

12. RESETTLEMENT

Three weeks after the media attention to the famine in October 1984, the Ethiopian government officially launched what was to be the most controversial aspect of its whole famine policy: resettlement. The plan was to move a large section of the population from the north to the south. The target was 1.5 million people. In fact, about 600,000 people were moved in three phases: November 1984-May 1985, October 1985-January 1986, and November 1987-March 1988. The justification presented to the west and to the people of Ethiopia was that it was a famine relief measure -- the north of the country was stricken by drought and environmental collapse, and the only alternative was to move most of the people elsewhere. Official justifications were embellished with such manifest untruths as: "the fact is that much of Ethiopia, particularly the northern provinces of Tigray and Wollo, are today an uninhabitable wasteland" and "there have scarcely been any real rains in the drought-prone areas since the 1972-4 catastrophe."¹ In the domestic Ethiopian media, the resettlement program was presented as the relief program -- the two were synonymous.

As well as drought relief, the program was described in glowing terms as an opportunity to use the "virgin lands" of the south and west, as an opportunity for socialist transformation and mechanization of agriculture in the resettlement sites, and as the first challenge to the cadres of the newly-set up Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE).

The TPLF and independent observers were quick to infer another motive: counter-insurgency. Population relocation had been a central part of counter-insurgency strategy in the southeast and in Eritrea, but had not yet been tried in Tigray and north Wollo. A policy of trying to remove by force a large section of the population was consonant with both long-standing military strategy in the country and the existing policy of "draining the sea to catch the fish." A Tigrayan resettler, Hailu Kelela, was told by his guards "Your whole woreda [sub-district] supports the TPLF, so we will break anyone who lives here and we will not stop with the people, but we will destroy the whole land unto the last tree."² In addition, the settler population provided a government stronghold in the resettlement regions in the southwest, where the OLF insurgency was gaining ground.

Many Ethiopian government policies, including villagization and the control of trade

¹ RRC, The Challenges of Drought: Ethiopia's Decade of Struggle in Relief and Rehabilitation, Addis Ababa, 1985, pp. 180 and 231.

² Quoted by Peter Niggli, "Ethiopia: Deportations and Forced Labour Camps," Berlin, Berliner Missionwerk, 1986, p. 9.

and migration, functioned both as counter-insurgency strategies and as mechanisms for social and economic control of the peasantry. Resettlement was the same. The details of the implementation of the program varied from place to place; at its worst, it was a brutal form of counter-insurgency, at its best, a fierce attack on the independence of the peasantry.

Background to Resettlement

Before the revolution there was a steady spontaneous outmigration from the northern highlands to the south and west. Adrian Wood, an authority on migration in Ethiopia identified 17 locations where resettlement was occurring between 1950 and 1974, partly encouraged by the government, and partly assisted by measures such as the eradication of malaria from many lowland areas.³ Up to one million people are estimated to have moved. International agencies such as the World Bank agreed that the northern highlands were "overpopulated" and encouraged the government to start programs for controlled resettlement.

The land reform of 1975 and accompanying policy changes stemmed much of the movement, by making migration and the acquisition of land more difficult. Rather than granting people freedom of movement, the government sought to control the process of resettlement. In the ten years between 1974 and 1984, 187,000 people were resettled under the auspices of the Settlement Authority and RRC. They included the urban unemployed, pastoralists and returning refugees as well as northern peasants. The process was not a success. Although the settlements were planned to achieve self-reliance within three years, by 1984 there were still 70,000 resettlers needing food assistance.⁴ The program was also very expensive. Consequently, in 1983 the RRC stopped resettlement and started an internal review of what had gone wrong. The review concluded in September 1984 with the recommendation that a small-scale and slowed-down approach be tried, using oxen and not tractors for cultivation.⁵

In the event, two months later, the exact opposite approach to resettlement was implemented.

Recruitment of settlers: Non-Insurgent Areas

³ Adrian Wood, "Spontaneous Agricultural Resettlement in Ethiopia, 1950-74," in J. I. Clarke and L. A. Kosinski (eds.) *Redistribution of Population in Africa*, London, 1982.

⁴ Alula Pankhurst, "Settling for a New World: People and the State in an Ethiopian Resettlement Village," PhD Thesis, Manchester, 1990, pp. 39-40.

⁵ Pankhurst, 1990, p. 40.

The Ethiopian government insisted to the western world that the resettlement program was voluntary. This was a lie. In fact, each district in the north had its own quota of resettlers, which it had to fill. If volunteers could be had, that was good; if not, other means would be found to recruit settlers. The existence of the quota system was itself fundamentally incompatible with the notion that the recruitment was voluntary.

