

# FANONET: Ethnohistorical Notes on the Gurage Urban Migration in Ethiopia<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explain the origins and development of Gurage urban migration in Ethiopia. The process of out-migration is described locally as *fanonet*, while the out-migrants are referred to as *fano*. The Gurage are one of the most urban-oriented ethnic groups in the country. In the years following their incorporation in 1888 into the wider Ethiopian context,<sup>2</sup> and particularly since the Italian occupation, inhabitants of Gurage villages have been encouraging the migration of their sons and daughters to various towns, mainly Addis Ababa. Known for their national and international migrating trends, the Gurage are considered to be a highly mobile and adaptive people. An Amharic joke claims: "*Guragena Land-Rover Yamaydersubet Yalem*," (there is no place where the Gurage and the Land-Rover does not reach) or (the Land-Rover being the earliest transportation vehicle in this region).

The size of the Gurage population in the capital of Addis Ababa, which increased from 2,000 in 1910 to 255,000 in 1984, is evidence of their large-scale migration. According to Adhana Haile Adhana's calculations, the relative percentage of the total population of Addis Ababa that the Gurage represented increased from 3.1 percent in 1910 to 17.2 percent in 1952. It decreased to 7.3 percent in 1968, but had increased to 18 percent by 1984 (Adhana 1991: 51; Alula 1993: 161-167; OPHCC 1987: 27, Table 16; Pankhurst 1961, 1976; Garretson 1974: 200; Shack 1976: 256-58) constituting the second largest ethnic group in Addis Ababa, after the Amhara, according to the figures for 1952, 1964-68, and 1984. However, these figures may be unreliable.

The Gurage are Semitic people, who belong to the *ensete*<sup>3</sup> culture complex of southwestern Ethiopia (Shack 1966). They inhabit the Gurageland located in the southwestern part of the former Shewa region, about 200 kilometers south and southeast of Addis Ababa, now part of the Southern People's Administrative Region. Gurageland is bounded by the Rift Valley in the east and northeast, extending as far as Lake Zeway, the rivers Gibe (Omo), and Wabe (Rebu), and Awash in the west and northwest, and north, and the Kambatta massifs in the south.

Farming, livestock raising, trade and migration constitute the major economic activities for the Gurage. The cultivation of *asat* and the raising of cattle are the two mainstays of the Gurage economy as a whole.

Linguistically, the Gurage are divided into three groups: the Northern Gurage (Aymellel or Sodo), Eastern Gurage (Silte, Wollene, Zeway, etc), and

Western Gurage, mainly the *Sebat-bet* (seven houses), and Gogot (Meskan). The main focus area of this paper is *Sebat-bet* Gurage.

This paper gives an overview of the existing literature on urban migration in general, in which a specific emphasis is put on studies of Africa and Ethiopia, Gurage in particular. Secondly, it focuses on the discussion of three major events: Emperor Menelik's incorporation of the Gurage and their land into the wider Ethiopian entity; the Italian occupation; and construction of the Gurage roads, which are taken as landmarks to explore the origins and development of the Gurage *fanonet*. The chronological treatment of Gurage *fanonet* in light of the landmarks enables us to determine their specific influences on Gurage urban migration. The third and final section is a brief discussion of the implications of these findings for understanding the Gurage culture and Ethiopian urbanization and migration, as well as economic development at large.

### An Overview of Urban Migration

The urban migration of rural peasants, that has become a global characteristic of the modern world since World War II, has been much studied (Gmelch and Zenner 1988; Kemper 1979). In general, migration is classified as either internal or international—that is, movement of persons within a nation or between nations (states, regions), respectively. There are different streams<sup>4</sup> of internal migration: rural-rural, rural-urban,<sup>5</sup> urban-urban, and urban-rural.<sup>6</sup> This paper focuses on internal migration within Ethiopia, particularly the movement of Gurage people between their home villages and urban areas.

The majority of the early studies dealing with migrant adjustment in cities were strongly influenced by the Wirthian model (1938: "Urbanism as a Way of Life"), that claimed not only that towns are characterized by the breakdown of the family and kin or non-kin ties, and the consequent impersonal social ties, individualism and anomie (normlessness, alienation, anarchy); but also that migrants in cities are completely isolated from their relatives in villages. The discussions of these studies were framed by the model of a dichotomy between "folk-urban" or "rural-urban" entities, considered to be mutually exclusive.

However, since Oscar Lewis' (1952, cited in Gmelch and Zenner 1988) pioneering fieldwork in Mexico City, "Urbanization Without Breakdown," Wirth's formulation has been successfully questioned and rectified. This Wirthian model was (and is still being) criticized as static and one-sided, and failing to account for the feedback process of migration as "the continuing changes in the rural communities of origin, in the urban communities of destination and in the migrants themselves" (Kemper 1988:187).

Regarding migration into African cities, many later studies concerned with migration in different parts of the world, including Africa, corroborated

Lewis' findings and have shown that Wirth's "Urbanism as a way of life" is not a reality for most migrants into African cities, because they are soon integrated into urban networks and voluntary associations that provide support to the individuals and bridge the differences between the urban and the rural settings (Baker 1986; Epstein 1958, 1962; Abu-Lughod 1961: 22-32; Little 1965; Mitchell 1966; Caldwell 1969; Mayer 1971; DuToit and Safa 1975; Parkin 1975; Hanna and Hanna 1981). In criticizing the Wirthian urban-rural dichotomy, Janet Abu-Lughod, in her path-breaking case study in Cairo (1961), argued that "... the dichotomy is as invalid in Egypt and in many other newly awakening nations as it is in the western nations, but for a somewhat different reason. In these cases the dichotomy has not yet sharpened due to the continued ruralization of the cities." Thus, it is well established that the urban and the rural areas are two ends of one and the same continuum of social life joined through migration, and that there is a feedback process, i.e., urbanization of the rural setting and the ruralization of urban life.

In addition, the network analysis method has been developed to study the process of urbanization and the migrant's adjustment to the urban setting. The notion of networks, according to Mitchell (1966), was first used by Barnes (1954, cited in Mitchell 1966: 55) in his study of a Norwegian island parish and then developed by Bott (1957) in her study of conjugal roles in London families. Network as a concept refers to a number of ties which individuals build up around themselves in an urban setting. Bott differentiates between close-knit and loose-knit ties, the former representing interactions with a high density of connectedness, while the latter refers to those links with low density connectedness. Following Bott's (1957) classical analysis of urban life, a number of researchers employed network analysis in their African studies (Southall 1956a, 1961, 1973; Mitchell 1966; Mayer 1971).

### **Ethiopian Urban Migration**

Ethiopian literature on migration, in particular, and urbanization in general, is meager, especially when it comes to anthropological studies on the subject. However, there are a few studies that deal with aspects of urban migration conducted by sociologists (Bjeren 1985), economists (Griffin 1992; Baker 1986; Mulatu 1982; De Young 1967; Befekadu 1978; Eshetu 1970), historians such as Pankhurst (1965, 1991; Bahru 1991), and geographers such as Mesfin (1968, 1972; Akalou 1967, 1973).

When Bjeren carried out her research, about three decades ago, which she later published in a book entitled *Migration to Shashemene* (1985: 5), there was even less migration research in existence. She reported that, at that time,

There were few urban studies of any kind published on Ethiopia, and *no studies of migration* (my

emphasis). A few articles had appeared which made inferences about migration on the basis of the results of the First Round of Urban Surveys, such as the one by Mesfin (1970). The urban material consisted of articles about historical development of towns in Ethiopia by Pankhurst (1957, 1961, 1962, 1965), dissertation on the same theme by Akalou (1967), and geographical descriptions by Horvath (1966, 1968, 1969).

In addition, there are some studies on urbanization in the form of articles such as Kuls (1970), Gamst (1970), Shack (1976), and subsections devoted to the same issue, like Fecadu Gedamu (1972), and Markakis (1974), that provide a general account on Ethiopian urban areas.

