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# **SOZIALANTHROPOLOGISCHE ARBEITSPAPIERE**

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"We have nobody in the agencies!"  
Somali and Oromo responses to relief aid in refugee  
camps (Hiraan region/Somali Democratic Republic)

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### Zur Herausgabe der "Sozialanthropologischen Arbeitspapiere"

Mit der Herausgabe der Sozialanthropologischen Arbeitspapiere möchte der Schwerpunkt Sozialanthropologie des Instituts für Ethnologie der Freien Universität Berlin zur Belebung der ethnologischen und sozialanthropologischen Diskussion beitragen.

Als Teil der Sozialwissenschaften erfaßt die Sozialanthropologie die Diversität menschlicher Kulturen mit dem Anspruch des Verstehens und erforscht die Bedingungen möglicher Formen menschlichen Seins. Dabei spielen sowohl interkulturelle Vergleiche als auch die vertiefte Befassung mit lokalen Gesellschaften und Lebensweisen eine wichtige Rolle. Für das Verständnis der gegenwärtigen Kulturen und Gesellschaften ist einerseits die Auseinandersetzung mit den dominanten Industriekulturen unerlässlich, andererseits aber müssen die Lebensweisen jener dreiviertel der Menschheit im Vordergrund stehen, die sich an den Rand der modernen weltmarkt-orientierten und industriekulturellen Entwicklung gedrängt sehen. Daher müssen nichtindustrielle Kulturen und Gesellschaften - auch wenn sie heute keine unabhängige Existenz mehr haben - mit besonderem Gewicht in jede allgemeine komparative Fragestellung aufgenommen werden.

Ein besonderer Schwerpunkt der Arbeitspapiere soll auf empirischen Untersuchungen liegen. Dabei versteht sich die Reihe insbesondere als Diskussionsforum, in dem erste Berichte aus noch nicht abgeschlossenen Forschungen vorgestellt und einer Fachöffentlichkeit zugänglich gemacht werden.

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"We have Nobody in the Agencies":  
Somali and Oromo Responses to Relief Aid in Refugee Camps  
(Hiraan Region/ Somali Democratic Republic)<sup>1</sup>

I. Introduction

Refugees are seen by the general public as victims in need of charitable aid. This view also tends to influence the social sciences. Anything which makes refugees look less "victim-like" (cheating on refugee numbers, trading off their food supplies, economic arrangements with the local population) is usually considered deviant behaviour. This might, however, indicate that refugees have freed themselves of such restrictive labeling. Here I would like to support the view that refugee communities can become 'self-regulating' groups (which a modern prose also calls '*auto-poietic*' systems). They are communities which have developed modes of social control out of themselves<sup>2</sup>. This idea is sometimes linked to the assumption that people in group processes "will quickly develop a social structure which will ensure the equitable and acceptable distribution of resources, no matter how limited those resources may be". There are good reasons not to follow this "over-socialized view of men" (Harrel-Bond, 1986: 285). Social structures exist in the camps, but they are certainly not *equitable*. In the

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<sup>1</sup>A version of this paper was presented at the *VIIth. World Congress of Rural Sociology, Bologna, 27.6.-1.7. 1988*. Field research on which this study is based was partly conducted by participating in a *re-enumeration survey* among camp-based refugees in Somalia. The research was done on behalf of the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)* and the *National Refugee Council (NRC)*. It has been complemented by an extensive study of documents and consultancy reports which I was able to read during a term as a visiting research fellow at the *Refugee Studies Programme (RSP)*, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford. Research was financed by a grant from the *German Research Board (DFG)*, promoting special research on the development of armed conflicts in third-world countries. In Somalia I owe a special gratitude to my translator and friend *Hassan Omer*, who is, however, not responsible for my interpretation of our common experience. While being a visiting research fellow at *RSP* I gained much from the discussions with, among others, Prof. Elizabeth Colson, Dr. Barbara Harrel-Bond, Dr. Doreen Indra, Dr. Norman Buchiani, Dr. Lorain Blaxter, and Ahmed Karadawi. Taha Abdi gave me valuable hints regarding the Oromo refugees. Prof. Georg Elwert, Dr. Gabriele Zdunek, Dr. Steve Sampson and Susan Cox gave comments on the final version of this paper.

<sup>2</sup>The roots of this idea were already advanced by *E.A. Ross* [1866-1952] and *C.H. Cooley* [1864-1929] (*Abraham, 1973: 329ff*).

course of the discussion there may arise the question (which I am unable to fully explore within the framework of this paper) of whether aid to refugees should actively support the auto-poiesis of their social systems rather than denounce it.

In many cases refugee assistance primarily represents food- and health assistance to prevent starvation and diseases. Programme-implementing agencies and national governments both pay lip-service to the aim to reestablish economic activities (agriculture, income-generating activities). Yet in many cases emergency aid continues and comes to be denounced as the 'dependency syndrom' among refugees. As a "blanket term used for all the undesirable social behaviour found in the (camps)" (*Harrel-Bond 1986: 283*) it denounces the lack of cooperation and mutual support among refugees and in regard to the agencies and of 'work ethic' in general<sup>3</sup>:

"A dependency syndrome is already well-established among the refugees, and has led to a number of undesirable situations. A striking example is that the refugee administration in Burdubu hires local Somalis to unload UNHCR foodtrucks because the refugees refuse to do this without unrealistically high salaries..." (*Todd, 1981: 2*).

If there is 'dependency' it should be rather seen as a dialectical relation between the refugees and the institutional expansion of relief agencies as service enterprises, with staff, salaries and specific donor ideologies.

I became interested in research on refugees in Somalia in the wake of a wider study on the emergence of a national movement among the Oromo in Ethiopia. Oromo make up to approximately 1/3 of the refugee population in Somalia. Their presence in the camps is partly due to the formation of armed political movements among Oromo speakers in the Ethiopian regions of Bale, Sidamo and Hararghe which claimed territorial control and used physical force against the representatives of the Ethiopian state.

A basic assumption which inspired my research was that, from a sociological point of view, the situation in the camps might allow us to understand why people develop specific forms of awareness to distinguish between themselves and others. The camps, situated in a wider field of social interaction provided an opportunity to examine how different groups responded to a situation where external intervention became crucial for the supply of basic items such as food and other relief services.

I begin with a review of recent debates on the topic of refugees and relief aid in Africa. I then present a case study of how refugees manage their relations with locals; how they try to influence the vital issue of keeping control over the numbers of

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<sup>3</sup>cf. *Waldron 1987: 11* ; *Mohammed Ismail 1988: 152* .

people present in a camp, and how this contributes to an economy based not only on the consumption of distributed food but on more intricate patterns. Modes of social control, which the aid-giving agencies and governments exert on a formal scale, can be found in the forms of gossip and slander within social structures made up by refugees. I speak of "structures" in the plural, because the responses of Somali and Oromo refugees in the same camp differ. This supports the argument that the social interaction in the camps is not only conditioned by the distribution apparatus and the access to material benefits. There are creative capacities to re-model social situations, and thus to establish patterns of self-organization which tend to reproduce "tradition" while people cope with a tremendous social change.

## II. Refugees in Somalia

The number of refugees in Somalia is based on a negotiated planning and programming figure of 700,000 camp-based refugees. The number is a political compromise between the Somali government, the major donor countries and the UNHCR. The refugees came to Somalia as a result of the Somali-Ethiopian war of 1977-1978, and the additional or subsequent conflicts between Ethiopian government forces, their allies (Cuban troops, Soviet advisers), and liberation fronts like the WSLF (Western Somali Liberation Front) in the lowland areas of the Ethiopian provinces of Bale and Hararghe, and the Oromo-based fronts like the SALF (Somali-Abbo Liberation Front), and OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) in Sidamo province and the highland areas of Bale and Hararghe<sup>4</sup>. The influx of new refugees into north-west Somalia after autumn 1984 added another 140,000 refugees to the official number. At that time the increase in population was largely due to the resettlement and villagization programme of the Ethiopian government in the Hararghe highlands, which especially affected areas where peasants were suspected to show support for the OLF. This followed a strategy to establish state control which had been

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<sup>4</sup>The most authoritative publication which deals with WSLF, SALF and OLF is *Markakis 1987*.

already used in the Bale highlands in 1979-1981<sup>5</sup>. Due to the latter influx the official total number of camp-based refugees in the Somali Democratic Republic is assumed to be 840,000. Since food supplies, i.e. rations, given by international donors, through the World Food Programme (WFP) to the refugee camps are distributed according to the planning and programming figure, reports about the continued existence of malnutrition in the camps on the one hand, and the appearance of donated goods on local markets on the other, provided a pretext for the demand of a re-enumeration survey among the refugees in 1988<sup>6</sup>. Numbers, however, do not tell much about the social reality in the camps.