In non-insurgent areas, various means were used to recruit settlers. At the beginning, some famine victims were so desperate that they volunteered. Resettlement camps and villages which had filled their quotas for resettlement were given priority in terms of aid from the RRC, and there were many instances of the withholding of aid in order to encourage resettlement from certain areas. Yimam, a settler explained:

It was a short term problem; how to "cross over" from March to April. We could not last out till the main rains crop. If we could somehow have survived through that period, we wouldn't have resettled.⁶

The food available in the resettlement transit camps enticed many. One settler reported: "If we could have slipped out after eating our fill we would have done so" and another likened the camp to a rat trap set to ensnare people.⁷ All transit camps were heavily guarded to prevent people from escaping.

Propaganda was also used to obtain volunteers, describing the easy and comfortable life that settlers could expect in their new homes. For example, a video film of green pastures and forests was shown to the inmates of Korem feeding shelter on December 31, 1984. A similar film later shown on Ethiopian television had shot the Wollo landscape through a filter that made it appear red and barren, while the colors of the southern landscape were distorted so as to appear blue-green.

However, an analysis of the origins of settlers clearly shows that accessibility for government cadres and soldiers was the overriding factor in determining whether people were resettled. 56 per cent of the resettlers in Wollo in 1984/5 came from the easily-reached districts of Dessie Zuria and Kalu, despite the short-term nature of the drought there. By contrast Wag and Lasta, much worse-affected by famine but also more remote, provided only 13 per cent.⁸ At an individual level, coercion was used. Those in dispute with their Peasant Association (PA) chairman, or in arrears on PA dues or tax payments, were likely to be detained and resettled. Some traders were stopped at checkpoints and resettled, others were picked off the streets. A

⁶ Pankurst, 1990, pp. 95-6. March is the hungry month before April when the harvest from the short rains is gathered in.

⁷ Pankurst, 1990, p. 124.

⁸ John Mitchell, "Review of the Famine Relief Operation in Wollo Administrative Region," 1986, mimeo, p. 53.

woman from near Kombolcha reported how she and eleven other families were taken: "We were called to a meeting and told 'your land is on the mountain slope which is to be used for the forestry; you have to go for resettlement!' We didn't even eat the maize we had grown on our irrigated land."⁹

An agriculturalist studying conditions in Wollo delicately captured the official approach: Perhaps the fine line between voluntary and coerced resettlement is captured by the notion of "bego teseno", to which party officials and political cadres carefully and skilfully reverted when voluntariness failed. "Bego" means goodness or kindness, and "teseno" means coercion. Hence, "bego teseno" literally means coercion for someone's own good. That is to say, for those who do not know their own interest, coercion is a legitimate means of helping them realize it.¹⁰

The government guidelines for selecting settlers clearly state that a willingness to go is only one of the criteria to be used. The other criteria include being a member of the "urban unemployed," living in an area designated for conservation or development, being in arrears on tax payments, living in a densely-populated area, being destitute and having eaten reserves of seed, and being a pastoralist. A government survey found that 38% of settlers belonged to these "non-voluntary" categories.¹¹

Recruitment of Settlers: Insurgent Areas

In Tigray and northern Wollo, the means of recruiting settlers was much more straightforward: force was used.

Reliable reports of resettlement at gunpoint were available from early 1985. In the first week of February, 17 truck-loads of settlers were forced from Meqele camp, and taken to the airport. On February 10, over 200 men were separated from their families and taken from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) feeding center of Wahreb Sharti near Meqele;¹² in the same week Afar herdsmen were rounded up by soldiers in Adigrat.¹³ On March 10, over 100 were taken at gunpoint at Korem.

The issue came to a head at the end of 1985. In October, a UN food monitor was

⁹ Pankurst, 1990, p. 164.

¹⁰ Alemneh Dejene, *Environment, Famine and Politics in Ethiopia: A View from the Village*, Boulder, Co., 1990, p. 99.

¹¹ Pankurst, 1990, p. 161.

¹² *The Guardian*, London, February 11, 1985.

¹³ *The Times*, London, February 9, 1985.

travelling together with two nurses from the French relief agency Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) to Kelala in north Wollo. They encountered a group of about 100 people being escorted to a resettlement transit camp by two soldiers, who freely admitted that they were under instructions to shoot any who ran away. A few weeks later, the food monitor reported to the UN Emergency Office for Ethiopia (UNEOE) in Addis Ababa on this and four other similar incidents. The head of UNEOE forwarded the report to President Mengistu, and an official "investigation" was mounted, which consisted of a guided tour of transit camps in the environs of Dessie, the regional capital of Wollo. The guides were provided by the RRC, and at least one Amharic-speaking foreign member of the team was intimidated by his guide, being threatened with expulsion from the country if he conducted his own investigations or publicized his findings. Not surprisingly, the investigative mission reported that nothing was amiss.

