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10 Multidimensional Impact of Refugees and Settlers in the Gambela Region, Western Ethiopia

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Introduction

The influx and settlement of involuntarily displaced people has a significant impact on the host population. This is particularly so when the newcomers are huge in number, culturally different from the hosts, their settlement is planned without any consultation with or consent from the hosts, and there is inadequate coordination and mediation between the two groups. Quite often, the results of such settlement are disastrous. The Gambela region of western Ethiopia provides such a case.¹ During the 1980s some 50,000-60,000 settlers from the Ethiopian highlands were relocated to the area, along with approximately 366,000 refugees² from South Sudan who settled in two camps in Gambela. The local population had previously been between 100,000-150,000.³ From these figures we can imagine how great the impact must have been. Indeed, Gambela appears to be an extreme case.

The landscape was completely changed and there were tremendous impacts on the host population in environmental, economic, social and political terms. It was not only disastrous for the host population, but for the settlers and refugees as well. The aim of this paper is to examine the extent of the disaster, and to assess how and why it happened. I argue that there were five fundamental contributing factors. First, settlers and refugees arrived with no prior consultation and certainly without the consent of the local hosts.

¹ I conducted fieldwork among the Anywaa in Gambela during 1988-89 and 1989-1991. I subsequently visited the area in 1993, 1995, 1997, 1998, and 1999. For anthropological and ethnographic results of research, see my publications in the bibliography.

² These are the official figures cited by the UNHCR and the Ethiopian government, which appear to be very high estimates. The real figures seem to have been closer to half of these (Scott-Villers et al. 1993).

³ It is difficult to ascertain the exact number. According to various reports of the Agricultural and Planning Bureau, the population of the region was 106,850 in 1989, 70,718 in 1992, and 110,363 in 1992. The 1994 national census puts it at 162,397. All figures include the settlers.

Second, the size of the settler and refugee population was disproportionate to the host population. Third, settlers and refugees were more able to adapt to the newly created market and cash economy than the hosts, who were primarily engaged in a subsistence economy. Fourth, by local standards, the refugees were overly privileged; provided with much better resources and facilities than those available to the hosts. Finally, there was no forum where problems between hosts and settlers/refugees could be openly discussed and resolutions sought.

The relations between hosts and settlers/refugees are very complex, with local, national and international factors at work. To explain this, I will focus on the policies of the socialist state regime (Derg), the ‘Sudanese factor’, i.e. the influence of the civil war and the relation between the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLM/SPLA, hereafter SPLA) and the Ethiopian government, inter-ethnic relations between the local hosts and new settlers, and the local hosts’ perception of the situation.

Gambela is a frontier region bordering with the Upper Nile province of Sudan, and one of the most remote regions in Ethiopia.⁴ Until 1991, under both the Imperial and the socialist regimes (Derg, 1974-1991), it was administratively an *awraja* (district) of Illubabor Province.⁵ A substantial proportion of the region is savannah woodland and grassland, although the eastern parts are covered with dense forests that extend from the escarpments of the Ethiopian highlands. It is sparsely populated with a density of less than ten people per square kilometer.

⁴ This is not to say that Gambela was completely isolated from the wider world. To the contrary Gambela became a prosperous trading center in the early 20th century, connecting Ethiopia and Sudan, by utilizing river transport. Part of Gambela town was a Sudanese enclave where a British District Commissioner had been stationed. After Sudan’s independence in 1956 the DC’s office became a Sudanese Consulate. However, the trade through Gambela fell-away after the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railroad was opened, and Gambela became a peripheral region (Johnson 1986; Kurimoto 1992).

⁵ In 1989 it was upgraded to an ‘Administrative Region’. Now under the regime of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) it has been granted full status as an autonomous ‘Regional State’.

The two main indigenous peoples are the Nilotic speaking Anywaa (Anuak) and the Nuer, both of whom are fundamentally different linguistically, culturally and physically from the majority of Ethiopians, who are Semitic, like the Amhara, and Cushitic, like the Oromo.

Nuer and Anywaa are 'black', tall and slender, while Amhara and Oromo are 'red' or reddish brown. This classificatory system is recognized and accepted by both sides. The 'black' peoples who inhabit the lowlands on the peripheries of the modern Ethiopian empire and the present Ethiopian state are looked down upon by the 'highlanders' – particularly by the 'Abyssinians', i.e., the Semitic speaking Tigrayan and Amhara. Being black has derogatory connotations: uncivilized and primitive. In Amharic black peoples are generally called 'shankilla', which was once a synonym for 'slave' (*baria*). Although these derogatory terms were banned during the Derg regime, which had embraced progressive and revolutionary ideology and advocated equality for all of the peoples ('nationalities') of Ethiopia, the deeply rooted sense of difference has remained. In the old Ethiopian ethnic/racial stratification, the Cushitic and Omotic speaking peoples were ranked between the top ('Abyssinians') and the bottom ('black' peoples in the lowlands) (cf. Donham 1986). But for Anywaa, this internal difference among the highlanders does not make much sense, for they see the Oromo and the Omotic peoples as well as the Amhara and Tigrayan, as *gaale* (sing. *gaala*), that is, 'people of red skin'.