A standard picture in the presentation of Somali refugee camps is an endless expanded area full of small conical huts, called *aqal* or *gobama*. This is no longer true for the Hiraan camps. In a few cases, where more permanent huts have been destroyed by floods or rains, families live in *aqals*. In some cases *aqals* are probably inhabited by local pastoralists who use the services of the camp (they usually settle at the fringe of a camp). Typically the *aqal* is today used only to supplement larger dwelling structures. Families in general have one *mundul*, a circular hut with a conical grass roof. Better-off families may have an *'arish*, a square hut with a ridged roof (grass or corrugated iron). Apart from this, dwelling and compound construction display three different features: the

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<sup>5</sup>Recent studies on villagization programmes in Ethiopia agree that the experiences from Bale (1978-1981) became a strategic blue-print for subsequent activities in Hararghe, and that its main goal from the very beginning was the establishment of 'security villages' (Cohn/ Isaksson 1988: 445; Goyder 1988: 104). Oral information collected among Oromo refugees from Bale highlands (collected in Amalow, March 1988), would agree with Cohn/ Isaksson (1988) that the establishment of 'security villages' dated back to the early days of the Ethiopian revolution. Refugees called the first stage *'mabar'*, probably an oromozised form of the Amharic *'mahabar'* - 'association' - which stands for the establishment of peasant associations after the land reform in 1975. The second stage which started in 1980 was called *'waliti dufa'* (lit. 'coming together') which is the Oromo colloquial for 'villagization'. This was given among the respondents as one reason why they had left for Somalia.

<sup>6</sup>It was during the initial phase (February to April 1988) that I took part in the preparation of the survey.

riverine Shabelle peasants<sup>7</sup> usually plaster their huts, and sometimes also the fences and the inner court with a mixture of mud and manure. Dwellings and fences are attached to each other. Refugees from a pastoral background place their *munduls* amidst a fenced compound and not attached to the fence. The huts of the Oromo are recognizable by a central pole, the *utuba*, which protrudes through the roof. The diversity of dwellings is a visible sign of the cultural heterogeneity of their inhabitants.

Camps in general have primary schools, a health station, special 'family-life-centres' for women's activities occasionally linked with a bar serving soft drinks, and a police post. Some of the camps have huge market areas, including small-scale handicraft, bakeries, restaurants, teashops, even video-halls, and display features of an hybrid urbanism. Refugees and locals freely enter and leave the camps, and formal control by Somali authorities, given the situation near the Ethiopian border and the potential of civil strife inside Somali society, was not excessive<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup>These refugees, coming from a peasant background, belong to the *reer* (people) *Jareer*. They are part of a continuum of agriculturalists of Bantu origin, who were early settlers in the valleys of the Juba and the Shabelle (cf. *Mohamed Nuuh Ali, 1985: 100*). The *Jareer* live at the banks<sup>s</sup> of the Shabelle, between *Mustahil*, at the Ethio-Somali border and *Godey* in Ethiopia. Many of the Somali refugees in the Hiraan Camps belong to the *Jareer*. They represent part of the legacy of the *Ajuran State* which flourished during the 16th. and early 17th. century in this area (*Mohamed Nuuh Ali 1985: 190ff*). According to local oral tradition the *Ajuran State* was based on an alliance between agriculturalists and pastoralists, while the agriculturalists became the patrons of the pastoralists (sic!) after the decline of the state.

<sup>8</sup>One camp, *Shelembod*, is confined to refugees from northern Ethiopia (Amhara, Tigray). Rules are especially restricted and refugees need permits to leave the camp (*Ruiz 1987*). In general it is the absence of money which restricts mobility.



### III. Refugees in Africa and Relief Aid: The Present State of the Discussion

As the result of the continuous wars and famines in sub-Saharan Africa, emergency relief and rehabilitation programmes began to mushroom during the 1970's. Refugee assistance programmes are a particular institutionalized form of this type of aid. They include a complicated form of interaction between groups of refugees, host governments, the UNHCR, and 'non-governmental organizations' (NGO) or 'voluntary agencies' (Volag). Refugees and host government often become accused of misusing aid, and the organizations sometimes become liable to the charge of project proliferation.

Refugees, i.e. people seeking protection in a foreign place to escape persecution, war or natural disaster, are an omnipresent factor in the course of development of civil society in Africa (see *Hellwig, 1903*). But as *Karadawi (1983: 540)* has pointed out, through the specific situation in post-colonial Africa, with its evolving inter-state system of the Organization for African Unity (OAU), the need arose to create a special legal category of person known as *the refugee*. Special laws had to deal and special institutions had to take care of *the refugee*. The legal framework to define "the refugee" has been outlined by the OAU convention on refugees from 1969, and in more specific terms by various national legislations. The political and social administration of refugees became at the same time a matter of supranational commitment, especially in regard to the allocation of funds. Access to funds are the link between national refugee administration (special governmental institutions like refugee commissioners, etc.), and national and international NGO's which implement assistance programmes in accordance with the national and international administration.

Up to now studies of refugees in Africa have found a very weak response among students of African sociology, anthropology and development affairs, as *Mazur (1988)* has recently pointed out. However, recent research done on the effects of emergency aid on refugee communities in Africa agrees in many details with parallel research done on the effects of development assistance on rural communities in Africa (cf. *Elwert/ Bierschenk 1988*). One may thus advance the hypothesis that responses towards external intervention follow similar patterns. The notion that "every investment from the outside is a stake in a game where different social groups tend to get a hold of its benefits" (*Elwert/ Bierschenk 1988: 104*) may equally describe a situation where relief and emergency aid is given.

*Harrel-Bond's (1986:330ff)* study of refugee-local interaction in Southern Sudan suggests that access to labour power, the need for allies in local conflicts, market relations and spontaneous entrepreneurship are typical for the situation where emergency assistance is brought in. In the case of Sudan, aid implementation became the focus for institutional competition between the

UNHCR, governmental bodies, and the NGO's (*Karadawi 1983:541ff*). This is a very familiar picture for anyone studying results of development assistance. *Olivier de Sardan (1988)* has pointed out how 'peasant logics' have to be studied to understand how aid programmes become transformed under local conditions.

The *Turtons'* study of how the Mursi responded to a drought in southeastern Ethiopia in 1983 (*Turton/Turton 1984; Turton 1985*) evokes a picture of a self-regulated social process, in which food assistance works along social organization without creating dependency. A similar process has been described by *Spittler (1988)* for the Kel Ewey Tuareg. They received salt during a drought which they could barter, according to their customary patterns, for millet. Because aid, as a planned intervention interacts with modes of self-organization, planned outcomes are often unpredictable (*Elwert/ Bierschenk 1988 : 99*).

The notion of a 'self-organizing' response in emergency situations relates to another long-standing discussion. *Dirks (1980: 21)* has argued that the disaster studies after the Second World War tended to emphasize how disaster created social *anomie*. The implication was that disaster victims required a special institutionalized "treatment". Social anthropologists perceived emergency situations in two different ways, which already roughly circumscribe the present discussion. *Turnbull's (1972)* famous study of the starving Ik is a standard description of a complete social *anomie*. *Evans-Pritchard (1940)* however, found among the Nuer that scarcity made people generous, while *Firth (1959)*, among the Tikopia, found exactly the opposite. *Amborn (1987)* found among peasant societies in southern Ethiopia differentiated responses to prevent the development from crisis to catastrophe, including temporary abolishment of cost-intensive social institutions, a halt in obligations towards the ritual calendar, an increase in marriage age limit, and a final resort to the neglect of young children and the aged.

Many studies undertaken on African refugees are applied research, on behalf of the UNHCR or programm implementing NGO's. They obscure the existence of what *Mary Douglas (1987)* terms "institutionalized thought-style". Within a single process social *anomie* is presupposed and demonstrated. There is a strong tendency in consultancy reports and agency documents to follow the assumptions, on which a programme is based, in a circular mode. This creates self-affirming concepts about refugees and their needs. *Mazur (1988)* has emphasized that the successfully imposed label of refugees as "victims" or "clients" became a determining factor for the "rules of access to and allocation of resources". This might be a familiar picture for some students of the impact of development assistance. *Bierschenk (1988: 158)* has recently pointed out that due to the expectations various interest groups might have with regard to the allocation and distribution of assistance, the process of project implementation could be described as a negotiating process which involves the

"strategic use of language" to shape the semantic categories which define the problems and their solutions. On the level of agencies and national governments these semantic categories or 'labels' become part of a negotiation process about the amount, expenditure, and administration of aid. And they can also include 'numbers' as planning and programming figures.