MSF, however, were less content, and in December went public with an account of the forcible resettlement of 600 people in Korem on one of three such occasions in October and November. The agency also claimed that the program was causing the deaths of 100,000 people. MSF were immediately expelled, and no more dissenting voices were heard among the relief agencies in Ethiopia. Shortly after MSF made their allegations, an Oxfam nurse, Carol Ashwood, confirmed that food had been withheld from famine victims with the aim of forcing them to resettle.¹⁴ The Oxfam press officer responded to the implicit slur on the organization:

We continue to make representations to the Ethiopian authorities if we have evidence that the scale or speed of resettlement or the methods employed involve coercion or are disruptive of harvesting or feeding programmes. Based on our experiences last year, we have so far found this approach more effective than high-profile public denunciations.¹⁵

In late 1985, trucks belonging to the Save the Children Fund (SCF-UK) were forcibly commandeered to transport resettlers. SCF protested privately to the RRC, but made no public statement, even when the trucks were taken on a second occasion. Both agencies were anxious not to endanger their ongoing relief programs.

At the end of 1985 the US-based human rights group Cultural Survival released a report on the resettlement program, based on interviews with refugees in Sudan who had escaped from the resettlement camps.¹⁶ This report, based on 250 interviews with refugees who had escaped the resettlement camps, repeated the allegations and provided many additional details of human rights violations.

The US government was outspokenly critical of the resettlement program, and

¹⁴ "Oxfam Nurse says Ethiopia 'Blackmails' Refugees," *African Business*, January 1986.

¹⁵ "Oxfam Outlines its Approach in Ethiopia," *African Business*, February 1986.

¹⁶ Cultural Survival, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine 1984-1985*, Cambridge, Mass., December 1985.

repeatedly criticized it for being forcible -- notably in a Presidential Determination of September 1985. No US assistance was ever given to the program. Apologists for the government accused the refusal of the US and UK governments to support the program of being "a spiteful and misdirected error."¹⁷

However, the UN consistently played down the controversy. Over the previous eight months the head of UNEOE, Mr Kurt Jansson, had repeatedly asked the government for explanations of reports of forcible resettlement. He later reported that "I never received a satisfactory explanation,"¹⁸ but neither did he publicly speak of any doubts he may have had. This silent endorsement edged towards an open advocacy when the controversy re-emerged. Mr Jansson related the problem specifically to the single incident of 600 people being forced onto trucks at Korem. Speaking to journalists, he "stressed that it was not certain that all 600 were moved against their will," and on the basis of this and other similar arguments urged relief agencies to support the resettlement program to avert widespread suffering.¹⁹

In January 1986, the program was suspended for nearly two years, though it is widely agreed that the main reasons for this were the huge expense and low returns, not international pressure. When resettlement was restarted, similar instances of coercion recurred almost at once. On January 3, 1988, seven people were killed while "resisting" resettlement at Korem -- by trying to run away. On February 8, 20 were shot dead, while 3,000 were forcibly resettled. The information reached the BBC, based on eyewitness accounts provided by medical and nutritional staff belonging to foreign voluntary agencies. The government instructed the agencies to deny the existence of the incident, and a representative of SCF was clearly discomfited when questioned about it by the British House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee:

I think we will never know. I think it would be hard to find out what really happened in Korem. ... The Ethiopian government has officially denied that the resettlement is forceable. I think their official explanation, concerning the claims made by the BBC about Korem, is to refer to it as a problem of disinformation brought about by foreign agencies acting in concert with the BBC. It obviously puts us into a very difficult position ...²⁰

In fact, there is a considerable amount of independent evidence that corroborates the

¹⁷ Graham Hancock, *Ethiopia: The Challenge of Hunger*, London, 1985, p. 110. Mr Hancock has since revised his position.

¹⁸ Kurt Jansson, Michael Harris and Angela Penrose, *The Ethiopian Famine*, London, 1987, p. 67.

¹⁹ *The Guardian*, London, November 7, 1985.

²⁰ Minutes of Evidence taken before Foreign Affairs Committee, February 17, 1988.

account originally given by the relief workers in Korem. This incident will be examined in some detail because the evidence has not been published before, and because it illustrates that nearly three years after the initial accounts of forced resettlement, pressure brought to bear on the government through "private representations" had absolutely no effect.

The personal diary of Eyob Goitam Naizghi, a visitor to Seqota in June 1988, gives an independent account of the background to those events:

By the "tella house" (local bar), one man is attempting to explain his experience of family separation with indignation and regret. It was some time in December of 1987, when people in his village started a rumour about food distribution in Korem by the "Commission". After a few days of deep thinking, he said, a group of them decided to pack and walk it to Korem with their families. After two days, approaching Korem, they decided to leave their families behind, and the men went to Korem to investigate if what they heard was real or a trap. After having met the authorities of the "Commission", they were told to register with their families and were given food-grain that will last them for about two days. Thinking of it all, they were not able to sense any trap for resettlement. Thus, they decided to bring their families inside Korem.