After Bjerer, Alula provided a comprehensive summary of the very limited literature on Ethiopian migration (1995: 277-304). He grouped the studies as general and specific. The general studies attempted to describe migration on a national level (Bondestam 1972; McCann 1987, 1988; CSA 1991; Ponsi 1982; Kloos and Aynalem Adugna 1989). The specific studies examined migration in particular areas, regions or urban centers (Prost-Toiumier 1972; Palen 1975; Bjerer 1984; Kloos 1982; Bekure 1984; Beyene 1985; Wood 1983; Hadgu and Asmerom 1985; Arkebe 1985; Baker 1986; Almaz 1990).

Urban migration is characteristic of industrialization and modern urbanization, both of which have been relatively recent phenomena for Ethiopia. However, Ethiopia has one of the oldest pre-industrial urban traditions, which goes as far back as the period of Aksumite civilization (Akalou 1967; Baker 1986; Mulatu 1982). At that time, Aksum town in the former province of Tigray constituted the center for historic Ethiopia (several other traditional towns also emerged). In the following periods, although commercially well-developed traditional cities such as Harare (since 1541) and Gondar (from 1963) developed in the country, there was no permanent capital until the birth of Addis Ababa in 1886 (Bahru, 1991).

Together with the foundation of the capital and the establishment of the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railroad, which was completed in 1917, the Menelik era marked the beginning of modern urbanization in Ethiopia. Subsequently, several railroad-side towns emerged and fifty years later "some of the railroad towns closest to Addis Ababa became the basis for the very modest beginning of Ethiopian industry" (Bjerer 1985: 62; see Shiferaw 1982). Also Menelik II's territorial expansion to the southern and southwestern present Ethiopia, including Gurageland, during the second half of the 19th century brought about the development of a number of towns in this

part of the country. Such towns first emerged as the settlements of soldiers and then evolved into towns of commercial and administrative importance (Worku 1984, 1991; Baker 1896).

The period of Italian occupation (1936-41) was marked by even more expansion of modern urbanization in Ethiopia. This era not only resulted in the emergence of new towns but also the existing towns assumed new urban functions and characteristics (Baker 1986; Mulatu 1982; Bjerer 1985). Formerly, landlords partitioned the land in cities. Such partitions consisted of the extended families as well as followers and workers of the landlords, who owned and ruled these areas. "There was no labor market. Instead, all urban laborers were attached to the ruling group through various patron-client relationships" (Bjerer 1985:62). All these structural relations were altered by the Italians, who eliminated or detained the feudal landlords, and confiscated and made the urban land freely available—to use the words of Bjerer, "all and sundry, without personal links of individual land owners, and this removed an important obstacle to growth of urban population" (Ibid). The urban labor market with wages payable in money during this period was the most significant positive implication for modern Ethiopian urbanization (Fecadu 1972: 82; Bjerer 1985: 62; Alula 1995: 302).

The post-Italian period up to the 1950s was characterized by a sharp decline in urban activity (Bjerer 1985: 63). However, after the 1950s the establishment of the Imperial Highway Authority, which constructed a number of internationally-funded roads, resulted in the expansion of modern transportation networks and commerce. This factor, together with the centralized regime of Haile Sellassie, which was characterized by a high degree of government centralization, furthered the process of modern urbanization in Ethiopia. New small towns, the main characteristic features of which were commercial and transportation centers, emerged. Also "an individual zone encompassing Addis Ababa and the railroad towns of Debre Zeit, Akaki Beseka, Mojo and Nazareth began to develop" (Bjerer 1985: 63).

It is from the perspectives of those social, economic, and historical contexts of Ethiopian urbanization that Gurage urban migration is examined. Urbanization here is defined as the development of modern towns and/or cities in the context of Ethiopia. Although the term towns or urban areas has been defined differently, Markakis's population-size-based definition of Ethiopian towns is used here. Markakis grouped Ethiopian towns in two broad categories, the towns with over 5,000 inhabitants and those in which the inhabitants number less than 5,000. For Markakis, the town in the first group acquired an "urban" feature (in the European and North American sense) with the beginning of an economy that is not agriculturally based, but has modern transportation facilities such as motor-able roads and often air fields that connect with the capital; an array of government activities such as

schools beyond the primary level and field stations for various government institutions; and a flourishing commercial life (Markakis 1974: 164; cited in Bjerer 1985: 64). Markakis described the towns in the second group as "points of rural concentration without any urban qualification."

### Gurage Urban Migration

Since 1888, the Gurage and their land have been incorporated into the wider Ethiopian state. The Gurage were subdued by Emperor Menelik and his forces at the Battle of Jebdu Meda after the end of fourteen years of Gurage resistance. This incorporation had impacts upon the socio-economic and cultural lives of the Gurage in significant ways. Firstly, mainly due to this development, the Gurage and their land became an integral part of the larger Ethiopian national entity. Secondly, it brought about the establishment of the new structural relationship called the *Neftegna-Gebar*, ("riflemen-tribute payers" relationship) in Gurage, as in other parts of southern and southwestern Ethiopia. Thirdly, this same territorial expansion by Menelik II resulted in the birth of Addis Ababa as a capital city. Finally, these and other phenomena paved the way for Gurage urban migration, a phenomenon that evolved as a result of interactions between internal and external structural forces.<sup>7</sup> As described below, these structural forces formed the historical and socio-economic contexts for Gurage migration from the late 19th century through the era of the Italian occupation and the Gurage Roads Construction Association, until the present time.

The available literature on Gurage history and their socio-economic as well as cultural lives is very limited. Now classic, William Shack's, *The Gurage: A People of the Ensete Culture* (1966), constitutes the first fundamental social anthropological work on the Gurage people. The migratory experiences of the Gurage have likewise not yet received much attention by researchers. However, there are some works, such as Shack's article (1976), Fecadu Gedamu's Ph.D. dissertation (1972), and several B.A. senior essays in history, that have included aspects of Gurage urban migration (Kedir Muhamed 1984; Amara 1985; Sherif 1985; Tilahun 1987; and Mudesir Jemal 1988). Failure of agricultural productivity, shortage of arable land, and especially tribute payment as well as taxation, are some of the causes for Gurage migration argued by several writers (Shack 1966: 72; Pankhurst 1968: 48, 49; Lebel 1974: 101; Tilahun 1987: 9, 34-36). According to Fecadu, the characteristics of *asat* cultivation, unlike that of cereal cultivation, may allow seasonal migration. It was pointed out by some writers that when the Gurage were reduced to the status of *gebar* (tribute-payers), they were pushed to migrate in order to generate the necessary cash. Since then, the Gurage have been migrating initially on a seasonal basis for short periods of time, and later on a permanent basis to the capital and the provincial towns (Shack 1976; Tilahun 1987; Bahru 1991). However, the extent of Gurage migration and

urbanization has not yet been fully documented. This paper attempts to provide a more accurate ethnohistorical and an insider's view of the evidence suggesting that Gurage *fanonet* has its roots in a multiplicity of historical, economic and socio-cultural traditions.

### The Origins and Causes of the Gurage Urban Migration

The development of Gurage *fanonet* and its specific characteristics have been significantly affected by three major events, which are of historical as well as socioeconomic importance. The conquest by Emperor Menelik of the Gurage and their land in 1888, which was followed by the establishment of a *Merkene-Gebar* relationship and the birth of Addis Ababa, constituted the first turning point in the history of Gurage urban migration. The second major historical event that had important implications for the *fanonet* experiences of the Gurage was the Italian occupation. The construction of the Gurage roads and schools constituted the third major socio-economic event that provided great motivation for Gurage *fanonet*. Gurage *fanonet* evolved as a result of interactions between the internal and external structural forces of those major events that formed the contexts for migration from the late 19th century through the era of the Italian occupation and the Gurage Roads Construction Association until the present time. Thus, taking those events as landmarks, the whole Gurage *fanonet* history could be divided into three periods: early: 1888-1935, middle: 1936-1966, and contemporary: 1967 until the present. I call those *fanos* who started to migrate during the early, middle and contemporary periods, the first, second and third generation migrants, respectively.