There are certainly specific differences between emergency and development assistance. Emergency assistance does not encourage economic activities. It should provide the means to re-establish economic activities among destitute populations. Therefore it has to rely on forces which are allocated beyond the 'free market'. These forces are generally summarized under the label of "moral obligations to humanitarian assistance" (*Karadawi 1983: 539; Harrell-Bond 1986: 362*). 'Moral obligations' and 'humanitarian' attitudes towards the destitute and persecuted are terms constantly repeated in the international discourse on emergency assistance. 'Moral', however, can be identified in line with *Durkheim* as a typical means of social control.

A further difference has to be taken into account. It has been pointed out that aid-giving institutions need to create a political legitimacy towards voters and tax-payers (*Elwert/Bierschenk 1988:105*). In the case of humanitarian aid, as has been noted by *Elias Habte Selassie (1985: 126)*, the NGO's are accountable to their specific constituencies. But the latter has to be analysed as a relationship between private individuals, while the former concerns a public matter. Legitimacy, in the case of emergency assistance, can often only be achieved by the construction of a convincing moral cause, and, to quote *Elias Habte Selassie*, by a final "success story" which pleases the specific constituency.

*Harrell-Bond (1986: 362)* argues that the moral cause has to awaken the "monsters of concern", i.e. concepts of compassion or guilt. These concepts touch emotions. Yet, *the refugee* is a juridical person in the first place. In my opinion it is necessary to keep in mind a distinction between the external and the internal construction of a person (*Krader 1976: 234ff*). The external definition links a human being to the law and the state. Such is the case with *the refugee*. But the internal construction is linked to his/her awareness of identity, of thoughts and feelings. Using the experience with refugees belonging to the *Simba* movement in Zaire, who came to Sudan in 1965, *Karadawi* has said:

"The term 'refugee' was officially adopted to mean the depoliticization of these politically-motivated exiles..... After the refugee has been depoliticized, this term is used for access to international assistance on 'humanitarian' grounds" (*Karadawi 1983: 540*).

The division of 'the refugee' into a juridical person, bound to a special law and dependent on the agencies which give 'humanitarian' assistance and a human being with a political awareness and identity is fictitious. But it serves the interests to exclude in many cases the political reasons for forced migration from the official agenda<sup>9</sup>.

**IV: Blaming the 'tiri qoble' ('census people'):**  
**A Case Study in Public Opinion and the Allocation of Shame**

The following case study starts with a fieldworker's observation on gossip and public opinion which reveals something about the defense mechanisms and vital goals of a refugee population.

Public opinion in the camps is mainly dependent on oral discourse. There are certain key places where public information is diffused and opinion is created: the market areas, the teashops, mosques, schools, the centres sponsored by agencies and the government (health centre, family life centre), ration shops, the office of the camp commander, and the wells. One may assume that some discourses are linked to a male sphere of activities, and some to female spheres of activities; the teashops are more often frequented by men, and the wells by women. The political discourse which is diffused from the office of the camp commander is dominated by men, while centres sponsored by agencies or the government may have female administrators or workers.

In the case in point the teashops encircled the office of the camp commander. They were huge, square-shaped, wattled dwellings. Mats and used ration sacks provided places to sit on. The teashops were mainly frequented by men coming from one specific section in the camp. They were Ogadeen-Somali from the Kabre Daher area in central Ogadeen. The camp commander was not only an administrative extension of the Office of the NRC in Mogadishu, but also shared family ties with the NRC. My translator knew him for some time. He considered the camp commander to be his friend.

We had a particular reason for coming to this camp. We knew from earlier visits, and from aerial photographs, that certain parts of the camp displayed rather unfamiliar features for a refugee camp. Some of the compounds were very spacious. Large areas were fenced in to keep cattle there. The ground was full of manure.

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<sup>9</sup>Typical examples for this attitude are provided by the newsletter *The African Refugee*, published for a while by the OAU. One may summarize this attitude under the title "The impact of drought and famine on population movements in Africa" (*Bakwesegha 1985: 6-7*). Drought and famine are certainly major problems but the core of the problem of 'forced migration' in most of the countries of the OAU is civil war and the causes behind it.

Inside the compounds one could see huge piles of building-materials, wood and grass. These compounds surrounded a big graveyard. Near the river Shabelle a cluster of smaller compounds was situated. They had tall trees inside the fenced spaces. A lot of building construction was going on in this particular area. The activities aroused the professional suspicion of the census team that local pastoralists might try to build their huts in the camp before the survey was due to start. What we actually found was that in most cases small conical huts from the 'aqal' -type had been transformed into circular huts with a conical grass roof of the 'mundul'-type. There was no increase in dwelling structures as such.

A second reason why I had chosen to stay a couple of days in this camp was the presence of a community of Oromo. Some years ago they used to form an administrative unit on their own, but were now integrated with the Ogadeenis in one camp. A number of Ogadeeni families lived in the Oromo section, but there was a strong feature of separateness. The typical shape of Oromo dwellings, with a central pole (*utuba*) stretching out of the roof was a visible sign. As a legacy of their former autonomy the Oromo section still had its own ration-shop and separate ration distribution. The former camp commander was now demoted to section leader. His favourite pastime was to linger around the teashops which surrounded the office of the camp commander.

Our first concentrated attempt to investigate the 'conspicuous' section started somewhat unplanned. An early-morning meeting with Oromo elders had to be postponed, because the night before a fight had been started between Oromo and Ogadeeni at one of the wells. The rains were already late and water had become scarce. The elders had to negotiate for reconciliation.

When we walked through the section which we were particularly interested in, we made an observation which we had not taken into account earlier. The graveyard, which was surrounded by the compounds, had several stone tombs, while in other cases huge amounts of wood marked the graves. This suggested that people with very strong roots to this place used the graveyard. It appeared that the compounds near the river with the tall trees inside, signified a village than a camp. We decided to ask passers by. For language reasons, I could not do that myself, my translator had to ask.

The first person we asked was an Oromo man. His answer was that the people had lived there before the Oromo came in 1981. The second person was a woman, carrying milk to the market in the camp. To my complete surprise she immediately conceded that the place was not the camp, but a former village, and that the camp had taken its name from the village. We now asked a couple of men, who argued that it was indeed part of the camp. A second woman, who came from the market, responded that the place used to be a village, but that it was now part of the camp. She showed

us a rough division line between the former village and the camp, which nearly coincided with a change in the size of compound spaces. My translator now remembered that some people had referred to this place as the 'Xawadle section', which also referred to a lineage group of local agro-pastoralistst with a strong political influence in the Hiraan region<sup>10</sup>.

Since it was now time to meet the Oromo elders, we left the place. When we later discussed our findings with them they laughed, "You found that out?".

Later that day we went to the Shabelle river to get some impression of the riverine agriculture and the irrigation systems. A group of youngsters followed us. My pockets were apparently full of money. I carried 5000 Somali Shilling (ca. 25 US-\$)<sup>11</sup> to cover the expenses in the camp (food, accomodation, gifts) and all in 20 Sh. notes. Some teasing about the money developed. Suddenly a discussion among the youngsters arose, stating we had given money to children to buy informations about their families, the number of ration cards families hold, and that we had taken children to the bush to abuse them. This was pure fiction. When we passed by one of the teashops near the camp commander's office, an elder called to the youngsters: "Did he give you money this time?".

The story circulated and affecting particularly the attitude among Ogadeenis towards us, but not the Oromo. What we learned from them was that many people did not believe the story, but that nobody intervened on our behalf. From my experience with the role of elders in stopping or encouraging certain behaviour among the youngsters I got the feeling that they wanted to let the story circulate. But because it did not disturb our overall social wellbeing in the camp, it seemed that we could ignore it.

Two days later we continued our research on dwelling-structures in the Xawadle-section. Suddenly a man who was plastering his newly constructed hut with mud invited us for a cup of milk. This was in itself a strange event, because milk was in general too expensive for refugees to offer to (especially non-invited!) guests. It turned out that he wanted to explain that the woman who had given the initial information about the village was mad and not responsible for what she was saying. Since nobody was present when we initially had talked to her, her people must

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<sup>10</sup>The *Xawadle* are part of the *Hawwiya* sub-group among the Somali.