After two days, someone was moving quietly and telling people to sell their pack animals. They cannot tell who he belongs to, and they thought it was all a mad joke. Two days later, early morning, they were rounded up by the army and loaded into brand new "Red Cross"²¹ donated trucks, on their way to the unknown places. It was only then they recognized it was a trap. Down-playing whatever guilt feelings he may have felt deep inside, he told us, the uninvited audience, boastfully how he snicked out of the truck and managed to escape to his village, leaving his wife with three children and a donkey behind. What a loss, he says to the donkey, because that was the only tangible property he ever owned. As to his family, he only hopes that they are doing fine, for he has heard nothing since they separated.

In the middle of all this sadness, two Russian-made MiG fighter planes unexpectedly roar the skies of Sekota town. Every single of us in the town are in panic. Even those with shaky legs are attempting to run away to the unknown ...

In January 1989, a visitor to TPLF-controlled Tigray interviewed several groups of escapees from the resettlement site of Pawe in Gojjam who were returning home. These are some extracts from the testimonies:

1. We are returning to our homes in Wollo at a place called Sekota. We escaped in the moonlight. We were taken last year during February -- about 11 months ago. There was an announcement from the government that everyone from Sekota should come to get cards to receive food rations. ... When we arrived there we were encircled by armed forces who beat and killed. Everyone, big and small, with or without families, were being forced into the truck. Those who refused were immediately shot. A lot of people died.

²¹ Rural Ethiopians commonly call any non-governmental relief agency the "Red Cross."

2. The government informed us that, because of the drought, they wanted us to come to a center to receive food rations and supplies. As we gathered at the place to receive the rations, we were surrounded by soldiers on all sides. The military forced us to be loaded on a truck which took us to the resettlement sites. Those who tried to claim property or family members left behind were beaten and shot dead. We were loaded on to 40 trucks altogether the first day, 30 trucks the second, and 60 trucks the third day. ... We were taken last year [1988] in February. After this month it will be one year ago.
3. When they took us from Korem, a lot of people died, shot dead. Five people were shot dead beside me by Kalashnikovs from the armed forces who forced us to be loaded onto the truck. Some lost their legs. There were tremendous beatings. We were surrounded in Korem as we went to the marketplace. Most of us left our families and properties and wives at home. We even left the donkey we had brought to market for loading what we could purchase. Two people jumped off the truck and died immediately.
4. We come from Gojjam Metekel resettlement area. We were forced by the Dergue from Korem to go there last year. When we went to collect ration cards off the Red Cross we were forced into armed trucks by the military and sent to Metekel.... Many people were killed by gun shots when we were forced away. Ten people died by jumping off the truck. 30 more people were wounded. I personally saw 20 people die.

Six months later, another foreign visitor to Tigray met a group of 34 escapees from Village Settlement Area No. 102 of Metekel, Gojjam. Their original home was Andork near Seqota, and he recounted their story:

They were starving due to drought, and in January 1988 were called by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission to go to the feeding centre at Korem where they would be fed. They were part of a group of 1200 people from their village area who went into Korem on 8th February '88, they were not issued with food but ordered instead to get into lorries for a journey to resettlement. They refused, and in consequence some 20 people were shot dead and some 30 wounded, after which they were herded into the lorries. In this process families were separated; in this group a man and wife are still with one son, but their two other sons have never been seen since they left Korem.

The policy of forcibly taking people for resettlement was not only a violation of their basic human rights, but also acted as a powerful deterrent to rural people visiting towns, thus disrupting trade, migration and the collection of relief.

Conditions in Transit and on Arrival

Despite the preferential targeting of relief food to transit camps, they remained places where many died, especially in Tigray. Figures for Ambassel in Wollo indicate that 140 per thousand of those selected for resettlement died in transit camps alone²² -- fortunately, a figure

²² Cultural Survival, *Ethiopia: More Light on Resettlement*, London, 1991, p. 6.

that is unlikely to be representative. The use of unpressurized airplanes to fly settlers south, at least during the first year, also led to many deaths.

Most of the resettlement sites were hastily chosen. The site of Metekel in Gojjam was picked by President Mengistu during a helicopter tour, and proved to be highly unsuitable.²³ Most sites were chosen within three weeks of the launch of the program, without the benefit of prior agronomic or hydrological surveys. The settlers were unused to local conditions and fell prey to unfamiliar diseases; they were also unfamiliar with the local farming conditions. Most of the "conventional" resettlement sites were run as cooperative farms, using mechanized plowing, and with settlers earning work points for their activities. Cadres of the WPE were able to implement their dreams of socialist collectivization. By 1988, many sites, instead of producing the expected surpluses to support the government, were still far from self-sufficient, and became recipients of famine relief. The government was forced to introduce major policy changes, such as a return to the use of oxen on individual smallholdings. In "integrated" settlements, local people were compelled to integrate the settlers into their existing villages, apportioning them land, and in these cases the settlers farmed as smallholders using traditional technology.