#### Early Period

The history of the *fanonet* experiences of the Gurage began with Menelik's incorporation of the Gurage and their land. Although the Gurage resisted and fought against the expanding forces of Menelik II for more than a decade, they were finally defeated by his forces in the battle of Jebdu in 1888. This final conquest resulted in the establishment of new military garrisons in various strategic sites in Gurageland, where Menelik II's soldiers were stationed. These soldiers were called *Merkene* or *Amara* (*Amhara*) by the local people and the garrisons were referred to as *ketema*. The *Merkene*, or *Neftegna* (riflemen) are said to have been composed mainly of the Amhara, Tigre, Oromo and even some Gurage.<sup>8</sup> The *ketemas* eventually evolved to become administrative centers for the *Merkene* and were widespread throughout *Sebat-bet* Gurage. Such *ketemas* in *Sebat-bet* Gurage included Cheza Sefer and Yeshehara in Muher and Aklil; Astazer, Quetana and Yewadeya in Ezha; Daquna, Yedoregebeya and Yaradashe (Jatu) in Chaha; Sarzegeba in Enor and Ener; Agata and Zara in Geto; and Jemboro and Abeke in Gumer.

This historical phenomenon brought about a new structural relationship, the *Merkene (Nefteгна)-Gebar* (riflemen-tribute payer) that subjected the predominant majority of the Gurage to the status of *gebar*. Thus, the hitherto free subsistence agriculturist Gurage were obliged to pay tribute and to provide other services including forced labor to the *Merkene*. The tribute, locally known as *gibir*, was initially payable in kind. It is commonly believed that the Gurage *gebars* were not able to pay tribute in their staple crop *asat* (Shiferaw 1995; Shack 1966: 72; Lebel 1974: 104; Adhana 1991: 59; Baker 1992: 128). However, throughout the *Sebat-bet* Gurage area, the tithe was paid in *wusa* (*asat* food) over at least the first seven years.<sup>9</sup>

Initially, the tithe was paid in *wusa*, which was said to have been called *qita* by the *Merkene*. Therefore those *Merkene* who received *qita* tithe were referred to as *qita-beli*, those who eat *qita* in Amharic. It is said that a *gebar* was expected to provide everyday one piece of baked *wusa* with *zimuamojat* (boiled local cabbage prepared with cheese and butter) for the *Merkene* in charge. This payment was supervised by the *chiqa-shums*, appointed village headmen. It was noted by the informants that the payment of *qita* tithe, locally known as *yewusa gibir* reportedly lasted for seven years.

However, this did not continue for long, since after the battle of Adwa, the *wusa gibir* was entirely replaced by grain tithe. Thus, the *gebars* were obliged to pay five *quna* of *adef tetiru*, i.e. which meant poor and good quality grains.<sup>10</sup> Grain tithe was payable in three *quna* of barley, one *quna* of *tef* (which was a must), and one *quna* of peas or wheat per month. The annual requirements included, but were not limited to, sixty *qunas* of *adef tetiru* grain, four Maria Theresa *birr*, and labor services, such as fencing, house construction, collecting fodder and fuel-wood, pounding grain, looking after the cattle and mules of their *Merkene* lords,<sup>11</sup> and accompanying their lords during military campaigns as well as on trips to Addis Ababa. If a Gurage failed to meet any of the above obligations, the *gebar* was detained and even chained by the feet until he/she fulfilled his/her requirements.

Moreover, the *gebars* were obliged to transport some of the annual tribute items to Addis Ababa, such as butter, sheep, bulls and heifers for annual festivities; as well as rope, and other items desired by the *Merkene* in the capital. The *gebars* had to do this in turn and rotation was according to the *chiqa shum's* division. During these periods they were said to have stayed in Addis Ababa for two to three months, providing labor services as well. For instance, the informants noted that much rope was transported when *Fitawerari* Habte Giorgis constructed his house, and about fifty sheep per village headman were also taken to the *teskar* (mourning ceremony) of his wife.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, the Gurage *fanonet* experiences could not simply be explained in terms of the need for resources to pay tribute. It was much more complex than this and the situations varied over time. To begin with, as explained above, the tithe was payable in *asat* for at least the first seven

years. At this stage (and well beyond it), the Gurage were forced to migrate unwillingly by the requirement to provide corvee labor in the capital but not due to any inability to pay the tithes with their local products.

This Gurage labor, together with that of other ethnic groups, was indispensable to the development of the capital, Addis Ababa, for activities such as leveling the surrounding hills, as well as house and road construction. The Gurage were engaged in this process as carpenters, masons, laborers, and porters and carriers of necessary building materials (such as grass, wood, stones and sand) brought from distant locations. Moreover, during the establishment of Addis Ababa, the capital was to be transferred to Addis Alem due to the acute problem of shortage of wood for construction and fuel. The Gurage laborers prevented Addis Ababa from dying out as a capital, as they played a leading role in preparing the land and in providing basic resources such as fuel wood. They planted eucalyptus trees, performed the maintenance of the trees, cut and prepared the mature trees for fuel and construction purposes, and transported the wood to the city. As such, they made the wood that was desperately needed for fuel and construction purposes available for the urban dwellers.<sup>13</sup>

It was after the *gebars* were obliged to pay the tribute in grain, instead of *wusa gibir* that more Gurage were forced to engage in the *fanonet* experiences. The fact that, unlike the grains such as *tef*, wheat, peas and barley, the staple subsistence crop *asat* was of far less exchange value is worth discussing at this point. The tribute was made payable only in grains such as barley, *tef*, wheat and peas, and crops like *tef* and wheat were not traditional Gurage products. The informants have attributed the beginning of *fanonet* first to providing corvee labor and then to this tribute payment solely in grains. Thus, the Gurage had to fulfill what was required of them through other means such as providing labor and military services in the imperial armies and later buying grains. Eventually, the Gurage opted to leave their villages for urban areas in order to obtain the necessary cash for paying the tax.

The following is an excerpt from the account of one of my oldest return migrant informants, Hediwo Mashewe, who said:

As my father told me, [the] Gurage urban experiences began with the obligations from *Merkene*. When the *Merkene* would go to Shewa, the *gebar* servants had to provide company to their lords. The *gebar* servants would carry their lords' luggage such as rifles, food, clothes, sleeping materials and all other things. The *gebars* would carry all these things walking and following their lords all the way from the village to Shewa, while the lords would ride horses or mules. Once they arrived in Shewa, our fathers [the *gebars*] were not allowed to stay in their lord's houses with them during the night. Rather, they would stay outside the house in the homestead. They had to provide services to their lords in Shewa,

too. They would meet the obligations of cutting grass, collecting fodder, chopping and carrying wood, ploughing and tilling the land, fencing and building houses, planting trees, working as guards, carrying objects and other tasks as well. When their *Merkene* lords wanted to return to the village [Gurage], the *gebars* would provide similar company on the journey back to Gurage. This was how the Gurage urban experiences began. Initially, they were moving to Shewa and directed by the *Merkene* lords and as a result, the Gurage came to know the ways to get to the urban area and to adjust to different situations. Then, the Gurage began to migrate by themselves, seeking jobs in towns.

In addition, some writers have made similar references to this early Gurage *fanonet*. For example, Pankhurst reported as follows:

. . . Construction of various kinds such as the building of houses and palisades, as well as the clearing of roads, created a considerable demand for manual labor and led to further influx of population, particularly from the southern provinces where the traditional distaste for manual work was less operative. Gurages living well over a 100 kms. from the capital, seem to have arrived for this work from the very beginning of the city. Vanderheyem, who visited Addis Ababa early in 1894, reports that it was already harvest to seek employment as laborers in the capital . . . Many of these migrant workers, who had the reputation of being very industrious lived, according to Dr. Merab, in temporary housing (1962: 53).