According to the 1994 national census the total population of Gambela state was 162,397. Its ethnic composition was: Nuer 64,473 (39.7%), Anywaa 44,581 (27.5%), Amhara 12,566 (7.7%), Oromo 10,543 (6.5%), Majangir 9,350 (5.8%), Kafa 6,783 (4.2%), Kambata 3,632 (2.2%), Mocha 3,089 (1.9%), Tigrayan 2,596 (1.6%), others 4,784 (2.9%) (Central Statistical Authority 1995). Of these, only the Nuer, Anywaa and Majangir are indigenous. Other indigenous peoples, such as Komo and Opuo, are too few in number to be separately represented.

The settlers and refugees who arrived in the area were located in Anywaaland, and it was among the Anywaa that I conducted my fieldwork. Hence, in this article the term 'hosts' primarily refers to the Anywaa. From their perspective, Gambela belongs to them, and the recent arrivals from the Ethiopian highlands, as well as the Nuer, are seen as late-comers.

Encroachment of socialist policies

The social and economic changes that occurred among the Anywaa during the Derg era was unprecedented and profound.⁷ A variety of ‘traditional’ customs and institutions were banned on the ground that they were ‘feudal’, ‘reactionary’ and ‘anti-revolutionary’. Mass associations imposed from above – such as peasant associations, women’s and youth associations – ‘replaced’ traditional institutions. All association members were registered and issued with ID cards. Each peasant was obliged to pay taxes on the land s/he cultivated.⁸ A significant number of young men were forcibly recruited into the national army and sent to the war fronts in northern Ethiopia, Eritrea and Tigray, all of which are extremely far from their homes. Numerous primary schools were built throughout the region, even in areas so remote that the teachers had to walk for days to reach them. The capacity of secondary schools was also extended, and a Teacher Training College was later opened. The Workers’ Party of Ethiopia (WPE), the only political party at the time, established branch offices in the region. Gambela was no exception of the ‘project of encadrement’ implemented so thoroughly by the Derg in the entire Ethiopia (Clapham 2002). Through the schools and adult education programs, socialist and nationalist ideology was propagated at the grassroots level. For the first time in history, I suggest, the Anywaa became fully Ethiopian citizens.

Numerous development projects were also begun in Gambela during the Derg era, as the regime regarded the region, with its rich water resources and sparse population, as an ideal target for agricultural development. These projects included: a state farm for cultivating cotton, mechanized agricultural schemes using East German made tractors, a dam construction and irrigation project coordinated by a number of USSR experts, and a rice project supported by North Korea. The resettlement program, which is discussed below, can be included on this list as well.

To facilitate these projects, and to maintain the refugee camps, the transportation infrastructure was greatly improved. A network of all weather roads was built, connecting Gambela to the other regions of Ethiopia, and Gambela town to other administrative centers, such as Itang, Jikaw, Abwobo and Pinyudo. A bridge, said to be the longest in Ethiopia, was built over the Baro River. Transport by air improved when a new airport was constructed outside of Gambela town.

⁷ For the social transformations in various communities during the Derg era, see James et al. 2002.

⁸ The tax was 47 birr per year, about US\$23 at the time, according to the official rate.

Telephone communication was also improved and the electricity supply became more reliable. Many Anywaa were employed by these new agricultural extension projects. Others were employed by the various projects of *encadrement*, voluntarily becoming Party cadres, administrators and school teachers. Generally speaking the local people welcomed the development of infrastructure and education, appreciating the fact that they were enjoying more opportunities than ever before.

There were also high levels of resentment, though. High rates of taxation and forcible army recruitment were common complaints. The alienation of their ancestral lands by state projects, settlers and refugees was a significant source of grievances. Although resentment was generally not publicly expressed out of fear of intimidation and arrest, occasionally direct measures were taken against the Derg. For example, in 1979 peasants led by deposed traditional leaders revolted against the Derg. They were soon suppressed, and many fled to Sudan. Anywaa dissidents in Khartoum organized the GLF (Gambela Liberation Front) around 1980, which was renamed as the GPLM (Gambela People's Liberation Movement) in 1985. With support from other anti-Derg organizations based in Sudan, they began to broadcast underground radio and launched small scale military operations against the government. Their actions made the situation in Anywaaland more difficult, as the Anywaa were collectively regarded as anti-government.