The appalling conditions endured by the settlers have been well-documented elsewhere, and will not be further detailed here.²⁴

The Counter-Insurgency Function of Resettlement Sites

The resettlement sites of Hareya and Melka Oda in Bale have already been mentioned as part of the counter-insurgency strategy adopted in that area (chapter 5). Resettlement sites in Wollega from 1979 onwards were also used in a similar way. In 1983, a development expert noted:

Settlement schemes and state farms as centres of government presence in areas may also have a role to play in controlling the rural population. These may be used as listening posts and military bases should the need arise. Where the settlers and farm workers are not locals, as is often the case, they may help break up the ethnic homogeneity of an area and provide a force loyal to the government. From this point of view, these projects can be seen as modern day *katamas* [*neftenya* garrisons] to watch over the local populations,

²³ This settlement project, perhaps the most disastrous in the country in terms of loss of human life, was generously supported by the Italian government aid program.

²⁴ Survival International, *Ethiopia's Bitter Medicine: Settling for Disaster*, London, 1986; Survival International, 1991; Cultural Survival, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine 1984-1985*, Cambridge, Mass., 1985, Peter Niggli, *Ethiopia: Deportations and Forced Labour Camps*, Berlin, 1986.

while a military significance may be assigned to the roads built.²⁵

The concentration of resettlement sites in western Gojjam (where the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) was active) and western Wollega and Illubabor (where the OLF was active) is no coincidence. Not only were large "conventional" settlements established, but "integrated" settlements were also set up, in which the settler population was mixed in with the locals. The counter-insurgency components of this policy will be further examined in chapter 18.

Though counter-insurgency considerations were certainly important in the planning and implementation of the program, once the government had decided to proceed, the program generated a momentum of its own. It has already been shown how the need to fill quotas resulted in more resettlers being taken from the accessible areas of central and southern Wollo, and fewer from the insurgent areas of north Wollo and Tigray. Similarly, when resettlement sites were chosen, the initial selection was done extremely rapidly, and many of the sites decided upon turned out to be unsuitable for habitation. For the same reasons, the sites chosen - - at least during 1984/5 -- were probably less than ideal for counter-insurgency purposes. The implementation of the program -- later officially described as "hasty" -- also led to local support for the OLF and EPRP.

Escape

Large numbers of settlers escaped or tried to escape. Even official figures give estimates for population loss that range above 20%.²⁶ One estimate of the returnees to Wollo alone is 75,000;²⁷ settlers from Tigray were reported to have a much higher propensity to escape. Those who returned home often represented just a fraction of the attempted escapers: the dangers of the trip included punishment (including summary execution) by cadres, interception by the army, harassment and enslavement by members of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and other Sudanese militias, banditry, the attentions of wild animals, flooded rivers, and disease and hunger. In one reported incident in December 1984, 330 escaping settlers were burned to death when government soldiers set brush fires around their camp.²⁸

²⁵ Adrian Wood, "Rural Development and National Integration in Ethiopia," *African Affairs*, 82, (1983) p. 532.

²⁶ G. Sivini, "Famine and the Resettlement Program in Ethiopia," *Africa* (Roma), 41, (1986) p. 231.

²⁷ Alemneh Dejene, 1990, p. 98.

²⁸ Gayle Smith, "Report on New Refugee Arrivals to Blue Nile Province, Sudan, January 13-14, 1985," Damazin, Sudan.

A significant abuse against escapees was enslavement by soldiers of SPLA. The SPLA, which has been fighting against the government of Sudan since 1983, enjoyed close links with the Mengistu government (see chapter 18).

SPLA soldiers frequently captured escapees, and subjected them to forced labor or concubinage. This amounts to enslavement. Most of the victims were Tigrayan resettlers escaping from the resettlement sites and heading for the refugee camp at ed Damazin in Sudan.

In February 1986, Sandra Steingraber found 52 Tigrayan resettlers who had just arrived in ed Damazin, after being held by the SPLA. 30 were adult women.²⁹ Tigrayans in the camp knew of almost 1,000 others still held by the SPLA. The TPLF was unable to negotiate their release until over one year later, and there were a number of subsequent stories of small numbers of escapees being captured and held for varying lengths of time.

There was a remarkable absence of women among the southern Sudanese refugee population: it appears that the SPLA soldiers decided to obtain replacement women by force. One woman who spent two months in captivity recounted her ordeal:

In October [1985] my husband and I escaped from that place [Gambela resettlement camp] with a large group -- over 1,000 people -- and we fled into the forest.