Meeting their obligations as *gebars*, at least in the earlier period, was the most magnificent motivating factor for the Gurage urban migration, *fanonet*. Their need for cash was increasing, especially since the annual tribute was made payable in cash. This has been addressed by other writers as one of the major causes for the Gurage *fanonet* (Shack 1966: 72; Baker 1992: 128; Adhana 1991: 59; Label 1974: 106; Garretson 1974: 210). Adaham stated that as *asat*, the staple crop for the Gurage, had minimal exchange value, the Gurage were not able to use it to meet their obligations such as tribute payment and taxation. Therefore, the Gurage were left with only the option of labor migration in order to fulfill their requirements (1991: 59).

In the previous studies mentioned above, *fanonet* has been described only as a way of meeting external obligations. However, by the same token, *fanonet* provided some Gurage with a means of escaping severe exploitation and such external obligations as tribute payment, taxation, forced labor services as well as being regarded as culturally inferior.<sup>14</sup> According to my informants, there were *gebars* who were unable to tolerate the *Merkene's* social and cultural oppression and economic exploitation. These *gebars* migrated, leaving their villages, their land, homes and other assets, such as

*asat*, behind. In some cases they brought their wives, children and cattle with them. Such migrants escaped in the dark to distant places such as Abeshige, then a no-man's land around Wolkite, and moving on to Addis Ababa, or its surrounding areas. Therefore, during the earlier period, *fanonet* evolved as a result of both the need to meet external obligations, as well as the need to avoid them, and attraction to the advantages of urban life. Thus, *fanonet* was not an entirely voluntary activity at this stage.

As mentioned above, the Gurage were among the corvée laborers in the capital after their incorporation in 1888. By the turn of the last century, the word *coolī*<sup>15</sup> had become synonymous with the name Gurage in Addis Ababa. In 1910, according to Mereb, the number of *fano* Gurage in the capital was 2,000, which constituted 3.1 percent of the capital's total population.<sup>16</sup> At this stage, manual labor and petty trade was the main urban economic niche for the *fano* Gurage. This niche included daily wage laborers, porters, wood-choppers, and those cutting and collecting fodder and grass for thatching, preparing and carrying construction materials, stones, sand, wood and grass, carpentry, shoe-shining, baby-sitting, maid servantry, ploughing, planting trees, digging wells, and road construction. According to Pankhurst, the Gurage were said to have worked doing road construction for 10-11 hours a day for the minimal wage of one *birr* per day per person (1968: 700-710). Considering their major contribution to the labor force throughout the history of Addis Ababa, the Gurage deservedly prided themselves as the main builders of Addis Ababa.

### Discussion on the Origins of Gurage Migration

The origin of Gurage urban migration was described by several writers mainly in terms of the Gurage necessity to meet externally imposed obligations of the *gebar* system such as tribute payment and taxation which were payable only in grain and money, respectively. These studies mentioned above claim that the Gurage villagers, who then became *gebars*, were growing predominantly *asat* which was neither of great exchange value nor acceptable by the *Merkene*. The tribute had to be paid in grain and then in cash, which the Gurage did not have. Thus, the Gurage were left with no options but out-migration (Adhana 1991: 60-61).

However, some of the findings of my study do not corroborate the idea of considering the so-called "tribute payment and taxation" as an adequate explanation for the ongoing Gurage urban migration for several reasons. To begin with, Gurage out-migration was not, at least initially, motivated by tribute payment which was payable in grain, rather than the local Gurage produce (*asat* or its products). On the contrary, it has been shown that in all *Sebat-bet* Gurage, tribute was payable in *asat* for about the first seven years or so, until the tribute payment was changed from *wusa* to grain alone.

Secondly, even after this change, it did not seem that Gurage of all

agro-climatic zones had to migrate to urban areas in order to obtain the required cash to buy grain to pay the tribute. For instance, in the study area, Gumer, and the highland areas of Geto, Ezha and Muher, informants described that cereals and pulses were locally produced at that time and therefore the Gurage of this area did not have to migrate to towns because they needed to obtain the required amount of grain and/or cash for purchasing the former. However, Gurage in predominantly *asat* growing areas where cereals were not produced might have needed to obtain the necessary tribute grain elsewhere, but still not necessarily in urban areas. As oral informants explained, this is because Gurage from these areas are said to have gone to cereal producing areas such as Gumer, Silte, Alichu Wiriro, etc. as laborers during the seasons of collecting and threshing cereals and pulses in those localities. The laborers were reportedly paid in cereals and pulses, which they were said to have used to meet their tribute payment obligations. These kinds of labor arrangements are known locally as *Yokena*.

Thus, the origin of Gurage out-migration, at least during the initial period, was not linked to the fact that tribute was not payable in *asat* but cereals. Initially the Gurage might have been exposed to urban settings as a result of meeting the requirements of accompanying their lords to the capital. This may be how the Gurage urban experiences began. They first came to Addis Ababa following their *Nefiegna* lords, because they were required to provide forced labor there. Through these experiences, the Gurage came to know the ways to get to the capital and afterwards other towns. Then the Gurage began to migrate by themselves and adjust to different settings. Thus it may be argued that the Gurage urban migration was first conditioned by the necessity of meeting obligations of accompanying *Merkene* and, even more significantly, providing corvée labor in Addis Ababa and its surroundings. Of course, in the later periods tribute payment in grain and taxation in cash could undoubtedly be considered one part of the significant factors that motivated Gurage out-migration.

However, even these so called "push factors" could have exerted different influences at the local level in various agro-climatic zones of Gurageland and thus *fanonet* needs to be examined accordingly. For instance, Shack's statement, "the increasingly expanding number of Gurage who now migrate specifically for wage ... is no doubt a consequence of the land act of 1929 which made taxation payable in money" (1966: 72), illustrates an apparently stronger "push factor" for the uncerealized Cheha area where Shack conducted his research than it was for Gumer where cereals were produced. In the case of Gumer, the informants suggest that the Gumer Gurage were able to pay tribute in grain. However to pay taxes in cash might have exerted a stronger influence on Gumer's (and other highlanders as well) out-migration than tribute payment in grain did. Even then it appears that it is a bit exaggerated to consider taxation in cash as such a conclusive cause, which had widespread influence on Gurage out-migration to a phenomenal degree.

This is because it does not seem that the Gurage urban migration had reached a large scale until 50 years ago, after the birth of the Merkato in Addis Ababa. As will be discussed in detail below, the Gurage migrants, according to my informants, were more attracted and encouraged by the Italian activities in Addis Ababa. At that period, the Italians established the Merkato as a market center, destroyed the feudal type of labor arrangements based on patron-client relationships and created a labor market with wages payable in money (Fecadu 1972: 82; Bjerren 1985: 62). These structural changes expanded the existing urban job opportunities and opened new ones for the in-migrants of Addis Ababa, including the Gurage. According to the informants, the Gurage engagement in self-employed occupations, such as petty trades, and settlement on a permanent basis in Addis Ababa is attributed to those measures taken by the Italians. Then, the settled and successful migrants provided a strong source of attraction for further Gurage urban migration, because the Gurage have strong traditions of mutual support.

### Middle Period

During this period a number of changes occurred in the characteristic features of the Gurage *fanonet* experiences. These changes were associated with political and socio-economic changes that took place at the national level. The Italian occupation (1936-1941) was a most dramatic historical process that had significant implications for the Gurage *fanonet* experiences. The victory of the Italians over the Ethiopians in the battles of Tembeyen, Maichew and Mekele brought about a political change in that the Ethiopian feudal government led by aristocrat Emperor Haile-Sallassie was replaced by Italian rule. This nationwide political upheaval had profound implications for Gurage *fanonet* in several ways.