Resettlement program

The first settlers arrived in Gambela in 1984. Somewhere between 50,000 and 65,000 re-settled in about 30 villages (*mandar*) along the Baro and Giilo rivers and around Abwobo. Ethnically, there were three different groups: Tigrayan from Tigray province, Amhara from Wello province, and Kambata from Gamo Gofa province. This resettlement was part of the national level projects that transferred about 600,000 people – mainly from famine stricken Tigray and Wello provinces – to sparsely populated and fertile regions in the west and south. Although the government argued that the projects were for relief and development, for the sake of people and Ethiopia, the projects were widely criticized for the way they were carried out, and because the real purpose was allegedly military: to depopulate the strongholds of the rebel movements. Most of the settlers were forcibly relocated, and given empty promises of agricultural, educational and medical facilities and services (Human Rights Watch 1991; Clay and Holcomb 1986).

Certainly the settlers in Gambela suffered more than other settlers. First of all the natural environment of Gambela's lowlands is radically different to their homes in the highlands. For them, Gambela might as well have been a foreign country. Because it is hot and dry, cultivating their staple crops – such as *tef*, *ensete*, and barley – was impossible, and they had to rely instead

on maize cultivation. Medical and educational facilities were very poor, and mechanization was not to the standards expected. Furthermore, the area is rampant with tropical diseases like malaria and dysentery, and their local hosts are a kind of ‘uncivilized’ people that they had never before encountered. It was as if they had been abandoned in the wilderness.⁹

According to the local Anywaa administrators, most of these settlers were not self-sufficient in food production, but had to depend on relief from the RRC (Relief and Rehabilitation Commission), a state organization in charge of famine victims and settlers. I was not able to interview them, because of the language barrier and surveillance by the government, but quite often saw them and on a few occasions visited their villages. Indeed, they looked quite wretched, both spiritually and physically. I have met a lot of refugees and IDPs in Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda and Kenya, and am under the impression that these were the most depressed and least well-off. Since relocation, their population has continually declined in numbers. Many have died; many have fled to other areas in Ethiopia; and still others have fled across the border into Sudan. By early 1993 their population was less than 10,000, and many of these were living in small urban centers rather than villages. The population decline is evidence of the total failure of the resettlement projects.

Civil war in the Sudan and the influx of refugees

During the first civil war in Sudan (1955-72) Gambela hosted refugees from South Sudan at the Itang refugee camp. When the second war broke out in 1983 and then escalated, a huge number of displaced people began crossing the borders seeking refuge. A refugee camp was set up at Itang again to house the ever increasing number of refugees. In 1988 there were about 200,000 at Itang and another 40,000 at Pinyudo (Fugnido), where a new camp was established that year. By January 1991 the official number had reached 280,000 at Itang and 86,000 at Pinyudo. Itang was by then one of the largest refugee camps in the world. Although the actual numbers may have been about half of the official figures, it was nevertheless extraordinary to house so many refugees in one location.

The ethnic composition of the refugee population was quite diverse. Although the majority were Dinka and Nuer – both of who speak Nilotic languages like Anywaa – from the Upper Nile and Bahr al Ghazal provinces, there were also many other ethnic groups from South Sudan as well as some from North Sudan.

It was a common knowledge in Gambela at the time that, as mentioned, the official figures were

⁹ It seems that those resettled in the highlands enjoyed better conditions (cf. Pankhurst 1992).

overestimated, perhaps by as much as 100% (Scott-Villers et al. 1993). The discrepancy reveals an important characteristic of the refugees in Gambela. Itang is known as the birth place of the SPLA, one of whose main military bases was adjacent to Itang. There were also a number of other SPLA military bases in Gambela, and all of the newly recruited guerrilla soldiers arriving from Sudan were initially registered as refugees, either at Itang or Pinyudo. There they spent some time resting and recovering from the fatigue of their long journey by foot. New soldiers were also recruited from among the refugees. When these refugee/soldiers were deployed back to Sudan, their registrations as refugees were never cancelled. Having conducted fieldwork in South Sudan intermittently between 1978 and 1986, I once again met a number of old friends in Gambela and Addis Ababa. I could not readily distinguish whether they were genuine refugees or SPLA officers and men – nor could the local Anywaa, for whom refugees and SPLA were almost synonymous. As many of the SPLA officers and refugees were Dinka, who politically dominated both the SPLA and the refugee administration, the Anywaa put both in one category and called them *ajwilli* (sing. *ajwil*, meaning a Dinka), even though they knew that there were many members of other ethnic groups among the SPLA officers, soldiers, and refugees. This is an important factor in the ‘ethnicization’ of relations between the Anywaa and SPLA/refugees.