<sup>11</sup>For comparison: a monthly income of 3000 SoSh. could be earned in the camps by a trained tailor. Local staff employed by the food-distributing agency ELU/Care had a monthly income of 10.000 - 12.000 SoSh.

have either interrogated her later or she herself had informed them about the conversation. I was not interested in going deeper into this problem. However, we had to find some topics for conversation so as to assure him that we believed he was a genuine refugee. When asked from where he originally came, and when he had arrived as a refugee, he answered: "1978, the year when Olol Dinle died".

Olol Dinle was once a famous Somali nationalist among the Ogadeenis. He had collaborated with the Italians during the 1930's but was executed in Addis Abeba in the early 1960's (cf. *Markakis 1987:712,290*). The case of our host was now even less convincing, but it was not the research topic. I was not at all inclined to anticipate any findings of the full survey. The camp-village relation was certainly a crucial topic, and my personal opinion was that the local people had a moral right to participate in the services provided by the camps.

When we left the camp and drove back to the town where we were permanently based, we passed the car of the regional refugee commissioner. Back in the hotel I learned that he had been there earlier that day to see me and my translator. Several days later I met him during a meeting, but he did not mention the visit. During the course of the meeting I mentioned our experience with the gossip and slander in the camp. The same afternoon I got the informal information that the day when we had left the camp, and when the refugee commissioner had passed by us, he and a local police officer were on their way to the camp to investigate why we had started to inquire about the village!

The next day, when we had to return to the camp for some other reasons, the Ogadeeni forced us to participate in public discussions in all the teashops surrounding the office of the camp commander, where we had not been hitherto. These discussions were very useful because they gave a very concise impression about aspects of camp-life relevant for those very people we had associated with the gossip. Some days later my translator told me: "I should not have supported you to ask the woman about the village. If I would not have done it, you would not know. The camp commander used to be my friend, now he does not even greet me anymore".

What had puzzled, even insulted, me all the time was the allegation that we had used our money to abuse children. One does not have to live in an Islamic society with strongly emphasized family and mating concepts to feel the humiliating aspect of these allegations. Our hosts and the Oromo were not impressed by it, but it became a constantly overheard remark when we passed by groups of women and children. These allegations definitely offended my self-esteem and feelings, as well as those of my translator. Indeed it bothered me much more than the abstract question as to how the inhabitants of the Xawadle section might deal with the possible results of a survey that might deny them access to relief-related aid.

What the public use of gossip and slander served did was to gain some access to my value system. It was used as a means of social control. But it did not really work. I was not a functional part of any of the camp communities<sup>12</sup>. And I had, unlike my translator, not even vested interests in any of the relief-networks related to the communities. Social stigmatization did not teach me not to be an *anomic* disturbance for the camp community. The logical conclusion was to call for the police.

This particular social control in the camp did not exceed the realm of the Ogadeeni and Xawadle-section. The Oromo had their own ration-shop, and their ration-supply was not immediately affected by a possible exclusion of the Xawadle. The relation between the Ogadeeni and the Xawadle displayed two important features: the Xawadle controlled access to the riverine agricultural strips, and they were the locally dominant political pressure group. The Ogadeeni, on the other hand, were dominant in all refugee related governmental administration. During earlier visits the camp had shown a high degree of verbal hostility against the survey. From teashop conversations we had gathered that a Moslem sheikh had recited the Koran against the survey. The reading of the Koran to ward off evil is an attested social practice for local Islamic leaders (*Buschkens/ Slikker-veer 1982: 28*). It also gives an impression of how the survey was perceived by parts of the camp population: on the same level as an unexplainable illness, difficult to cure by the rational means of administrative ties!

But under the conditions of the survey, nobody could prevent us from staying several days in the camp. From the very beginning the camp commander had tried to accomodate us among teachers who all understood English, and were thus able to exercise some social control. That control had apparently. The ultimate answer was the call for the police. In between, the degrading message of child abuse was used.

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<sup>12</sup>The accusation of child-abuse has certainly to be seen in the broader framework which included all the methods to make sense of and to control the presence of a '*gaal*' (stranger), who was apparently not linked to any useful (i.e. aid-related) activity. There were other attempts to establish social relations by various means of *joking relationships*. As a rule Ogadeeni expressed that with the wish that I should marry into one of their families. The Oromo wanted to build me a hut. Both were expressions of the same quality. But one stressed *kinship* and the other *neighbourhood* as an expression for a close communal relation. In the Oromo case a hut, constructed by the neighbours, was the prerequisite for any man's marriage. In the case of the Ogadeeni the construction of a hut belonged to the obligation of the bride's family.



An important aspect of the procedure was the particular role of women. Women had given us the initial information, and women and children were an important source of distribution of the gossip. I see two possible explanations for this contradictory behaviour. Women were excluded from the formal political discourse in the camp, and as such more open, and at the same time less 'diplomatic' than men. The woman we first asked answered with a simple truth without considering the further effects. Nobody had probably asked her a question like this before. Women were on the other hand the ration-card holders, who collected rations at the ration shops. Ration surplus, at the family level, was marketed by women through a system of pooling and benefit sharing. The whole reproductive process of camp life made communication between women and children much closer than between men and children. Housekeeping with rations was also the particular task of women, and, by the various tasks performed in the daily routine, immediately linked to the communication with children. Those whom it was feared would talk too much with strangers got the message to keep away from them.

The planning and programming figure of 700.000 camp-based refugees becomes central in this regard. Following its introduction, the figures of refugees had also to be adjusted at the camp level. During the process of adjustment the section leaders lost their power as record keepers and ration distributors, and had to hand over both responsibilities to the staff of ELU/Care. Between 1983 and 1985 the section leaders had to set the stakes for their dependents, clients, and allies. With the implementation of a new ration-shop system in 1985 ELU/Care formally controlled the ration distribution. But the masterplans for family sizes, and hence ration entitlement, which ELU/Care now keeps, had been compiled by the section leaders and the camp commanders in response to the planning and programming for 700.000 refugees<sup>13</sup>. This situation had stagnated since 1985. The presence of "those who count the people" was thus a threat to the *status quo*<sup>14</sup>. This was less a problem for the Oromo. They had nothing to lose. Their ration system was not directly linked to the Xawadle, because they formed a camp on their own when they came in 1981. The relation between the Ogadeeni and the Xawadle was already older. But to go deeper into the relation between the

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<sup>13</sup>A number of articles and reports enable the reconstruction of stages and changes in the ration distribution system (Melander/ Nobel 1979; Wisner/ Lewis 1981; Christensen 1982; Braukämper 1982/83; WFP/UNHCR 1985; McEwan 1987 ).

<sup>14</sup>People felt less threatened by our presence in a neighbouring camp. There the *Saudi Arabian Red Crescent Society* was responsible for ration distribution. They followed a different donor philosophy. In their case the marketing of donored goods, such as rice which was at the same time barely available in Mogadishu, was encouraged rather than blamed.

Xawadle and the refugee population one has to take into account the ecological setting of economic activities.

Agricultural soil alongside the Shabelle river in the Hiraan is confined to very small strips, mostly not reaching 500 to 800 m. beyond the river banks. Feasibility studies on the possibilities to expand agriculture in this region agree that salination of the soil is a major problem. The people live in an area with marginal rainfalls (206 mm around Belet Weyne). However, only the expansion of rainfed agriculture is seen as a way to prevent further soil degradation<sup>15</sup>.

Refugees with an agricultural background from the Qalafo and Mustahil areas in Ethiopia were used to the Shabelle floods as a means of irrigation, and they had a variety of cereals, fruits and vegetables (sorghum, maize, pumpkins, potatoes, papaya, cassava) in their home areas. For others, further upwards, riverine agriculture was as haphazard as downstream<sup>16</sup>. A salty inlet which enters the river near the border increases enormously the danger of soil salination, especially during the dry season. And land developed under agricultural schemes for the refugees becomes immediately contested by local people (we observed such an incident in another camp).

Refugees had to establish a working relationship with local people. While in this case the Xawadle participated immediately in the ration economy, in another case villagers exchanged land-use rights against rations. But they reminded us several times that, although they did not belong to the camp, they hoped, or rather expected from the 'international community' to be included in any future development schemes among the refugees.

A further problem lies in the fact that any agricultural development projects on the other side of the border, including settlement schemes for 'voluntary repatriation' will limit the amount of water available on the Somali side. This dependency on the same source of water supply links population groups on both

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<sup>15</sup>OXFAM did a feasibility study in the Belet Weyne area in 1980. They proposed an expansion of rain-fed agriculture (*Todd 1982: 25; Mister 1985: 12*). People in one of the camps where OXFAM had started a project, which was later handed over to the *Refugee Agricultural Unit* (RAU), used nevertheless the the Shabelle water during the dry season to grow fodder (beans) for their domestic cattle. The water had a salinity of 80%.