When we reached Sudan, we met people who at first gave us food. Then they gave us money and led us to the next village. That is when they took the children away. After that they took us, the women. I don't know why they took the children -- for workers maybe, for slaves. These men had uniforms. The people who gave us food did not wear uniforms.

When they tried to take us, there was a battle. Our husbands tried to fight with them, but it was sticks against guns. Some husbands were killed, some wounded. The army was victorious. The remaining husbands fled into the forest. The army took us to their camp by a roundabout direction. We stayed there six nights, then the fighters divided us among themselves, choosing the most beautiful there were. We were sent to the huts of each fighter and always guarded, even when we went to the toilet. This is because they wanted to mate with us, they wanted children by us. Other than this, we did not understand them because we did not speak their language.

During the day we pounded maize for them. There were other wives, women previously captured.... When we protested, they beat us. I lived in a hut with three fighters. At night they exchanged me among themselves. This went on for two months.³⁰

Like many others, this woman was pregnant with a child whose father was a member of the SPLA. She was eventually released, though she could not relocate her husband, and

²⁹ Sandra Steingraber, in Clay *et al.*, 1988, p. 89.

³⁰ Quoted in Sandra Steingraber in Clay *et al.*, 1988, p. 97.

intended to return to the remainder of her family who had been left behind when she was forcibly resettled from her home in Tigray.

The Anyanya 2 para-military force, which was supported by the Sudan government and the Gaajak Nuer militia, which was armed by the Ethiopian government, were responsible for similar abuses.

How many Died?

Resettlement certainly killed people at a faster rate than the famine. The mortality rate was particularly high in the early days of arrival at resettlement sites. Settlers in Keto, Wollega, refused to talk about death:

We did not talk about it. Even the word was avoided. We used to go round asking, "is there anyone who has 'slipped away'?" Corpses were carried off like sacks of maize; they were piled on a trailer and taken to mass graves, Christians alongside Muslims. Children were placed between the feet of adults. Grave diggers received extra rations of food.³¹

People apparently became numb to death. They no longer mourned. They slept, ate and drank coffee next to corpses. They no longer had the strength to dig proper graves. There were even occasions when the graves were so shallow that toes of corpses stuck out ...³²

In July 1985, Cultural Survival estimated that between 50,000 and 100,000 people may already have been dead on account of the resettlement program.³³ This figure is open to much dispute, but the researchers laid out their evidence for scrutiny. The UNEOE, anxious to give grand figures for the deaths attributable to the famine, never produced an estimate for the human cost of resettlement. The government-employed academic, Prof. Richard Pankhurst, wrote of Cultural Survival's mortality estimate: "the allegations made in such an unscholarly publication are so one-sided and so extreme that they can only be accounted for in terms of the selective use of data to support a preconceived political standpoint."³⁴ Prof. Pankhurst cited not one single piece of independent evidence in his rebuttal, but Mr Kurt Jansson of UNEOE was convinced: "this [Cultural Survival] survey has been convincingly debunked by the eminent Ethiopian

³¹ Pankurst, 1990, p. 235.

³² Pankurst, 1990, p. 248.

³³ Cultural Survival, 1985, p. 99. The estimate was for ~~total~~ deaths; the estimate worked out below is for deaths in excess of those that would have been expected to occur in the famine zone.

³⁴ Richard Pankhurst, "The Ethiopian Famine: Cultural Survival's Report Assessed," *Anthropology Today*, 2.3, (June 1986) p. 5.

scholar, Dr Richard Pankhurst ..."³⁵

Several investigations have been done into overall levels of mortality. These can be used to obtain an estimate for the total number killed by the program. In the following calculations, minimum estimates are consistently used for deaths. If medium estimates were used, the figures might rise by over 50 per cent; if maximum estimates were used, they would more than double. These calculations suggest that the Cultural Survival estimate was approximately accurate.

It is important to note that the population of resettlers was an abnormal population -- it contained very few children and old people, and was mostly adults in their prime of life (these people were deliberately chosen). As a result, the death rate would have been expected to be lower than the 20 per thousand per year that is the "normal" figure; it would probably have been a maximum of about 17.5 per thousand.³⁶

RRC figures for recorded deaths during the first year of resettlement indicate heightened death rates: 110 per thousand in Gojjam, 68 in Illubabor, 42 in Keffa, 38 in Wollega and 34 in Gonder.³⁷ In Jarso and Keto, Wollega, the rates were 93 and 51 respectively.³⁸ These figures do not include deaths in transit camps, on the journey, or on arrival before the settlements were fully established and registration of deaths began. Neither do they include those who died while escaping.

The same RRC data indicate that in Pawe settlement, Gojjam, death rates in the first four weeks of registration were equivalent to 332 per thousand per year -- almost 20 times normal, falling away over the following weeks. In Keto, the recorded death rate over the first three months was equivalent to 122 per thousand.