Another important aspect of the Sudanese refugees in Gambela was that the SPLA were given a free hand in the refugee camps, as well as in the Gambela region more generally. The SPLA and the Derg cooperated fully with one another, with the latter generously providing logistics and other support to the former. The refugee camps were administered by committees comprised of ‘representatives’ of the refugees, who were invariably SPLA officers. The committee was in charge of distributing food rations and other relief goods, such as soap and clothing. Thus they could divert resources originally intended for refugees to other purposes. In fact without access to and utilization of relief goods, the SPLA would not have been able to sustain its activities. Moreover, the entire Gambela region was under a sort of informal joint administration of the SPLA and the Derg, under which the SPLA officers and men, as well as the refugees enjoyed freedom of movement, while there were strict regulations imposed on ordinary Ethiopians.

In May 1991 when the Derg regime fell, the entire population of SPLA-refugees in Gambela was obliged to withdraw to the Sudan side of the border, as the advancing EPRDF (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front) forces seized power, both in the center and Gambela (because the SPLA was closely allied with the Derg, they were regarded by the EPRDF an enemy). This was a major disaster for the SPLA, whose officers, men and allied refugees suddenly lost all of the support and privileges they had received under the Derg and UNHCR protection, and became targets of aerial bombardment by the Sudanese army as they were now in the Sudanese territory.

Many of the former refugees in Gambela resettled in the refugee camp at Kakuma in north western Kenya, after a long and tough journey. The SPLA officers and troops eventually redeployed to other places in South Sudan, Kenya and Uganda. I have since met a number of them in various places, who recall their stay in Gambela as the ‘good old days’, when they were free and food was plentiful. They had enjoyed freedom of movement as well as access to the refugee facilities and resources.¹⁰ For those who relocated to Kakuma, the quantity and quality of food relief makes a great difference, because they consider the food distributed at Kakuma to be extremely poor. From the Anywaa perspective, however, the situation looks very different.

Impact of settlers and refugees

Environmental impact

In 1984 as a part of the national campaign, large numbers of university students, lecturers and administrators were sent to Gambela to construct huts for the new settlers. The forests in the eastern part of the region provided timber for the settlers and refugees. In addition to the building materials extracted from the forests, the amount of fire wood consumed by some 200,000 settlers and refugees was enormous. Although there is no concrete data in this regard, the massive deforestation was quite obvious.

The sudden change to the human environment also had a profound impact on the local wildlife. Hunting had long been an important economic activity for the Anywaa, and the Gambela region was known for its rich abundance of wildlife. After they began to arrive in the area in 1983, the SPLA soldiers hunted wild animals such as elephant, buffalo, giraffe, antelope and gazelle with automatic weapons for their own subsistence. The local Anywaa were soon also hunting with automatic weapons, namely AK-47 rifles that they had either purchased from SPLA soldiers or had been supplied by the government to equip the militia. It was thus not long before the previously rich wildlife was almost exhausted, and the Anywaa lost their primary source of dietary meat.

¹⁰ There were also complaints, of course, especially concerning the SPLA’s forced recruitment of refugees and the uneven distribution of relief items, food and clothing.

Economic impact

An enormous amount of relief food was distributed to the settlers and refugees. The amount supplied to the refugees was calculated on the basis on the 'official' figures rather than the actual number of people, and thus there was an enormous surplus of relief supplies. Part of it was sold out, and thus flooded, the local market. Maize, beans, rice, wheat flour, biscuits, cooking oil, sugar, and various tinned foods became available at very cheap prices. Soap, clothing, blankets, and empty containers (recycled cardboard boxes, tins, plastic bottles, etc.) were also sold.

Note that at that time in other regions of Ethiopia, including the capital city Addis Ababa, commodities were scarce, in sharp contrast to the remote Gambela, where commodities brought from foreign countries as relief supplies were abundant and cheap. For instance, in the late 1980s, one gallon of cooking oil was 50birr¹¹ in Addis Ababa, while in Gambela the Canadian one was 15birr. A Swedish canned corned beef (1kg) was 5birr in Gambela, and was totally unavailable in Addis Ababa. One sack of maize (90kg) was 20-25birr in Gambela town and nearer to the refugee camps was less than 5birr, while the same weight of *tef* the staple crop for Ethiopians was more than 100birr.

As it suddenly became more populous, Gambela became a trading center, and the town expanded. Smaller towns in the area, such as Abwobo, Pinyudo and Itang, also expanded as settlers and refugees arrived and settled down. These places had been merely 'posts' for primary school teachers and policemen, but soon developed into small urban centers. In those small towns there were small kiosks, butcheries, tea and coffee shops, bars and restaurants, and hotels of mud walls and corrugated iron roofs. The development of transportation and communication systems, various agricultural projects, and an increasing number of workers from the highlands all contributed to this. The trade network expanded deep into South Sudan. Although the majority of settlers and refugees remained in utter poverty, many became successful small traders, selling goods to refugees, settlers, the local Anywaa and Nuer, and the highlanders. Some of the settlers were successful enough to become the owners of shops, bars, restaurants and milk cows – and hence suppliers of fresh milk in Gambela town.¹²

¹¹ At that time 1US\$ = 2 birr at the official rate, and 5 birr on the black market.