The upheaval resulted in structural change in the Gurage villages, the origin of *fanonet*. The event brought about the end of a 44-year-old *Merkene-Gebar* relationship in Gurageland. This meant the end of the external obligations demanded by the *Merkene*, such as tribute payment, both in kind and in cash; and the provision of labor services by the *gebar* Gurage. Pankhurst (1967: 37-88) also discussed the Italian change of policy, which eliminated tribute payment. One of my informants, described the following:

The Italians liberated the Gurage from *Merkene*-caused slavery. The Amhara or *Merkene* did not treat us [the Gurage] as equals, but as slaves. Because of their bad deeds, God took them to Maichew, where they were finished by the Italians. God heard our cries and grievances and allowed the Maichew miracle to happen. Since then, there has been no payment [tribute], or work for the *Merkene*, and we [the Gurage] have become equals with them.

In addition, this same development resulted in the birth of the Merkato,<sup>17</sup> as

well as the construction of a number of roads in the capital and other towns that were destinations of the Gurage *fanonet*. Road construction marked the period of the Italian occupation, and the Gurage contributed significantly to the road-building labor force. This role of the Gurage laborers in road construction has also been reported by other writers (Baker 1986; Pankhurst 1968: 49; Garretsson 1974: 200; Amare 1985: 14-15; Ipcar 1970). According to Baker, the construction of roads was one of the highest priorities for the Italians in their East African colonial agenda; and about 85 percent of their colonial budget was ear-marked for road construction. He also reported that the amount of roads the Italians constructed in Ethiopia added up to 7,000 kilometers, half of which were asphalted. "By 1941, the Italians had laid down an impressive road network throughout much of the country" (1986: 50).<sup>18</sup>

These changes had significant impacts on the causes, patterns and streams of the Gurage urban migration, and resulted in an even greater wave of Gurage labor migration to different urban areas. During this period, my informants recalled, a large number of Gurage, usually in groups, out-migrated and became engaged mainly in the construction of roads in the capital as well as in other areas. The roads, for example, such as the Addis Ababa-Wolkite-Jimma-Gomma were built by the Gurage. The *fano* Gurage provided both free and wage labor for the local road construction activities in Gurageland as well. They worked as free-laborers when the road between Wolkite and Migo was constructed.

During this period, in urban areas the Gurage engaged in different types of petty-trading such as the selling of *injera*, *furno*,<sup>19</sup> pulses and cereals, vegetables, fish and other food items at *gulits*,<sup>20</sup> and by carrying the items on foot. The *fano* Gurage were known for carrying their items around for sale on foot, hailing "*felagi-furno*" (bread for sale) and "*delago yalesh begemedede*" (rope in exchange for recycling a tanned hide used for sleeping).<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the young *fano* Gurage boys were particularly active in another type of petty-trade called *suqe bederete*, which literally means "a shop on my chest." It was so named because the boys carried in a box on their chests assorted goods such as sewing needles, safety pins, buttons for clothes, *qirinfulde*,<sup>22</sup> and *qerefa*,<sup>23</sup> to name a few, standing on the streets in the capital city.

By the 1950s and 1960s the *fano* operating a *suqe bederete* business faced fierce competition with expatriate traders, mainly the Yemenite Arabs who then monopolized major commercial activities. These expatriates had governmental support in their struggle to compete with the Gurage traders and when the Gurage were found selling items around the Yemenite shops they were arrested by the police and jailed for a two-week period. Upon release, they had to pay a fine. However, despite all the setbacks, the *fano* Gurage succeeded in expanding their businesses and eventually replacing the Yemenite Arabs in the commercial sector.

According to my informants, until after 1950, self-employed

occupations such as trading had not been the main economic niche of the *fano* Gurage. For one informant, Abido Semani, to the best of his memory, by 1957:

... there was no *fano* Gurage who had a licensed residence and business of his own in Addis Ababa, except one, a man called *Shekih* Yesuf, who owned his own house in *Benin-Sefer*. The present possessions of the Gurage in towns such as villa houses, cars and multiple businesses were not the realities of that time.

Another informant said that it was after 1960 that a few *fano* Gurage emerged as owners of private businesses and the majority of the *fano* Gurage were engaged in various types of wage labor, hired by others, particularly by the expatriates. However, according to a few migrants, even before and during the Italian occupation, the *fano* Gurage were engaged in self-employed occupations since they had already organized their self-help association in 1961.

### **The Contemporary Period: The Construction of the Gurage Roads and Schools**

The migrant Gurage addressed the various issues of development (i.e., the construction of roads, schools and health facilities, introducing new technologies and commercialization of agriculture) in their home village areas through their development associations such as the Alemgana-Wallamo Road Construction for the northeastern Gurage, which has been described by Fecadu Gedamu (1972). Likewise, a development association called the Gurage Roads Construction Organization (GRCO) was established for the *Sebat-bet* Gurage, in the western Gurage areas.

The historical, social and economic aspects of GRCO have been described by several writers (Mudesir 1988; Woldesillassie 1986, 1987; Kedir 1984; Gebreyesus 1972, 1973). However, the GRCO is discussed here as an infrastructural development that resulted from the Gurage *fanonet* experiences, as well as its impacts on furthering out-migration and other aspects of village life.

The GRCO is a non-governmental organization established by the *fanos*, that has brought about modern transportation networks in an otherwise geographically inaccessible Gurage area. As a large number of children of the Gurage villages have been moving to urban areas, particularly the capital, and as their home region was not reachable, modern transportation facilities were needed. Thus,

... the enlightened members of the community who were determined to change backward living conditions held a series of consultative meetings both in the country-side and in urban centers. The series of consultation and subsequent dialogue generated by

the elders paved the way for the formation of The Gurage People's Roads Construction Organization. GRCO's organizational structure and operational guidelines were ratified by the general assembly of the Gurage people and provided the institutional framework needed to pull together community resources for the construction of roads. The roads have linked the region with the main highway system of Ethiopia (GPSDO 1995: 3-4).

Since its establishment in 1961, the GRCO has played a remarkable role in constructing modern transportation networks in the *Sebat-bet* Gurageland. During GRCO's three-plus decades of development endeavors, more than 420 kilometers of all-weather roads were completed and opened to traffic. When I carried out my research in 1995, I found that 4,480,000 birr was being invested to construct similar roads that were to measure about 64 kilometers, which would reportedly bring four sub-regions in *Sebat-bet* Gurage area together. Some further 360 kilometers of all-weather roads were planned for construction in the near future. The major portion of the cost of the construction has been funded by GRCO, which contributes 65 percent of the total cost, whereas the remaining 35 percent is subsidized by the government (GPSDO 1995: 4).

As a result, unlike in the pre-1960s, these all-weather roads have connected not only the whole *Sebat-bet* Gurage region to almost all parts of the country, but also each and every sub-region or village together. Shack's statement: "no regular communication exists between Gurageland and the outside world," is no longer true (1966:202).

Space does not allow me to discuss the development of GRCO in detail. However, it is worth mentioning that the GRCO, which was geared initially to road construction, has been restructured and was renamed as The Gurage People's Self-Help Development Organization-(GPSDO) in 1988. The former programs of GRCO were assumed by the GPSDO and other new socio-economic development agendas have been adapted.

### **The Impacts of Improved Road Networks**

The most significant result of the construction of modern roads is that Gurageland has become accessible to surrounding areas as well as to other parts of Ethiopia. In turn, the intra- and inter-accessibility of the Gurage region has facilitated both the rural-urban and internal flows of persons, ideas, skills, and goods. Hence, its far-reaching implications for *fanonet*. While necessitated and induced by the movement of persons, the emergence of modern transportation networks has facilitated and reinforced Gurage out-migration. It could well be argued that the development of modern road networks has rendered the Gurage *fanonet* a phenomenon of ever larger scale.