An investigation was also done into death rates of newly arriving resettlers and those who had already spent several months in the resettlement sites -- thereby including deaths in transit. The sample included people from both famine-stricken areas (Tigray and north Wollo) and areas which had escaped the famine (parts of Shewa).³⁹ Only the results relating to the newly-arriving settlers from Tigray and Wollo were published, due to political pressure. These

³⁵ Jansson, 1987, p. 26.

³⁶ Derived from data in: Asmerom Kidane, "Demographic Consequences of the 1984-1985 Ethiopian Famine," *Demography*, 26, (1989) p. 518; and Central Statistical Office, Ethiopia, "Report on the Results of the 1981 Demographic Survey," Addis Ababa, 1985, data from Wollo.

³⁷ Sivini, 1986, p. 232.

³⁸ Calculated from: Alula Pankhurst and Ezekiel Gebissa, "Report on a Study Tour of Settlement Schemes in Wollega," Addis Ababa, 1987, pp. 34, 58.

³⁹ Asmerom Kidane, 1989, pp. 515-22.

indicated a life-expectancy of around six years, compared to the normal of over 40 for the area. This level was possibly the lowest ever recorded in a scientific demographic survey, and for comparison was seven times worse than the mortality due to the 1972-3 famine in Bangladesh. The crude death rate was 123 per thousand, which, allowing for the over-representation of young adults in the population, is probably equivalent to a level of 150-175 in a normal population.⁴⁰

The author was obliged to blame the mortality rate on the famine. However, closer examination of the data indicates that the death rate recorded among the settlers already resident in the resettlement sites was almost equal (115) and that the rates were similar for those from both famine-zones and non-famine zones. The implication is that, instead of blaming the death rates on the famine, it is more logical to blame them on the resettlement program.

These findings indicate that death rates during the resettlement program were -- at a minimum estimate -- in the order of 100-115 per thousand, which is about six times normal for that population. In the famine-stricken areas, death rates were raised by about three-and-a-half times. About half the 1984-5 settlers came from such areas: this implies about 14,000 deaths over those attributable to the famine. One defender of the concept of resettlement drily noted that the program was "involving human costs higher than those caused by the famine."⁴¹

The other half of the resettled population was not suffering raised death rates before resettlement: about 31,000 excess deaths occurred among this group.

Deaths during escape must also be included. At least 100,000 settlers from Tigray and Wollo returned home. Interviews among refugees in Sudan indicate a death rate of at least 20% among escapees.⁴² This figure may be too high: assuming that only a minority escaped through Sudan, and that the death rates among those travelling inside Ethiopia were much lower, a minimum figure of 5,000 deaths during escape can be guessed at.

Thus, very roughly, a minimum of about 50,000 people were killed by the resettlement program.

Resettlement and Famine Relief

⁴⁰ The figure is also an underestimate, because the settlers were asked about deaths of family members. As many families were split up, many deaths would have occurred without the knowledge of other members of the family. Also, whole families could have died, leaving no-one to report on the deaths.

⁴¹ Sivini, 1986, p. 235.

⁴² Sandra Steingraber, "Resettlement in 1985-1986: Ecological Excuses and Environmental Consequences," in Clay *et al.*, 1988, p. 47.

In addition to the direct human cost of the resettlement program, it involved enormous indirect human costs, by the diversion of resources. Resettlement sites and transit camps received priority allocations of relief food from the RRC. A food monitor commented: "Because supplies of RRC grain were insufficient, those beneficiaries registered for RRC distribution who had decided to stay in Wollo received no ration."⁴³ Voluntary agencies opposed this policy, at least implicitly, which led to a climate of suspicion between them and the RRC.

Between the conclusion of the first round of resettlement in May 1985, and the resumption of the program in October, huge stocks of undistributed grain built up around the temporarily unused transit centers, while people went hungry nearby. One agency report read:

There is a strong feeling of a serious scandal. The huge stocks are unjustifiable ... The pattern that emerges is quite clear. Huge quantities of grain have gone to the resettlement sites or are being held in stock. Wollo continues to suffer ... The general view is that the government is not interested in Wollo. It is either appalling neglect or deliberate mistreatment.⁴⁴

Between June and September 1985, the RRC consigned an average of 8,630 metric tonnes (MT) of grain to Wollo (population: three million) each month. The estimated need was 35,000 MT per month. Addis Ababa (population 1.4 million) received 12,000 MT per month over the same period. As though this were generous, however, the amount allocated in the following four months -- when stage two of the resettlement program was under way -- was a mere 1,535 MT per month.⁴⁵

The suspicion that relief programs were hindered in Wollo in order to facilitate resettlement is confirmed by a number of incidents in which the RRC intervened to prevent voluntary agencies from distributing food while recruitment of resettlers was proceeding nearby. "For example, party officials forbade two EECMY [Ethiopian Evangelical Church-Mekane Yesus] centres to distribute general rations when resettlement was carried out.... Similarly, the Philadelphia Mission at Kundi was ordered to postpone distribution until resettlement in their woreda [sub-district] had finished."⁴⁶

The fear of resettlement prevented many rural people from coming to towns and relief centers for food or other activities such as trade. When 600 people were forcibly resettled in Korem in October 1985, 12,000-14,000 others in Korem abandoned the relief shelter and fled to

⁴³ Mitchell, 1986, p. 48.