¹² The milk cows were purchased from the local Nuer. It should be noted that before the settlers began trading in it, fresh milk had not been available anywhere in Gambela town, even though the Nuer have been long known as 'people of cattle' and some Anywaa also raise cattle.

The Anywaa also rapidly became involved in this flourishing market and cash economy. Taxation, education, transport, and the newly introduced practice of paying bridewealth in cash,¹³ all contributed to the need for cash. But they did not produce commodities for sale. Instead, their agricultural productivity declined as they began to buy maize and other food crops; and because the young men, the main labor force, left the villages to go to larger towns, the war fronts, and panning for gold.

According to a household survey that I conducted in Cwobo village near Abwobo town in 1989–1990, 62 (37%) of the 168 households surveyed were headed by women; husbands/fathers were absent. Of those 62, the male heads of 33 households were dead, twelve were elsewhere seeking gold, nine were elsewhere working, and three were performing national service (i.e., they were in the army). In the next generation of males, 38 were absent; 16 were panning for gold, 13 were at school, and eight were in the national service. Although I do not have similar data on other villages, my observations in other villages suggest that the rate of female headed households and the total number of absent men – 29 husbands and 38 sons out of 168 households – are rather moderate in comparison.

As the system of government expanded and a number of development projects got underway, a good number of Anywaa got jobs as administrators, clerks, teachers and workers. Their numbers, however, were relatively insignificant as a proportion of the total population, and the pay was rather low. The monthly salary for a new primary school teacher was about 200 birr, and for an unskilled laborer less than 100 birr. Before the Revolution, many Anywaa men had migrated as seasonal laborers to Dembidolo and other places in Wellega and Ilubaor provinces during the coffee bean harvest. As the Derg banned the employment of laborers by private farm owners, this practice disappeared and the Anywaa lost a major source of cash income.

For Anywaa men, gold panning provided a potentially for more profitable opportunity. There were two principal gold sites at the time: Runga to the east of Abwobo, and Dambala, which was located in Ilubabor Province, near Gurafarda town. It took 10 days on foot to reach Dambala from Gambela town.

¹³ Bridewealth was customarily paid for with special glass beads (*dimui*), iron hoes and spear heads – all of which was banned by the Derg, who instead introduced a cash payment, which was initially about 200 birr.

It is located in a remote area near the Sudanese border and was not administered by the government. Although both the journey and staying in Dambala itself was risky, and the labor was hard,¹⁴ many Anywaa men traveled there to work. Runga is much closer to their homes, and during 1989–1991 I estimated that more than 1,000 men were working there at any given time. I was informed that there were many more men, probably twice as many, working at Dambala. The workers in both places were exclusively Anywaa, and any Anywaa, whether Ethiopian or Sudanese, could go there and work. As the government's administration did not extend into those places, they were also a sanctuary of sorts for those fleeing from the government: to avoid military service, political persecution or criminal charges.

It was reportedly not too difficult for a worker to find one gram of gold per day, and the price at Runga was 35 birr per gram. If one was a bit lucky and worked hard, it was possible to earn as much as 1,000 birr per month. The price of gold per gram was 50 birr in Gambela town, and 70 birr at Addis Ababa, so of course, some Anywaa became brokers who traveled between gold panning places and Addis Ababa. On the way to Addis Ababa, he would carry a few hundred grams of gold, and thousands of birr on the way back. Again, this was risky business – there was also a possibility that the gold or money would be confiscated by the police, lost in a swindle, or taken by robbers. Nevertheless, some brokers became extremely rich in cash terms.

But even they, however, much less those engaged in gold panning, had little success in investing their money in other businesses or trade. To my knowledge, only one became the owner of a small kiosk and bar. Another made a joint purchase of a second hand car intended to run an informal taxi service; but the car soon broke down and the business came to a standstill. In general, the money earned by gold panning was spent buying expensive goods such as jeans, sneakers, watches and radio-cassette-players, and purchasing drinks at the bars in town.

Certainly one of the obstacles to the Anywaa's success in trading was it was almost entirely monopolized by traders from the highlands. More importantly, however, very few of them had the entrepreneurial attitude required to benefit from the market economy. They remained passive 'consumers', while many of the settlers and refugees became 'suppliers', and this contributed significantly to their impoverishment.

¹⁴ The work includes digging – sometimes several meters deep – in search of soil containing enough alluvial gold, extracting the soil, and panning with water.