This is because the movement of people has become much easier

than it was in former times. The first generation migrants had to walk on foot from their villages to urban areas, carrying their luggage themselves. At that time, this travel took them a couple of weeks even when the migrants used animals (horses, mules, donkeys) for riding and packing. In contrast, since the construction of these all-weather roads, the *fano* Gurage take public transport vehicles right from their villages, or from places which are walking distance from their villages, to the various towns of their destination. The description provided by Shack concerning transportation networks in Gurageland 30 years ago, contrasts sharply with the present day scenario. Shack described: "There are no cars and bicycles in Gurageland. One lorry makes a weekly visit to Enderber during the dry season to collect *qancha*<sup>24</sup> fiber; and an occasional Land-Rover may arrive at this time" (1966: 201; footnote number 4).

The contemporary migrants' travel on public buses (which offer service on a daily basis) from their villages to Addis Ababa, takes them less than twelve hours, whereas the same trip took the initial migrants well over eight days. It is even simpler for the current successful *fanos*, who cover the same distance in four to five hours, driving their own Land-Cruisers or small automobiles. These days, it has become commonplace to see a considerable number of such private automobiles in Gurage villages during the annual festivals such as *Meskal* and *Arafa*, weddings and funerals.

Thus, not only has the volume and the frequency of the Gurage out-migration considerably increased, but also its characteristics have changed. Before the construction of roads, the *fano* Gurage predominantly consisted of adolescent and adult males. Since the 1960s, however, village women (young and adult) and very young (male as well as female) children have been increasingly appearing on the migratory scene. Furthermore, even the movement of elderly men and women has become part of the *fanonet* process.

As a result, new types of *fanos* have appeared in the picture. Because the development of modern road networks has facilitated the adaptation and expansion of new cash crops and commerce, commercial migrants have become commonplace and a significant portion of the migratory population. Such migrants leave their villages for commercial reasons and carry out business transporting agricultural products such as eucalyptus wood, *chat*, hides and skins, grains (barley), etc., to towns for sale. Back in the villages, migrants trade items they transport from urban areas, such as clothes, salt, soap, sugar, fertilizers, and the like. One researcher rightly observed this situation and reported that the Gurage region is "... probably the only rural region where one would frequently come across peasants (young, middle-aged, and old) who had traveled out to Addis Ababa, other places in Showa, or to other regions" (Adhana 1991: 53).

The village survey results for Zizencho<sup>25</sup> have shown this evolution of large-scale Gurage *fanonet*. Accordingly in describing and analyzing the data, households in Zizencho are classified into three categories: current *fano*, former *fano*, and never *fano* households referring to the households in which

there are current, former and never *fanos*, respectively. As presented below (Table 1), an overwhelming majority of the village households, which constitute 66 percent (104 out of the total 156 households), fall within the category of current *fano*, while the remaining two groups of former *fano* and never *fano* represent the 22 percent and 12 percent of the total village households respectively.

Table 1. Village Households by *Fanonet* Experience

Type of Villager	Number of Households	Female	Male	Total # of Individuals	Percentage of Total
Current <i>Fano</i>	104	274	249	523	66%
Former <i>Fano</i>	34	95	83	178	22%
Never <i>Fano</i>	18	48	45	93	12%
Total	156	417	377	794	100%

Source: Field Survey, 1994

Like the age-sex profile of *fanonet* mentioned earlier, its motivational and attitudinal interactions have undergone changes as a result of the modern road networks. These have enabled the otherwise isolated people to have access to commercial activities, to educational as well as health services and institutions, and other socio-economic phenomena that are taking place in the surrounding areas, other parts of Ethiopia, and the world at large. The need for cash, education, medical treatments and commercial benefits have appeared as part of the major motivational factors that give greater impetus to Gurage out-migration. As was noted by Agaz Habte:

Thanks to our *fano* children and their fruits (the roads) now every person, even those who never thought of going to Shewa, such as the very old, sick, blind and disabled persons, go to towns and get health services, become cured, and return to their villages. If someone dies in the hospital, the corpse is transported on a *leonchina*, like an alive person, back to the village. In the past, this was not the case. Then, dead bodies of our kin were abandoned. They did not get the kind of dignity that the current Gurage are having. Also, unlike in the past, we are not walking from here (the village) to town. We are so lucky and privileged that we go to town seated.

### Construction of Schools

Again, the description provided by Shack concerning education in *Sebat-bet* Gurage thirty years ago provides a sense of how much has changed:

The impact of mass education in Ethiopia has produced no currents of change in Gurageland. Only a fraction of the eligible school population receives formal training; family restrictions prevent more than a few girls from attending school. Adult literacy, evaluated in terms of the reading and writing of Amharic, is a skill acquired only by a few chiefs, headmen, clerks and traders. There is *no* literature in the vernacular (The only publication in Guragegna is a Catholic catechism printed in the Cheha dialect during the Italian Occupation, Foot Note 7)" (1966: 202).

However, considerable changes have occurred since the time of Shack's observation. The construction of a modern road network also facilitated the establishment and expansion of social services, namely schools and clinics, in *Sebat-bet* Gurage region. In addition to the construction of modern roads, GRGO-GPSDO have been undertaking the construction of schools and health centers. According to one survey (which was carried out for GPSDO), up to the year 1993, 99 schools have been constructed in the six sub-regions of Cheha (19), Muher and Aklil (11), Ezha (14), Enor and Ener (25), Geto (11) and Gumer (19). Of these, 73 are elementary (from grades one through six), and 22 include grades one through eight. The remaining four are composed of grades seven through ten, seven through twelve, a high school beginning with grade nine in 1993 (additional grade ten was opened in 1994) and a comprehensive secondary high school (grades 9-12), respectively. At present, of all *Sebat-bet* Gurage, there are a total 44,913 students (the breakdown by the respective levels is 39,755; 3,345; and 1,813) (Gebreyohanes 1993: 9,18). The number of girls and young women attending school has increased considerably, although far fewer girls have the opportunity to attend school compared to boys. The results of the village survey for Zizench in Gumer have confirmed this.<sup>26</sup>

Of the 99 schools, the construction cost of 53 has been totally covered by private funds, predominantly with funds coming from the migrants. The cost of the remaining 39 has been financed by both civil society funds (from rural and urban Gurage) and government subsidies. The percentage of the people's (villagers and *fano*) contributions for the construction of the 53 and 39 schools are computed to be 53.53 percent and 39.39 percent, respectively (Gebreyohannes 1993: 7, 9, 19, 31, 41, 50, 72).

This expansion of education has reinforced the Gurage urban migration. Some migrants left their villages in order to complete their junior and senior secondary school education. This was particularly the case when the schools in most Gurage villages were predominantly elementary. In those schools, education was offered through grade six. As there were no, or not enough, junior or secondary schools in the areas, the school-leavers (and drop outs) would go to a few junior and senior high schools like Jemboro and Emdiber in Gumer and Chaha, respectively, and mainly to different urban

centers such as Addis Ababa, Nazareth, Shashemene, Yirgalem and others. The two sons of one of my informants, Melese Neri, are examples of such migrants. Melese said:

I have two sons in town. Both attended school through grade six in Zizencho Elementary school. Then they quit and migrated because they could go no further in their schooling, as there was no school in the vicinity of our village. They left five years ago with a man named Lema Tereda, who is a rich *fano* in Awasa, owning *tej* houses. He is our relative and initially I helped him to become a *fano*, while I was a *fano* in Sidamo. Therefore, he took my sons with him as a favor to me.

### Causes/Networks

The motivational factors for out migration changed over time and varied from person to person. As it has been shown above, the migrants' motivations to move out of their villages evolved from the interest in meeting their *gebar* obligations and obtaining cash for paying taxes and repaying debts, to covering expenses for marriage and annual festivities, as well as clothing, purchasing cattle and land, repairing old houses and/or building new houses, and to obtaining better access to education and health services. As explained earlier in this section, following the emergence of a new *Merkene-Gebar* relationship, meeting their *gebar* obligations in labor services and later in military service in the imperial armies appears to have become a more important factor for the first generation migrants (Fecadu 1972:119).