<sup>16</sup>Information gathered among refugees in Bo'o camp and from *Shears/ Scrivener 1976*.

sides of the border probably more than previously anticipated<sup>17</sup>.

Deforestation is another crucial problem with ecological and social implications (see *Young 1985*). Deforestation is endemic in the Hiraan region. Collection of firewood is one of the main daily activities among the camp population. For some, especially among the poorest groups, it is the sole source of cash-income. Often it is combined with specific modes of exploitation of labour: sharing of the collected wood with the local population, and/or with owners of donkey carts which are used as means of transport. Additionally there is often taxation by local market supervisors.

Building construction, a second motive for deforestation, is probably the most significant visible sign of change in the Hiraan camps. Nearly all households have now at least one *mundul*, i.e. a circular wattle-and-mud hut, with a conical grass roof. Procurement of building materials, and building construction requires certain planning, including the investment of labour and cash. The labour input may reach from five to six up to six months, depending on access to surplus labour and on the preferred type of architecture. Building construction is deeply connected to either absorbing social investments among kinsmen, friends and neighbours, to provide labour for self-help (called 'goob' or 'iskashato') or to the availability of cash. In the mentioned case the Xawadle had a virtual monopoly on building construction material. Their compounds were full with piled sticks, grass and poles. The Oromo, who centred their concept of self-help activities on the idea of maintenance of good 'neighbourhood' (*ollaa*), used to collect building materials collectively but had to share-crop it with the Xawadle.

Even if the number of refugees is lower than the present programming and planning figure for the Hiraan camps suggests, the local ecological conditions will certainly not allow for the necessary expansion of productive activities. In the present situation, refugees and locals must share what every group requires by whatever entitlement. This need to share would have set other objectives for a survey. The basic objective was to establish a new 'programming and planning figure', and people certainly felt threatened by that. What *Waldron (1987)* has

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<sup>17</sup>*Mesfin Wolde Mariam (1964)* saw the water problem as a very crucial one for the future relations between Ethiopia and Somalia. He did not expand on this topic but resorted in his studies to a 'Greater Ethiopian' nationalism. Preparations for a development plan for the Ethiopian side of the Shabelle started already in the 1960's (*Markakis 1974: 369*), but project implementation began only after the Ethiopian revolution. (*Shears 1976*). The present programmes for 'voluntary repatriation' and 'resettlement' are a continuation of the projects which had to be interrupted in 1977 (*Shears/ Rees 1982*).

called 'blaming the refugees' became objectified by a fixation on numbers, and not on social problems and their linkage with economic necessities, material expectations and ecological constraints.

The Oromo had remained outside the discourse which blamed the '*tiri qoble*'. In the case of the Hiiran camps they were not linked to any kinship network among the Somali<sup>18</sup>, and they spoke another language. Their central social values emphasized rather *neighbourhood* than *kinship*. If one compares the emphasis on *neighbourhood* with the known value-system among Oromo in general, it becomes possible to view it as the core upon which a reconstruction of social institutions which express 'tradition' becomes possible<sup>19</sup>. Oromo in the Hiraan camps came mainly from the triangle Masno-Goba-Gindir in highland Bale. Earlier in this century, Islam had fostered their links with the Somali (cf. *Haberland 1963 : 411, 783*). Respondents in the camps agreed on this point for the time in question. In the second half of the 1970's they had turned to become *Somali-Abbo*. The promises of arms and education made it preferable to be *Somali-Abbo*. Attachment to the *Oromo* cause started, especially for the 'elders', i.e. people now above forty years, only in the camps. Islam, once constituting a link and a common cause with Somalis, had become a stronghold for an *Oromo* identity, because Islamic education in the camps, was the only education (*barmoota*) which the children received in their tongue.

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<sup>18</sup>In the visited camps in Hiraan the Oromo did not intermarry with the Somali. But this is not representative for other camps and regions. Even political activists in Mogadishu can be found married with Somali wives. In the camps alongside the Juba river, in the the Gedo region, Oromo intermarried with local *Rahanwein*, Somali agriculturalists. They were even engaged as their allies in the legal and physical clashes which accompanied the land speculation related to the possible construction of the Juba dam (information by *Alex de Wall*, Oxford, May 1988). Among the refugees in the north-west (Hargeisa), groups like the *Jarso* are considered to be completely mixed.

<sup>19</sup>The relevance of *neighbourhood* among the Oromo-speaking people has been outlined by *H.S. Lewis 1974*.

## V. Social Control, Food and Morals

Under the present system of aid acquisition for refugees the presentation of a convincing moral cause becomes crucial for the fund raising activities of voluntary agencies. This concerns mainly the private sector. Relief assistance for refugees, although implemented by NGO's, has at the same time a very delicate linkage with the public sector. It is the donor governments that give money to the UNHCR, and the UNHCR that distributes funds to the agencies. Refugee repatriation programmes in the Horn of Africa, for instance, are based on the philosophy "that refugees will be attracted home by promises of assistance" (*Harrel-Bond 1985:11*). The implicit meaning of this philosophy is that assistance can be used as a means of social engineering for population movements, where decision-making among refugees is expected to be based on the pursuit of economic advantages rather than on political identifications. A link between the negation of political causes, and the construction of humanitarian cases seems to exist.<sup>3</sup>

It is indeed the formal agencies of the state which are able to control the juridical person of the refugee, be it the border police, refugee administration, security, etc., but they do not necessarily control his/her identity, thoughts, feelings, and, most important, the discourse and social behaviour that derive from it. Refugees do not strip off their political identification as soon as they have crossed the border. Although the UNHCR has made it a formal rule not to support refugee camps which are not at least 50 km away from a border in order to prevent a continuation of political activities (*Rogge 1985:60*)<sup>20</sup>, many border areas in the Horn of Africa can in fact be considered as strategic 'hinterland' for armed political movements.

A recent analysis of Somali refugee camps by *Waldron (1987)* has revived an older discussion in the analysis of refugee camps in Africa in terms of "total institutions" (see *Chambers 1979*)<sup>21</sup>. Aid, especially food-aid, or 'rations', is seen as a means by which the 'staff' (i.e. UNHCR, NGO) controls the 'inmates' (the refugees). Part and parcel of this process is the creation of a high level of social distance between 'staff' and 'inmates', expressed by restricted contact, hostile stereotypes, feelings of superiority and inferiority. A "good behaviour", i.e. participation in agricultural schemes or food-for-work programmes entitles

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<sup>20</sup>What does of course not describe the realities in countries like Pakistan, Thailand or in Central America. That the UNHCR gives 'unpolitical aid' is a myth, as *Steinacker (1988)* has pointed out.

<sup>21</sup>The idea of a "total institution" derives from *Goffmann's (1968)* study on "Asylums".

to rations, whilst misbehaviour (absence, marketing of rations) leads to disenfranchisement. Control of food supply can certainly be a powerful means of social control. The present discussion about the use of famine in the civil wars in northern Ethiopia and Eritrea is but one example. But food supply can control human behaviour in more sophisticated ways. One way could be the control of the food/cash nexus (*Hay 1985:30*), i.e. by an unfavourable exchange rate of the donated food in comparison with items like milk or meat. A second way could be the control of the calorific and protein intake, which determines "the amount of energy expended on behaviour per unit of time", as *Dirks* puts it (*1980:31*). Both modes of control seem, however, to be rather narrow methods, which could hardly be applied without any other means of assistance.

Morals, social control, and economy can be linked flexibly, but are constantly interwoven, as *Elwert (1987)* has argued in a recent extended interpretation of the concept of 'moral economy'. One has to keep in mind that the economy of donated goods displays features which are outside of the 'free market' flow of commodities. The transformation of donated goods into commodities is one of the features of attested misbehaviour among refugees and their hosts. Many people will certainly feel offended if they realize that their "gift" immediately appears on a market.

*Elwert* tries to use the concept of "moral economy" (cf. *Thompson 1971; Scott 1976*) to describe the limits of such processes of commodification, and its impact on society. "Moral economy" is seen as a set of rules that guarantee unremunerated services for a specific communal set-up ('imagined community'<sup>22</sup>, nation, etc.). Crucial for this argument is viable social control exercised by the means of shared feelings, especially in regard to honour and shame.