The production and consumption of distilled alcohol (*araki*) can be directly traced to the settlers' influence. Anywaa had previously drunk locally brewed beer (*kongo* in Anywaa, *borde* in Amharic), but it was only drunk by adult men and no other alcoholic drinks were common. During the Derg era everyone began to drink. Those who had money went to bars in town to drink industrially produced beers and spirits. For the rest, *araki* became very popular. The *araki* made by the Kambata settlers was known for its high quality. Anywaa women soon began to distil *araki* themselves, which provided one of the few sources of their income, but also led to heavy drinking which became habitual for many Anywaa. Moreover, as the *araki* and *kongo* produced by Anywaa women were only purchased by other Anywaa, while Anywaa bought alcohol from both Anywaa and others, this enterprise did not increase the total amount of cash circulating within their community.

When I visited a number of Anywaa villages between 1988 and 1991, they looked deserted. Young and middle-aged men were hard to find, and the ones who were there were not seriously engaged in any food producing activities. Old people, women and children were hungry. They were not producing enough food for their own consumption. Alcoholism had become chronic and many were drunk, both men and women. As their traditional political and ritual offices had been abolished by the Derg, the communal aspects of social life had dissipated. Perhaps I was especially sensitized to their feelings of desertion and their low moral, in comparison to the communities of South Eastern Sudan, where I had conducted fieldwork between 1978 and 1986, and where the subsistence economy was strong and communal life was highly cohesive.¹⁵

Political impact

According to the oral testimonies that I collected, when the settlers and refugees first arrived, the Anywaa had no hostile feelings towards them. Both groups were called *welle* (guests). With the South Sudanese refugees in particular, they recognize cultural and historical ties – in fact, many Anywaa live on the Sudanese side of the border, and new social ties with these refugees eventually developed, including many cases of inter-marriages. However, Anywaa developed very limited social relations with the IDPs, although they lived in closer proximity. I did not observe any instance of sustained friendship, nor inter-marriage between the Anywaa and the settlers. Their relations appear to be limited to the economic level.

¹⁵ It should be noted, however, that a sense of being abandoned, demoralized and powerless was explicitly expressed by the Anywaa themselves, especially by women (see Kurimoto 2002). See also Kurimoto (2001a) to understand how Anywaa conceptualize the status quo, as powerless and impoverished, and how they make sense of it.

As the time went by, however, hostility towards the refugees/SPLA grew among the Anywaa. This was partly because some SPLA officers behaved very arrogantly, looting properties and raping women, and partly because the Anywaa became jealous of the general well being of the refugees, who enjoyed more resources – particularly relief food and clothing – and better facilities, such as schools, clinics and scholarship, and enjoyed them for free. The hostility came to a head in September 1989 when a group of armed refugees/SPLA attacked the Pinyudo village and razed it to the ground. This was the largest Anywaa village adjacent to the refugee camp. The entire village was burnt down, and at least 120 villagers reportedly died. The attack was apparently triggered by the murder of a refugee. Although the murderer was never identified, the refugees/SPLA concluded that it must have been committed by some Anywaa and decided to take revenge. The Anywaa villagers were taken by surprise. Four days later, the Anywaa militia and refugees/SPLA clashed at Itang, where 20 Anywaa militia members and ten refugees/SPLA were killed. Shops and bars owned by Ethiopian highlanders were destroyed and looted, leaving five highlanders dead as well. Neither the government nor the SPLA took any measures after these deadly incidents. The UNHCR remained silence.

The anger and hostility towards the refugees/SPLA subsequently became very strong, but there were no avenues to formally express their grievances, no authority to intervene on their behalf.

In the course of these events, the Anywaa increasingly came to see their situation in ethnic terms. As mentioned, the settlers were called *kambaathe*, as many of them were Kambata. They were also called *gaale*, a more general category referring to Ethiopian highlanders who have ‘red’ skin. SPLA/refugees were generally called *ajwilli*, which means Dinkas. At the time, the most senior posts in the regional administration were all occupied by Nuer.

During the 1980s a number of Nuer migrated to Gambela from Sudan. Some were registered as refugees, but others settled in different places along the Baro River and became Ethiopian citizens. We might regard this as the most recent stage in the historical ‘Nuer expansion’ to the east, but the Anywaa saw it differently. They believed the arrival of the Sudanese Nuer was part of a deliberate strategy by Ethiopian Nuer leaders to dominate the Anywaa and take over the land. During all of this, an ethnic consciousness was growing out of the notion that the Nuer (*Nuaare*, sing. *Nuaar*), Dinka and Ethiopian highlanders were allied and conspiring against the Anywaa.