However, the motivational factors for the second, and, even more so, for the third generation migrants are varied and affected by inter-related economic, demographic and social factors. A number of migrants who left their villages during the middle period were initially motivated by the prospect of better living standards in towns, about which they had heard through other migrants from their villages. For example, two of my informants, Damo Zerihun, one of the current migrants who became wealthy, and Imam Kemal were attracted to urban life by their better-clothed friends when they met them while they were visiting their villages in Zizencho and Aegra for the Meskal and Arafa annual festivals. Both of them were age 14 when they left their villages for the first time. They came, by the village standards of the time, from well-to-do families and had motivations for migration that were not directly related to socio-economic family problems. Also, their decisions to migrate were not discussed or approved by their families in the village or elsewhere. Instead, they were influenced by other migrants in the village and decided to migrate by themselves, both stealing money and sheep for

transportation from their fathers before escaping. Therefore, at least initially, in these cases, out-migration was not a collectively considered strategy to increase the household's income generating capacity. Hence, Baker's statement, which reads: "Once the decision to migrate has been made collectively by the rural households in conjunction with urban kin, migration occurs directly to Addis Ababa" (1992: 135), can be questioned as this has not always been true of the decision making process for Gurage out-migration.

There are some cases in which out-migration has been a matter of collective decision-making for the members of households, and parents in particular. Unlike the previous cases, in some instances, parents collaborate with urban kin to decide who should migrate, how and why. For instance, the following cases reveal this characteristic. My informant Melese Neri, who is 55 years old, and a returnee to the village, was sent by his father to Addis Ababa 38 years ago. He went with his paternal uncle, Ato Zerga, who was then back in the village to visit his family. Zerga was a *fano* living in Asegede Sefer in Addis Ababa (Merkato) and his job was chopping wood. Therefore, Melese left his village as a result of a joint decision by his father and uncle to do so. Likewise, another informant, Yilma Sirani, 38 years old and a return migrant was sent twenty years ago to Yirgalem, Sidamo by his mother. At that time, he was a boy of ten years and the eldest son of his parents. His father died before he left, and this caused his out-migration.

Thus, the Gurage support network based on kinship has emerged as a recurrent factor reinforcing *fanonet* in all three periods of Gurage migratory experiences. Coming from the same clan or village as the senior migrant and having connections through marriage have provided new migrants with legitimacy to get help from fellow migrants in their destinations. Also, this Gurage tradition of counting on the support of kin has played a considerable role in the patterns and motivations of the *fanos* and particularly in their changing occupations and degrees of success in urban settings.

In addition, failure in agricultural productivity, shortage of arable land and, especially, lack of tribute payment as well as taxes are some of the motivations for Gurage migration, attributed by several writers (Shack 1966: 72, 1976: 262; Lebel 1974:101; Pankhurst 1968: 48,49; Baker 1992:128; Tilahun 1987: 9, 34-36). Most of the informants emphasized that the rapid rural population growth, shortage of farmland and poor resource base for agriculture constitutes the major motivating factors for contemporary Gurage out-migration. The limited available farmland, which is the major productive asset in Gurage, has experienced a decrease in the fertility of the soil due to over-cultivation. The peasants cannot afford the costs of inputs such as fertilizers and special seed to cope with the depletion of the soil. Households, as production units in Gurage villages, are incapable of providing basic subsistence for themselves. Therefore, out-migration has been viewed by the

villagers themselves as the main means of survival for many rural Gurage households.

My informant Agaz Habte Mereche, age 80 and one of the most respected elders in the area, but not a migrant himself, described how indispensable *fanonet* has been for the village life as follows:

Given that we are suffering from shortage of farmland, from loss of soil fertility of the small amount of land that we have, and high population density, our lives in the village would have been impossible had it not been for the *fanonet*, and the support from our *fano* children. It is due to them that we (the rural villagers) opened our eyes and became civilized in terms of our dressing, education, health services, roads and everything. *Fanonet* is part of our farm, field, our marriage, our wealth and resources such as cattle land and *asat*.

This implies that the village life, particularly its economy, has become dependent on income gained from *fanonet*, through which it is linked to urban-based socioeconomic processes. It also implies that *fanonet* is conceived of as an essential resource.

### Changes in *Fanonet* Over Time

Some significant differences occurred between the earlier migration and the movements during and after the Italian occupation. Initially migration was routine on a seasonal basis and temporarily for short periods. Later, it became of a more permanent nature to the capital and other provincial towns. The urban activities and destinations of the Gurage migrants changed over time. For both the voluntary and the involuntary first generation migrants, Addis Ababa and its surroundings constituted the major source of attraction for the *fano* Gurage. That time, a one way journey would take the *fanos* a week or more, traveling on foot from their village to Addis Ababa or its surroundings such as Sululta, Sebeta and Holeta. They had to carry their food, mainly baked *wusa*, and instruments such as a sickle, *marasha*, axe, etc., which were important for their activities as *fanos* in urban and suburban areas. They were engaged as wage laborers in different activities both on- and off-farm; working mainly as porters, guards, laborers in road construction projects, hired shop keepers (for the ex-patriots—mainly the Yemenites, Indians, Armenians, Greeks and Italians); and servants in tea rooms, hotels and *tej* houses. During this period, the majority of the *fanos* engaged in domestic work and manual labor. Imam Kemal said:

In towns, Gurage would carry everything. It was their job to carry everything ranging from *zenbil* [baskets] to stones. People would

hail 'Gurage Gurage! to mean 'porter porter!' As there was no education [schools] in the villages at the time, the children of Gurage villages would rather be sent to towns for labor work. At the time of their departure, the plans of the *fano* would be to get to town and to take any job opportunity in order to obtain money, buy clothes, and then get back to their villages and buy cattle or land and build a house. They did not aim to settle permanently in urban settings. Therefore, children of the poor would start to migrate to towns and would there become servants, guards, and daily laborers in factories.

The Italian occupation was characterized by construction of new roads which meant that more regions of the country become reachable and this provided varied sources of attraction to the second generation Gurage *fano*. Although Addis Ababa remained the major source of attraction, the Gurage also migrated to other towns such as Wolkite, Jimma, Agaro, Weliso, Nazareth, Sidamo region (Dilla and Yirgalem) and others. The *fano* began to walk from their villages only up to Wolkite where, since the late 1930s, they would then take a lorry to reach their destinations.

During and after the Italian occupation period which saw the emergence of the Merkato as a market center, the *fano* Gurage have successfully engaged in self-employed activities such as trade and cottage industries, and in the 1960s and 1970s, they nearly replaced the Arab (Yemenite) and Indian merchants (Bahru 1991: 197, Shack 1976: 270). Imam Kemal<sup>27</sup> described this situation as follows:

Initially, many of us [the *fanos*] had been engaged in domestic work and manual labor. It was a rare case to see a *fano* Gurage running his [or her] business in an urban setting. This was a gradual process as those Gurage who were wage laborers in different activities such as *tej* houses, wholesale and retail trading shops, tea rooms, hotels, bakeries and others gained experiences and began their own businesses, each taking over in his [or her] respective area of employment. Those Gurage who would work in Arab owned retail trading shops began their own trade and the same was true for other *fanos*, too.

For instance, for the most part, the *fano* from Zizencho and neighboring villages in Gumer have been concentrating on a specific economic niche which is working in *tej* houses. Working in *tej* houses, known as *tej-qejinet*, and later on owning *tej* houses, is considered to be the specialty of *fano* from this area. This was the influence of the second generation of *fano*, those that migrated during the Italian occupation. Some of these migrants were working as cooks for the Italians, in restaurants or households. For example, one of my informants, Damo Zerihun Elilo, who is himself a current migrant, described

how he and others from his village were first influenced by the experiences of the earlier *fanos*. He is one of the very few successful and rich migrants in the village, owning a couple of *tej* houses and running other businesses as well in Nazareth. Damo Zerihun is 55 and has been a *fano* for the last four decades.