'Moral economy' depends on a public discourse. Public discourse in modern civil society can be seen as a means to communicate an at least partial knowledge about goals and strategies of major actors. Public discourse is thus a means of participation and control. The spoken and written word and visual evidence are transmitted by the media. This however is not confined to industrialized societies. Under the conditions of camp-life in Somalia, the radio is an important source of information. The sound of the daily broadcasts by the BBC in the Somali language (*af Somaal*) echoes in the market areas of the camps, and huge crowds of males gather around the teashops. People are thus informed about broader sets of events, and any major action which

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<sup>22</sup>The idea of a 'nation' as an 'imagined community' has been outlined by *Anderson (1983)*. The earlier idea that 'society' ('Gesellschaft') is an "artificial construction" of a 'community' ('Gemeinschaft') has already been advanced by *F. Tönnies [1855-1936] (Abraham 1973: 256ff)*.

has an impact on camp-life is judged against the background of broader informations (people were able to compare the international assistance they got with the assistance Afghan refugees and guerilla movements in Pakistan received).

There is a public discourse inside the camps and several discourses that link the camps with the outside. This might be seen as a banality, since one can assume that there is always some public discourse in society. What makes it significant is the fact that the administrative discourse in Somalia is linked to the use of the Somali language, in written and spoken forms. The aid-related discourse is, however, linked to the use of English. The link between the two discourses is the local staff of the agencies, who have to have at least a working knowledge of English.

The administrative discourse links the office of the National Refugee Commissioner (NRC) with the district NRC, regional camp supervisors, camp commanders, section- and subsection leaders. Leaders of informal opinion are the elders, and young people (mainly male) with a high level of formal education. Camp commanders, section- and subsection leaders are government officials. They are paid by the government, and can be dismissed, promoted, or transferred by the government (*Elias Habte Selassie 1985:128ff*). The formal frame for this administrative structure was developed in 1975/76 to organize the relief camps for drought victims. One reason behind the development of this structure was to combat 'tribalism'.

It was the interaction between the national and local level in the administrative network that gave rise to the international outrage about corruption and nepotism in the process of aid distribution. Apart from the fact that it would be an unscientific prejudice to believe that expatriate agency staff is *per se* not open to corruption and nepotism, there are also several possibilities for a semantic reconstruction. What might be called "nepotism" in one aid-related discourse, becomes an "unrecognized institutional strength", in a second aid-related discourse (*Boston University Team 1983: 3*). In the case of Somalia both mean the same: a system of social obligations inside extended lineage networks that criss-cross the society and include ethnic Somali refugees from the Ogadeen. To inquire about the networks is, from the governments point of view, a strict taboo because it means to inquire about the clan (*tol, qabila*), lineage (*qolo*), sub-lineage (*jilib*), and extended families (*reer*). The terms belong to the semantics of 'tribalism', of unilinear descendency and corporate lineage identity (cf. *I. Lewis 1957*), but at the same time they describe the channels for the flow of information, goods and services.

The role of the Somali-speaking agency staff is crucial in very recent developments. The agencies absorb a great number of school-leavers and university graduates. ELU/Care, the food

distributing agency, employes about 2000 people<sup>23</sup>. A consultancy report for the UNHCR from 1981 defined the administration of refugee aid quite aptly as job opportunities for "a number of school leavers who would otherwise join the already overcrowded government ministeries and agencies" (*Todd 1981: 2*). Today people may switch from one agency to the other, but keep a distinctive network of information and interests, which works alongside and in interaction with the lineage network.

In the case of the Somali refugees a language border demarcates two distinct spheres of discourse, both related to different aspects of refugee administration. If one adds the large presence of Oromo in the camps one finds a third group, only marginally linked to both of the discourses. The fact that they even had to learn English through the medium of foreign language, *af Somaal*, hampered them in both administrative discourses. One of their major complaints can be summarized in the view: "We have nobody in the agencies". Having a relation somewhere and giving and receiving information and services would be considered as being the norm, while they saw their situation far beyond the norm. The presentation of the specific national cause of the *Oromo* and attachment to *mass-organizations* of the *Oromo Liberation Front* which had a 'semi-clandestine' existence in Mogadishu, provided a means to construct a larger network<sup>24</sup> and a separate *moral cause*.

The link between relief aid, voluntary agencies, their specific constituencies, moral causes, and the feelings of guilt and compassion can be extremely vulnerable if a forceful public opinion allocates honour and shame. The presentation of the refugee drama in Somalia since 1979 was largely based on the picture of starving people "living in abject poverty at the

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<sup>23</sup>A large number of Kenyan nationals are employed in this field. Following a rumour they are more likely to do paper work than Somali nationals do, i.e. writing reports for the files! In a certain way this rumour dovetails with *Laitins* (1977: 206) argument that the English courses in Kenyan schools made ethnic Somali more responsive towards an outward authority.

<sup>24</sup>The *Oromo Relief Association* (ORA) which is a recognized institution to provide relief aid for Oromo refugees in the Sudan, is not allowed to work in Somalia. Until 1981 the ORA was present in the camps, and provided some support for elderly people. Even before relations between the Somali Government and the *OLF* broke down in 1982, ORA had to cease its activities. Refugees in the camps saw that less as a matter of politics, but of jealousy on the side of Ogadeen-Somali in the camps, who did not accept that special relief was given to Oromo only. According to one informant, the Somali government feared also that some Somali might turn 'Oromo' to participate in this aid (Information by Taha Abdi, July 1988).



margins of subsistence in a poorly serviced rural camp" (*Rogge 1985:21* ). This picture became in 1981 increasingly challenged by a presentation of refugees now ruthlessly waging a guerrilla war in the Ogaden against Ethiopia, and thus misusing aid which was given out of moral commitment for starving refugees. Added to it came allegations of theft and corruption in Somalia. Of crucial importance was finally the widely publized "numbers game" in summer 1981, which lead in early 1982 to a negotiated "planning and programming" figure of 700.000 refugees. The discussion in the international media (with only a handful of newspapers giving first-hand reports, while all the others simply quoted ) impeded an international fund-raising campaign by the Somali government in March 1981 for a stated number of 1.3 mill. refugees. Compared with 1980 Somalia experienced in 1982 a cut-back of US-\$ 26.9. mill. annual refugee assistance:

UNHCR funds for Somalia, 1980 - 1982:

1980	59.315.3 mill. US.-\$
1981	46.239.0 mill. US.-\$
1982	32.430.3 mill. US.-\$ <sup>25</sup>

In April 1982 the UNHCR launched a US-\$ 20. million relief programme for displaced persons and 'voluntary repatriation' in Ethiopia, which enabled NGO's to switch their humanitarian efforts immediately to the other side of the border (*Harrel-Bond 1985 : 11* )<sup>26</sup>.

From April 1981 onwards two events and processes known as '*the numbers game*' took place. In March 1981 the Somali government launched an international appeal for assistance. This appeal was based on an estimate of 1.3 million refugees. Later that month the first complaints by Western relief-workers that the government used inflated numbers (*Times*, 27.3.81 ) were publicized. One month later *Graham Hancock* in *The Guardian* (24.4.81) fired a broadside against the Somali government and linked the possible inflation of refugee numbers to an aggregate of political artifices, such as providing President *Siad Barre* with funds to pay off the Ogadeen and use them as mercenaries against the then nascent Somali National Movement (SNM) in the

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<sup>25</sup>cf.: *United Nations General Assembly, Thirty-Second Session, Report on UNHCR Assistance Activities in 1980-1981, and proposed Budget for 1982; 1981, p. 60;*  
- *UNHCR Office, Report on UNHCR Assistance Activities in 1982-83, and proposed Budget for 1984; 1983, p. 404 .*

<sup>26</sup>*Waldron* (1984: 5 ) described how a building construction project in the camp of Sigalow had to be stopped in summer 1981, because the responsible NGO did not receive the earlier anticipated funds for relief-work in Somalia.

Hargeisa area. A further argument was that President *Siad Barre* was still giving arms and ammunition to the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF). This was presented as a particular indictment, because the Somali government had just tried to get US.-\$ 40 mill. military aid from the United States, and only in January 1981 had the State Department finally assured Congress that there were no Somali troops in the Ogadeen region (*International Herald Tribune*, 23.1.81). Finally the questions of military and humanitarian aid became linked.