This 'conspiracy' appears to have been more imagined than real,¹⁶ but for the Anywaa it was both very real and quite threatening. As one old man explained:

They [*Ajwil*, Dinka] said, '... this government [of the SPLA] is ours. Your name is not in it...' They prohibit guns. They said, 'When Anywaa get guns, they will dominate us.' The policy came from there. They combined themselves with *Gaala* (highlanders) and said, 'Anywaa have no place here'. The one that was given by the people of the world to all people [international relief and aid] was eaten by them [*Ajwil* and *Gaala*]. Anywaa were left outside. It was eaten by *Kambaatha*, *Gaala*, *Ajwil* and *Nuaar*. It is those people who took guns. Now our problem is that our land is being invaded. *Nuaar* had no land here. *Ajwil* had no land here. We did not know them before. *Ajwil*, when they were satisfied and became fat, they came and excreted on Anywaa. They killed Anywaa, some were pregnant, some had small children and some were blind. They were thrown into the river and died...¹⁷

Note that access to international relief and aid is an important source of grievance. The old man asks 'Why did they get it for free, while we were not given anything?' Of course, according to the government and aid agencies, the settlers and refugees were entitled to this aid, but he did not see it that way. Another important grievance is the uneven distribution of 'guns', which is a powerful symbol of 'modernity' as I argued elsewhere (Kurimoto 2001a). Like international relief and aid, it came from outside and was possessed by 'Dinka-Nuer-highlanders', not by Anywaa.

In my experience, it appears that the most profound consequence for the Anywaa from the in-migration of settlers and refugees during this period was a growing sense of territoriality ('Our homeland has been invaded and occupied by outsiders or foreigners'), nationality ('We are Ethiopians, but they are Sudanese') and of autochthony ('We are the first comers'). After 1991 when the Derg was supplanted by the ERPDF, this new consciousness has been growing ever stronger, particularly among the educated Anywaa elite – to the extent that they may now be called 'ethnic nationalists'.

¹⁶ To date, there is no concrete evidence that any such conspiracy existed. In fact, the relations between the Nuer and Dinka-SPLA were far from cordial and many Nuer had been killed by the SPLA, both in Ethiopia and Sudan, during the first phase of the Sudanese civil war.

¹⁷ Uceri Akwer Adora, interviewed 12/8/90. The killing refers to the 'Pinyudo massacre' of September 1989.

Like other nationalists, they recognize their own identity from an essentialist/primordialist point of view and have an exclusive attitude towards other peoples living in Gambela. From another perspective, of course, the Anywaa themselves, like the Nuer, have a history of migration: oral traditions testify that when they reached and settled present day Gambela they encountered aboriginal people who were already settled there, and shifting national identities between Ethiopia and Sudan has been one of their survival strategies for some time. As we have seen, during the Derg era, many Anywaa who were born and raised in Ethiopia registered themselves as refugees in Gambela to enjoy the privileges. But, as elsewhere, these details are largely ignored when reciting one's grievances.

Aftermath: beginning of ethnicized conflict

At the end of May 1991 the EPRDF forces advanced upon and occupied Addis Ababa. The socialist regime, Derg, fell. At the same time Gambela was also taken by EPRDF and GPLM forces, after a series of battles with the SPLA. This change of power in both the center and Gambela triggered a mass exodus of some 160,000 SPLA/refugees. With their security no longer guaranteed under the rule of their enemies, they fled across the Sudanese borders. They consisted of three different but closely related groups: the SPLA officers and men with their families, all of the Sudanese refugees, and Ethiopian Nuer government officials and their families. They were pursued by GPLM soldiers, Anywaa peasants and former militia members, who especially targeted the Ethiopian Nuer. The former chief administrator of Gambela region later informed me, in Nairobi where he had taken refuge, that more than 30 members of his family were killed at that time.

One of the more disastrous events that took place during this period was the massacre of settlers at Ukuuna, east of Abwobo, where some 770 Anywaa and 3,000 settlers lived side by side. When the Anywaa chairman of the local peasant association was shot dead by fleeing Derg soldiers, the local Anywaa peasants and militia assaulted the settlers. Although the Derg's soldiers had gone, the settlers were also *Gaala*, and became the target of revenge. Fire was set to the settlers' huts and the settlers were indiscriminately killed. It was later estimated that between 100 and 200 settlers were killed, and numerous villages were completely devastated. This was a great tragedy. During the Derg era, unlike the Anywaa's relationships with the Nuer and the refugees, there had been no open hostility towards the settlers. But their general resentment and hatred for the highlanders/Derg was now expressed in a brutal fashion. Ukuuna settlers who were themselves victims of the Derg policies were victimized again.

Under the EPRDF settlers were granted freedom of movement; some of those who had remained and survived returned to their pre-settlement homes, while others stayed on in Gambela. The majority left the villages and moved into towns.