The urban Gurage, are known by other Ethiopians as well as foreigners, for their industriousness and orientation towards achievement as they are hard-working and economically successful within urban settings. They have engaged in manual labor including shoe-shining and domestic work, small-scale industries and market trade. The role of the Gurage labor services in the capital can be noted by citing the fact that until a couple of decades ago, the Indian word "Cooli" (porter) in Addis Ababa was synonymous with a Gurage and people used to hail porters by shouting "Gurage! Gurage!" (Pankhurst 1968: 49; Shack 1966, 1976). Since the birth of the Merkato (1936-41), by nearly replacing the expatriate merchants, the migrant Gurage have been playing a leading role in the country's national economy, particularly in the commercial sector. Furthermore, it can safely be said that the Gurage have constituted the backbone of the Merkato, where market goods and services, upon which the overwhelming majority of urban Ethiopians depend, flow primarily via Gurage traders and laborers (Shack 1966; Worku 1991; Bahru 1991). In addition, Daniel's description rightly summarizes the Gurage characteristics as follows:

Capitalism cannot be considered alien to Africa. Capitalist spirit already exists, for example, among the indigenous enterprising groups such as the Gurage of Ethiopia, the Ibo of Nigeria and the Luo of Kenya . . . The Gurage people of Ethiopia possess the economic behavior that is essential for technological change and economic growth. The Gurage are hard workers, efficient, open to new ideas and have a remarkable capacity to save. They are competitive, risk-takers, innovative and possess organizational ability.

The Gurage respect all work and are very good at anything they do. They are efficient farmers, traders and skilled artisans, who can make their own alternatives to imported consumer goods. In Addis Ababa, they are the shoeshine boys, menial job workers, retailers, restaurateurs, financiers and manufacturers. They take pride in hard work and network among themselves. In the 1960s and 1970s, they became the "worker bees" of the Merkato, by competing successfully with Arab and Indian businesses. The Gurage culture, like the Protestant ethic, stresses the virtues of hard work and saving, features essential for successful capitalist development. The Gurage entrepreneurial behavior presents a useful development model from which Ethiopia can learn. If the Gurage and all other productive groups were accorded the social

status commensurate with their entrepreneurial abilities, they could bring about industrial revolution in Ethiopia (1990: 95-96).

## Conclusion

This study provides an analysis of the origins and development of the phenomenon of Gurage urban migration. It shows that there have been multiple historical, social and economic sources for the origins and development of the Gurage urban migration. Although the Gurage need to meet externally imposed obligations has been one of the main causes, it is not a sufficient explanation for the origin of Gurage *fanonet* in and of itself. The interplay of multiple forces in the contexts created by the three major landmarks initiated and shaped the history of Gurage urban migration over the last hundred years, including Menelik's incorporation of the Gurage in 1888, the Italian occupation, and construction of the Gurage roads. The Gurage migration has not been a homogenous process, as the differences in individuals involved, chronology, agro-climatic zones, and influencing forces resulted in a complex set of migratory experiences.

The study entails, among others, two points of fundamental significance. At the national level, the century-old migratory experiences of the Gurage have enabled them to develop a distinct economic culture that is entrepreneurial, and thus to acquire a new identity. One of the country's most creative and energetic ethnic groups, the Gurage are known for their economic entrepreneurship. As a result, mobility, business-orientedness, success in urban-settings, and, above all, commerce have become marks of Gurage identity in Ethiopia. Thus, such a study on their migratory experiences can provide a basis for understanding not only the Gurage entrepreneurship, but also the consequential role of the Gurage as a leading force in the development of the country's modern economy and the commercial sector in particular. Also, given that the Gurage have been one of the main providers of labor in Addis Ababa and other towns in the country, it can shed light on the history of the capital, in particular, and Ethiopian urbanization at large.

At the local level, *fanonet* has created a new social group, that is, *fano*-households within the Gurage village communities. This emergent social group has its own lifestyles, values, attitudes, and interests. Some distinct *fanonet*-induced cultural, social and economic traditions are so widespread that they are embraced even by non-migrant villagers and have therefore become part of Gurage village culture. Dressing, household utensils, marriage transactions, house construction are some of amongst the many cases in which such dramatic changes have taken place.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This paper is based on research I conducted among the Gurage of Ethiopia during 1994-95, with support from CODESRIA, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, and the Graduate School of Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia, which resulted in my Masters Thesis (1995) in social anthropology from the same university. I wrote this paper during my tenure as a visiting scholar at the UCLA's African Studies Center, from September 1998 through September 1999, to which I am grateful.

<sup>2</sup>For detailed historical description about the Gurage resistance against Menelik's incorporation, see Worku Nida 1991; 1984.

<sup>3</sup>Also known as 'false banana,' and its scientific name is *Ensete Ventricosum* (Smeds 1955). It is the staple crop for most peoples of the southwestern Ethiopia, including Gurage. The Gurage call it *asat* and, hereafter, I prefer to use the Gurage name, *asat*.

<sup>4</sup>Stream is defined in terms of the departures and arrivals of the migrants.

<sup>5</sup>It is also referred to as city-ward, or urban migration.

<sup>6</sup>Also termed as return or homeward migration.

<sup>7</sup>See Worku Nida 1995.

<sup>8</sup>For example, *Basha* Yemiru, who headed the *Merkene* in Enor and Ener, was an Enor Gurage himself and in the former times was captured by Menelik's soldiers and then recruited into the army. However, such persons who were recruited into the Imperial army, were also called *Merkene*, or Amhara, even though they were Gurage by birth.

<sup>9</sup>The following has been learnt from the interviews conducted seven years ago with the native Gurage and living *Merkene* informants throughout the *Sebat-bet* Gurage. Accordingly, the fact that *gibir* was initially paid in *wusa* was found to be common knowledge amongst the elders in the area.

<sup>10</sup>Barley was considered to be of poor quality, whereas *tef*, wheat and peas were good quality cereals and pulses.

<sup>11</sup>Locally known as *yetiyet bukure* (bullet mules).

<sup>12</sup>For detailed accounts about the history of tribute and taxation systems in Ethiopia in general, see Shiferaw Bekele 1995; Pankhurst 1967.

<sup>13</sup>On the roles of the Gurage in the development of the capital, see Horvath 1968. According to J. Horvath, the Gurage took care of the whole eucalyptus farming process—planting, harvesting, and transporting. "The dependence of the residents of Addis Ababa on the eucalyptus tree for fuel and building materials is so great that it is difficult to think of Addis Ababa without the tree." (Ibid: 16).

<sup>14</sup>Economic exploitation and social humiliation are marks of the *Merkene-Gebar* relations in the history of Ethiopia as whole.

<sup>15</sup>An Indian word meaning porter, or unskilled worker.

<sup>16</sup>Merab Impressions d'Ethiopie (Paris, 1921-9, PP177-78, cited in Horvath 1968:15).

- <sup>17</sup> Which, according to De Young, ". . . is today undoubtedly the largest and most important single market in Africa" (1967: 107).
- <sup>18</sup> Also, see Mulatu Wubneh 1982; Pankhurst 1962.
- <sup>19</sup> A European-type bread (literally *furno* is an Italian word for oven).
- <sup>20</sup> Small markets.
- <sup>21</sup> The reply to this would be: *ahun wesedew yantew zemedede* (your relative just took it away).
- <sup>22</sup> Cloves.
- <sup>23</sup> Cinnamon.
- <sup>24</sup> It is a fiber made from the sheaths of *ensete*.
- <sup>25</sup> My study village in Gumer; and the survey was carried out in 1994.
- <sup>26</sup> See Worku Nida 1995, chapter 5 in particular.
- <sup>27</sup> He was then a *fano* working in a bakery at Mercato in Addis Ababa.

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