" 'If the United States wants to feed the Somali Army and the guerrillas fighting in Ethiopia, it should do so directly and not involve humanitarian organizations', a Red Cross official said." (*The Guardian*, 24.8. 1988 )

It was certainly never the question to find out how many refugees really were in Somalia. In a country where not even the population figures are known, as a recent ILO study has pointed out (*Jamal 1988: 98ff*), any attempt to count refugees must become a chimera. Afghan refugees in Pakistan have never received the same kind of scrutiny as did Ethiopian refugees in Somalia in 1981. One of the journalists who participated in the 'numbers game' knew apparently perfectly well how to destroy the 'moral cause' of 'victims' in the eyes of a wider public. When he himself wrote a booklet in 1985, which aimed to support fund-raising for famine relief in Ethiopia, he preliminarily exculpated the Ethiopian government for any possible accusation of misappropriation of aid, which might "have discouraged potential donors to the Ethiopian appeal" (*Hancock 1985: 116ff*).

There were probably a number of factors behind the 'numbers game' and the subsequent switch, or better 'division', of 'humanitarianism'. The Western countries were now firmly established in Somalia. The United States had got Berbera as a naval base without committing itself to the Somalia cause in the Ogadeen. Somalia only received part of the promised military aid when a new border war with Ethiopia broke out in July 1982. The endorsement of repatriation-programmes and settlement programmes for displaced persons in Ethiopia provided an initial step for major Western donor countries to increase their presence in Ethiopia. For the USA it was a general start toward improving completely deteriorated relations. 'Voluntary repatriation' and 'settlement for displaced persons' remained catch-words for 'donorism', until being replaced in 1984 by 'famine relief'.

An initial attempt in 1980 to convince international donors to support Ethiopia<sup>27</sup> found no favorable response among Western

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<sup>27</sup>cf. *Special Economic and Disaster Relief Assistance - Assistance to Ethiopia - Report of the Secretary General; United Nations General Assembly - A/35/ 360 - 12. Sept. 1980.*

donors<sup>28</sup>. After the 'numbers game', fund-raising improved for Ethiopia. However, some changes were necessary to be entitled for UNHCR funds. First the resettlement authority had to be switched from the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture to the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission<sup>29</sup>, i.e. from *economics* to *disaster*. Then the *internal displaced person* had to be legally defined as entitled to UNHCR funds<sup>30</sup>, what in effect meant the creation of a new type of *juridical person* in addition to *the refugee*. Finally, the Ethiopian government had to change its oblique language against the refugees (who now became eligible for *voluntary repatriation*), which was worded as follows:

" A refugee is a destitute person. And as such he creates problems to many parties in the international community. He becomes a burden to the host community by perhaps sharing its meagre resources, thus impairing development. He poses problems to the international community which has the moral responsibility of clasping and reinstating him to his former normal position. He also leaves a share of problems to his own people back home. In addition to the dislocation of himself and perhaps his family, he withdraws his essential labour power which is so vital for the development of his country's economy (sic!)".<sup>31</sup>

A second proposal<sup>32</sup> cautiously omits this unambiguous declaration of the feudal principle of '*glebae adscriptae*' ('bound to the soil').

Social anthropologists may assume that there is never one "moral economy", but one has to deal with partial and partisan moral codes, with different public opinions and discourses, with different concepts of honour and shame, and with different means

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<sup>28</sup>cf. *Short-Term Relief and Rehabilitation Assistance Needs in Ethiopia; Prepared by the United Nations Coordination Committee for Relief and Rehabilitation - In Collaboration with the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission for Ethiopia*, 25. 3. 1981, Addis Abeba.

<sup>29</sup>Information given by Taha Abdi, Oromo Relief Service, London, July 1988

<sup>30</sup>cf. *Short-Term Relief and Rehabilitation Needs in Ethiopia; loc. cit., p. 2*

<sup>31</sup>cf. *The Returnee Problem in Ethiopia and Assistance Require-- The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission; Addis Abeba, Sept. 1981*

<sup>32</sup>cf. *Project Proposal for Assistance to Ethiopian Returnees; Dec. 1981*

of communication to convey the message of disgraceful behaviour. In the case of African refugees a shallow international concept of rules determines the moral code which dictates qualification for assistance. This is summarized under the heading of "humanitarianism", which could at the same time be described as the "conscience of rich countries" (Harrel-Bond 1986: 68 ). But is there an international standard for honour and shame or guilt and compassion that touches the emotions of a human being in such a way as to instigate action ? Is the moral discourse among donors compatible with the discourse among the recipients ?

## VI. Conclusions

The argument has been put forward that aid-giving in the case of relief and rehabilitation aid for refugees needs to stress moral values to justify the procurement of aid among the donors and to provide an acceptable cause for the public opinion in donor societies. Recipients of aid, on the other hand emphasize moral obligations which might include social groups which were not intended to receive aid in the first place. Both spheres of discourse tend to allocate honour and shame to perform social control, but what can lead to a Catch-22 situation, whereby the draughtsmen move on both sides. People in the camps had the general feeling that the census was not in their interests. Larger issues were at stake, such as a general appeasement policy for the Horn of Africa in regard to borders, territories and armed political movements. The peace agreement between Ethiopia and Somalia in April 1988, and the factual recognition of the Ogadeen border by Somalia was as well part of the puzzle which provided the blue-print for their future as the presence of a survey team.

In the case of the refugees in Somalia the link between moral economy social control and control of information is structured by different spheres of language use, and linked to networks of social organisation and agencies. Ogadeen-Somali can use the corporate structure of the lineage system. Oromo refugees have to develop other networks. In the specific case it was identification with a national movement among the Oromo. But Oromo did not act in conformity. There was regional diversity. Refugees in the Gedo area and Juba valley were found as allies of the Rahanwein agriculturalists against the Marehan (Ogadeen) pastoralists. This would need a separate analysis.

Aid administrators in Somalia are particularly uneasy about pastoralists, allegedly ruthlessly crossing the border, always looking for relief aid. Some certainly do. In this connection the operational agenda of agencies becomes very useful. The *International Council of Voluntary Agencies* (ICVA) mission to Ethiopia, in January 1982, actually encouraged "voluntary agencies to view their actual or potential assistance within the context of the Horn of Africa rather than within an individual country perspective" (ICVA, 1982). The call for cross-border

engagement is added by a 'thought-style' within UNHCR which blames the liberation fronts and political opposition movements in different countries in the Horn of Africa for helping people to cross the border in order "to solicit international assistance"<sup>33</sup>. The relation between humanitarian aid, implemented by basically the same agencies on both sides of the border, and an UNHCR where part of the staff promotes the policing of political movements supports the view that 'humanitarian' aid is linked to the control of political behaviour (Karadawi 1983 : 540 ). This argument needs certainly more investigation.

In the case of the refugees in Somalia a further link between relief aid and strategies for regional development should be investigated. When the NGO's started to support programmes for the 'voluntary repatriation' of refugees to the Ogadeen in 1982 they resumed development schemes in the Shabelle valley and its tributaries which had started in 1975 and which had been abandoned during the war of 1977/78. But agricultural schemes on both sides of the border depend on basically the same water resources.

A short glance at the map of the Horn of Africa shows that the area contested by the war, and the activities of the Somalia linked WSLF and SALF are identical with the catchment areas of the Shabelle and the Juba river (see Appendix ). Both rivers are vital for any agricultural development in Somalia, and for any programme to resettle the refugees. There is a permanent danger that present remedies for the refugee problem will lead to conflicts over water resources. It is essential that ways of sharing resources between refugees and local people be developed. It will be necessary to implement this development on the bi- or rather multi-national level which characterizes the social landscape. The linkage between accelerated development projects and the genesis of armed political movements suggests that the national identification involved is also related to a resource competition which concerns international aid rather than pasture.

Relief aid for refugees seems to be linked to different subsystems of moral economy. The presentation of a cause or plight in the media is crucial for encouraging or discouraging potential donors to show commitment. What has to be presented is a convincing moral cause, and in the case of *the refugee* that means a person whose credibility is beyond any doubt. That implies the establishment of a semantic hegemony. Different interest-groups could characterize the same people as weak and helpless refugees, guerilla fighters or shrewed and slightly work-shy

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<sup>33</sup>cf. Discussion Paper prepared by the RCO/ Addis Abeba - Issues to be Discussed at the Regional Representative Meeting, Nairobi 1986

pastoralists who are ruthlessly developing 'survival strategies' on both sides of the border. Who would possibly support refugees living in settlements which are presented as having restaurants, gambling- or video halls? This development, however, shows that self-organisation is somehow working, even though it does not meet the expectations of external donors. And for sure, it is not an *equitable* society which develops in the camps.