⁴⁴ Quoted in: Paul Vallely, "Starving Wollo: An Empty Excuse," *The Times*, London, August 14, 1985.

⁴⁵ Mitchell, 1986, p. 56.

⁴⁶ Mitchell, 1986, p. 51.

the nearby hills. Fear of resettlement was a major reason for Tigrayans failing to come forward for relief.

The resettlement sites themselves were favored in relief distributions. "A sixty-year old settler from Kelala Woreda in Wollo pointed out, 'I have received more relief food here in the last three years than I had for so many years in Wollo.'"⁴⁷ Ironically, the settlements needed to receive relief food every year from 1985 to 1991, even in years when the settlers' home areas in the north were self-sufficient. The government spent at least \$120 million overall on the program in its first four years.

Without the resettlement program, the relief program in Wollo, Tigray and north Shewa could have been implemented much more effectively, and an important hindrance to normal and essential activities such as migration and trade would have been removed. An unknown and unknowable number of people died unnecessarily as a result.

Resettlement and the Environment

The environmental justification for the resettlement program was perhaps the most persuasive -- the land of the north was so degraded that it was necessary to remove a significant proportion of the population in order for forestry projects and other programs of land reclamation to be implemented. However, there is good evidence that the program had the reverse effect.

The environmental impact of the program in the resettlement areas had been disastrous. Large areas of forest have been cleared, often in an indiscriminate fashion. Indigenous people have been displaced, and forced to settle elsewhere. A committee appointed by the Council of Ministers reported in 1988 that:

Unless concerted efforts were taken to arrest the accelerating rate of deforestation and soil erosion [in the resettlement areas], there would be a major imbalance in the ecosystem within eight years. The magnitude of this imbalance and degradation would be similar to that of the famine-affected areas of the northern highlands of Ethiopia.⁴⁸

The resettlement program has also contributed to degradation in Wollo. This is because the fear of resettlement is one factor that has contributed to many farmers being forced to behave in a purely short-term manner. More generally, a farmer who invests labor and resources on his land, for instance by building terraces or planting trees, may not remain to see the fruits of his investment because he is arbitrarily plucked from his village and sent hundreds

⁴⁷ Quoted in: Alemneh Dejene, 1990, p. 102.

⁴⁸ Quoted in: Alemneh Dejene, 1990, pp. 105-7.

of miles away. Worse, his activities may even make resettlement more likely, because they may arouse the envy or dislike of the PA committee members, so that they select him for resettlement. Five per cent of Alemneh Dejene's sample of farmers in Wollo cited fear of resettlement as a reason why they failed to plant trees.⁴⁹

More generally, while all land and natural resources remain state-owned and subject to arbitrary disposal by an unchallengeable local authority, conservation initiatives will be discouraged. This is illustrated by the case of Abaselama in Wollo:

The landmark of this peasant association is a gully (caused by severe downhill flooding), which begins at the top of the hill and extends for several kilometers along the road until it reaches the plain.... In its twisted journey downward, this gully came within 20 meters of the house of one of the farmers interviewed for this study. The farmer took up the formidable task of planting eucalyptus seedlings in 1979, adding manure, building fences around the seedlings, and watering during the dry season. The fruits of his labor became evident as the seedlings stood taller than most of the huts around the area. His success became a subject of conversation in the village. Either out of envy or a plot organized by members or leaders of the peasant association, he was accused in July 1987 of planting trees on pathways belonging to the peasant association. The judiciary committee of the peasant association revoked his ownership of the trees, instructing him not to plant other seedlings around the gully.⁵⁰

This story ended happily with the researcher intervening with the regional Ministry of Agriculture to restore the enterprising farmer's right to his trees. But there are innumerable examples of peasants being discouraged from conservation initiatives for similar reasons. One of the most ironic is that those who are farming an area designated as a conservation area are liable to arbitrary resettlement, and the self-organized planting of trees and protection of soil by farmers is one factor which makes it more likely that the government will designate a place as a conservation area.

⁴⁹ Alemneh Dejene, 1990, p. 40.

⁵⁰ Alemneh Dejene, 1990, p. 43.