When the situation in Gambela normalized, many of the Ethiopian Nuer who had fled to Sudan returned. And as the civil war in the Sudan continued, and in fact intensified after the SPLA leadership split in August 1991, resulting in inter-factional fighting between Nuer and Dinka, there was a new influx of refugees. New refugee camps were set up in Pinyudo and Bonga. Today the majority of refugees in Pinyudo are Nuer, with Bonga specifically for Uduk from the Southern Blue Nile. As the boundaries between Gambela Regional State and Southern Regional State were adjusted, the district in which the Dima refugee camp is located was incorporated to Gambela. There are thus now three refugee camps in Gambela.

‘Ethnic federalism’, the new political structure designed and implemented by the EPRDF regime that created ethnicity-based regional States, has provided an arena for the Anywaa and Nuer elite to compete for resources. The new structure provides an ideal field for the exercise and expression of the ethnic nationalism that emerged during the previous period. While the GPLM who seized power at the regional level was predominantly an Anywaa organization, the Nuer elite organized their own political party, the Gambela People’s Democratic Party (GPDP). Instead of seeking power sharing and co-existence, the elites have been struggling for power. Central to the struggle are the issues of territoriality, nationality and autochthony.¹⁸

Anywaa elite insist that the Nuer in Gambela are not Ethiopians but Sudanese, and therefore have no claim to representation in the administrative or legislative bodies at either regional or *wereda* (district) levels. From the other side, the Nuer elite claim that they are Ethiopian citizens and deserve much more representation. In addition to these existing problems, oil resources in Gambela, for which the Federal Government initiated a project of exploitation, became a burning issue in recent years. Anywaa ethnic nationalists claim that the oil belong to Anywaa, while the Federal Government argues that, according to the constitution, all mineral resources are properties of the Ethiopian state.

These battles have been fought not only in the political arena, but also in very violent conflicts, as people on both sides are instigated and mobilized. Between 1991 and 1992 there were three major incursions by Nuer from Sudan.

¹⁸ I owe this part of argument to Dr. Dereje Feyissa who supplied me with new information and his analysis based on fieldwork. He is currently a COE Research Fellow at Osaka University.

The second occurred in January 1992 and was conducted in the most organized way. The soldiers were in military uniform and armed with guns and weapons. They burnt down 26 Anywaa villages. At that time there was a new faction of the SPLA based in Nasir, just across the border, headed by a Nuer commander, Riek Machar. Anywaa believed that the operation was by order of Riek, strengthening the notion of a Nuer-SPLA conspiracy against the Anywaa. The Anywaa-Nuer armed conflict flared up again in 1998, and once again during 2002-2003. During 2002 and 2003, inter-ethnic conflict in Gambela entered a new phase. Tension between Anywaa and highlanders grew after some highlanders were murdered by unidentified men. In December 2003 after eight highlanders were killed on the road between Gambela town and Itang, hundreds of Anywaa citizens were killed in Gambela town and in rural areas by outraged highlanders, both civilians and soldiers. This is the worst incident that Anywaa have experienced in modern history.

Discussion

The Gambela case discussed above illuminates how profound and sometimes disastrous are the unintended consequences of resettlement and refugee programs. They deeply affect both the host populations and the settlers/refugees. I am not arguing, of course, that the presence of the settlers/refugees is the sole factor. The problems discussed arose in the specific political space of Gambela, located between Ethiopia and Sudan, and thus political changes in both countries shape the situation. I want to emphasize the essential importance, although mindful that all concerned acknowledge it, of efforts to foresee the unintended consequences of humanitarian aid programs, however difficult it may be. To do this, the specific local, national and international contexts that the space is set in must be fully taken into consideration. Since these contexts are always subject to change, once a program is begun, a constant and critical monitoring and revision is necessary. Another important factor is that the situation may look entirely different from the different perspectives of different participants. In the particular case discussed, the Nuer, Dinka, settlers and highlanders may well each have a radically different view. Moreover, we should not assume that all people of a group speak with the same voice. When trying to develop a comprehensive understanding of the affects of resettlement and refugee programs, these intricate factors need to be considered (cf. Kurimoto 2004). As noted in my introduction, five fundamental factors can be discerned that contributed to these disasters. First, lack of consent from the local hosts for bringing settlers and refugees; second, disproportionate population of settlers/refugees; third, greater economic ability and adaptability of settlers; four, more privileged position and greater well-being of refugees relative to the local standard; and five, no forum where problems between hosts and settlers-refugees could be openly discussed and solutions sought.

If these factors had been taken into consideration by decision makers, namely the Derg, the disasters that happened before 1991, and even disastrous events that have happened since, might have been averted, or at least contained to some extent. It appears that the UNHCR should also be held accountable for the disasters, as it largely ignored what was going on among the refugees and between the refugees and their local hosts. I think these are some of the lessons that we can learn from the case of Gambela.

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