3

*Postscript December 1988*

By now findings of the survey have entered the international media. The "Nomads Republic Somalia" becomes blamed again for corruption and the misuse of aid. A "generous estimate" of the UNHCR amounts to 450.000 refugees, and the new blame-label for them is "professional refugees" ['Berufsflüchtlingwesen'] (*Der Spiegel*, No. 50, 12.12. 1988 : 152 ). The same procedure as in 1981 ? The international public should ask for the full publication of the findings. After all it is they who pay for the UNHCR.

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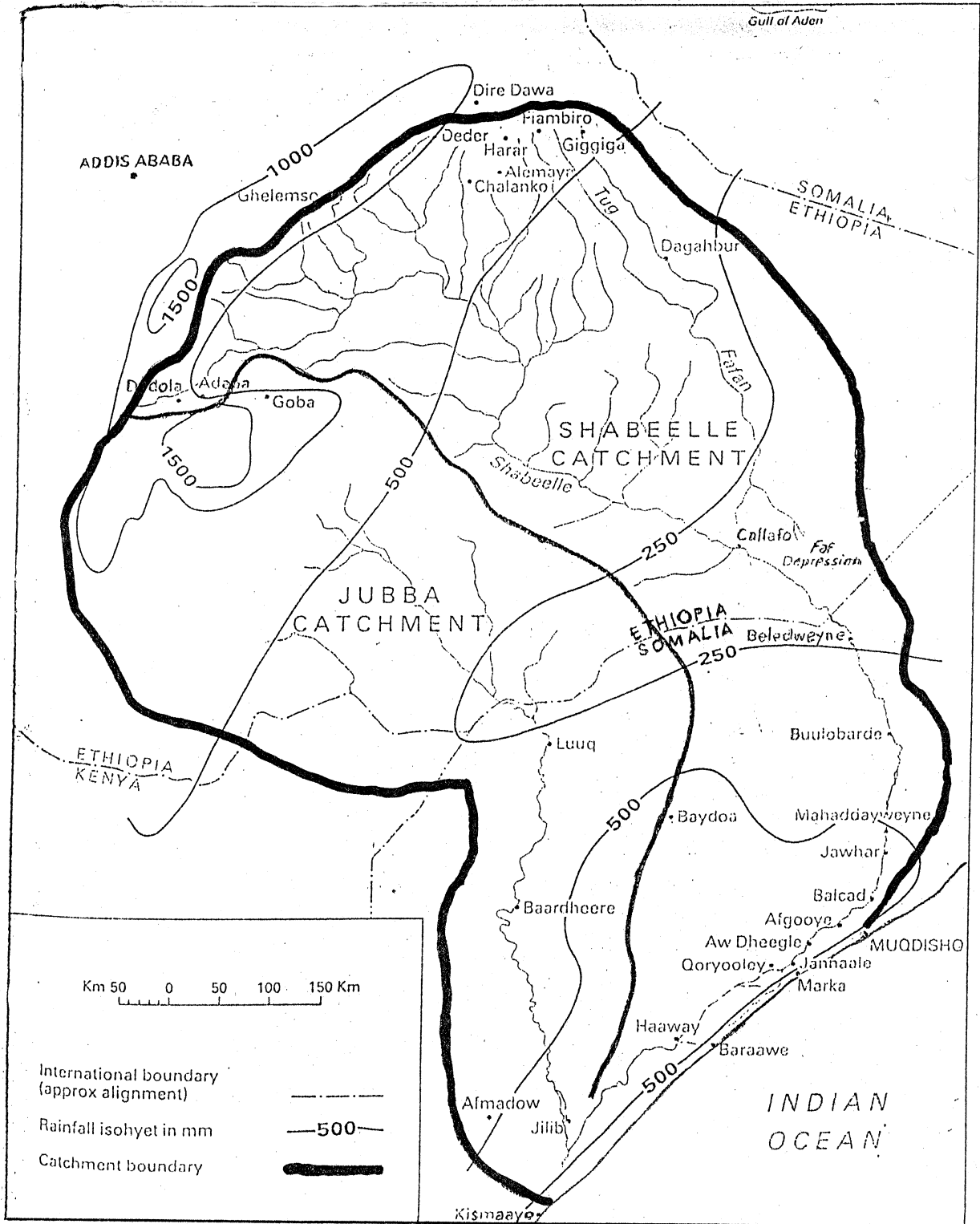


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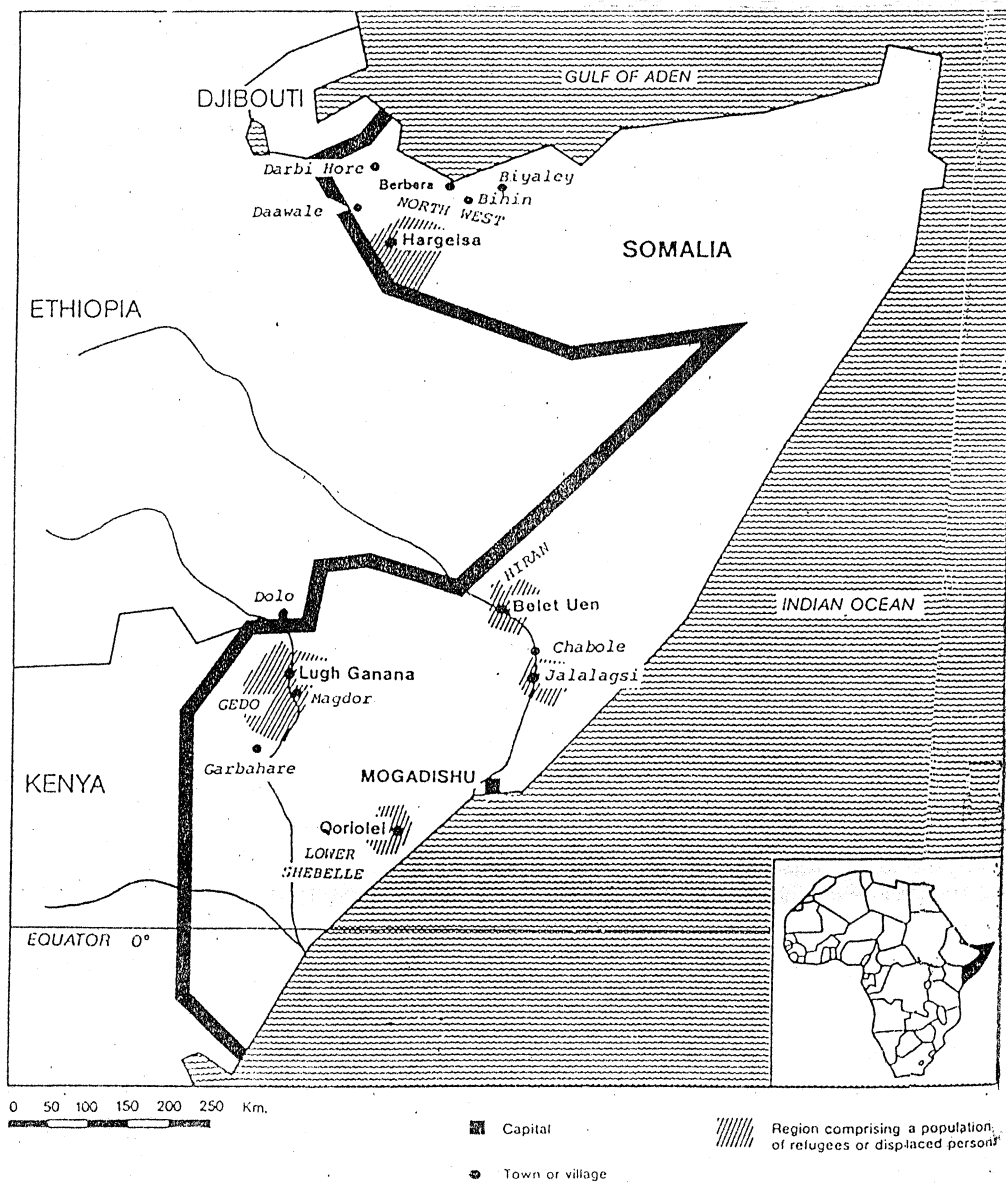
Appendix

Juba and Shabelle Catchment Areas: (adapted from *Hendy, 1985*)



Appendix

Regions in Somalia Containing Refugees or Displaced Persons <sup>34</sup>:



<sup>34</sup>Adapted from UNHCR activities financed by voluntary funds: Report for 1986-87 and proposed programme and budget for 1988, Part I. Africa: 48; UNHCR, 1987