

## AGING AMONG THE AARI IN RURAL SOUTHWESTERN ETHIOPIA: LIVELIHOOD AND DAILY INTERACTIONS OF THE “*GALTA*”

Mariko NOGUCHI

*Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University*

**ABSTRACT** This paper examines the conditions of elderly individuals living in rural southwestern Ethiopia by investigating their daily activities and their work lives, including how and with whom they work. This research was conducted primarily in one location in southwestern Ethiopia where many Aari individuals reside. All 16 elderly individuals, known as *galta*, who resided in this region received perfect scores on a measure of their ability to perform basic activities of daily livings (ADLs). They attempted to reduce their daily workloads by living near those who were related to them by blood or by marriage. Aari individuals who decrease their social interaction due to age or sickness are said to be tired (*lanqta*). Even elderly people without relatives required additional support. Indeed, *galta* often face severe hardships, but they can earn a living by relying on longstanding social relationships initially established before they became *galta*.

**Key Words:** The elderly; Social relationships; Care; ADLs; Rural southwestern Ethiopia.

### INTRODUCTION

Concern about the rapid increase in the number of people older than 60 years in sub-Saharan Africa has grown in recent years. The proportion of the Ethiopian population older than 60 years seems to have changed only minimally between 1950 and 2005, from 4.8% to 4.9%. However, the absolute number of elderly people in Ethiopia increased four-fold between 1950 and 2005, from 885,000 to 3,653,000 (United Nations, 2012). The United Nations (2012) has estimated that the over-60-year-old population of sub-Saharan Africa may quadruple again, to 162,000,000, by 2050. This rapid aging of the population of Africa is considered to be “premature” and has been attributed to climate change, malnutrition, parasitic diseases, and infections (Eyassu et al., 1987). This situation stands in contrast to that in the developed countries of Europe and North America, where population aging occurred in the context of a well-developed socio-economic and political environment (Gachuhi & Kiemo, 2005). Indeed, the life expectancy in many sub-Saharan countries is about 10 years less than that in developed countries. Velkoff and Kowal (2007) argued that social standing may be a more meaningful indicator of being elderly than is chronological age. They underscored the importance of recognizing that some people younger than 60 years of age may be considered old because their morbidity profiles and status are similar to those of people older than 60.

Moreover, many investigations have found that the social roles and status of elderly individuals in rural Africa have changed (e.g., Apt, 1997; Nyambedha et al., 2003; Gachuhi & Kiemo, 2005; Cattell, 2008). The population’s aging is also

relevant to issues related to labor migration, education, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other infectious diseases, and the introduction of Protestantism. Most people, particularly in rural areas, lack access to public systems that provide social and healthcare support. Apt (1997) noted that the function of the extended family as “a traditional welfare system” has eroded because of rapid internal and external changes. As a result, elderly people no longer receive this traditional form of social support, which leaves them vulnerable and in need. Eyassu et al. (1987) also pointed out that the experience of elderly people is considered less valuable by young people, who are experiencing rapid changes to their lifestyles, knowledge bases, and work methods; in such a situation, elderly individuals are undervalued. Changes in the value placed on traditional kinship networks caused by changes in lifestyles and values are clearly manifested in the anthropological investigation of western Kenya conducted by Nyambetha et al. (2003). They argued that elderly individuals have found new roles as caretakers of children and orphans in the context of population growth, changing socio-cultural values, unfavorable macroeconomic trends, and the rampant HIV/AIDS epidemic. Indeed, the elderly must perform hard work, make personal sacrifices, and endure emotional strains. They concluded that this represents a “retirement lost” for elderly individuals unable to experience what, ideally, should have been a peaceful stage of life. Cattell (2008) conducted long-term fieldwork in western Kenya and also examined the recent trend in which elderly individuals care for members of the younger generation, such as their adult children with HIV/AIDS and their orphaned grandchildren, at a time in their lives when they not only expected to be cared for themselves but also require such care. She also noted that the development of formal educational systems has reduced the importance of elderly people as teachers and advisors, major roles played by this group in the past. Her detailed interviews underscored the role of inter-generational lifestyle differences in creating the widely recognized gap between the perspectives and values of elderly and those of young individuals.

Most studies of the effects of social change on elderly individuals in Africa have focused on the deterioration of living conditions. Cohen and Menken (2006: 5–51) pointed out that, despite recently increasing interest in aging in Africa, relevant demographic and empirical data are scarce. Many studies have offered conclusions about the circumstances of elderly people and the presumed deterioration in their living conditions as a result of factors such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, and the changing population dynamics but have not produced actual long-term investigations of these issues. Additionally, wide variations in geography, climate, race, language, tradition, creed, religion, values, and so on, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, render research on the situation of elderly people in this region difficult. Therefore, they emphasize the need for long-term comparative research in various regions. Eyassu et al. (1987) underscored the urgent need for information about the growing aging population to enable, for example, reliable predictions about population dynamics, micro- and macro-economic issues, needed healthcare services, and social and lifestyle changes.

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the focus of this research, has been described as “a racial melting pot.” It contains more than 80 ethnic groups (CSA, 2008), and many anthropological studies have been conducted, especially

in southwestern Ethiopia. In some studies, elderly people serve as knowledgeable informants about history, traditional customs, and culture (e.g., McCann, 1995; Maki, 2009; Soga, 2009). Other studies have examined the role of elderly individuals in traditional livestock-farming societies in East Africa (e.g., Legesse, 1973; Tagawa, 2005) or in dispute resolution (e.g., Unruh, 2005; Mamo, 2006). Studies of elderly individuals have also been conducted from a medical perspective. Fantahun et al. (2009) compared the relationships among literacy, gender, and mortality rates in urban and rural areas. Afewouk et al. (2004) found that the HIV/AIDS infection rate among elderly individuals, a topic that had attracted only sparse attention thus far, was as high as that in the younger generation. Little is known about how the social network that supports elderly individuals is constructed or about how these individuals adapt to a rapidly changing society.

The concept of “care” is an important element in the description of the living situations of elderly individuals offered in this paper. According to Hiroi (1997), the meaning of this term can be expanded from its typically limited and specific focus on, for example, providing nursing services, to a wider focus that includes treating someone with special consideration and interest. Caring is an act involving humans; it occurs only in an interpersonal context, and necessarily entails reciprocity (Matsushima, 2002).

Because care involves survival, the degree to which caring relationships are asymmetrical is crucial for both parties. That is, a caretaker may also depend on the person requiring care. For example, when person A takes care of person B in exchange for money or food, B depends on A, but A may also depend on B to make a living. The distribution of the benefits accruing from a caring relationship varies across relationships, and the degree of dependence of each party varies as a function of the degree to which each individual receives care. Imbalances in this regard can lead to relationships in which one individual is dominant. Saito (2003: 192) discussed asymmetrical relationships between caregivers and those requiring care in terms of mutual dependence. He argued that we should consider “how asymmetry can be maintained without the development of dominance” rather than proposing that the asymmetry be eliminated. He also noted that “the maintenance of reciprocity in the context of asymmetry” is a condition for avoiding dominance and preventing a one-sided relationship characterized by “arbitrary interference.”

## THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

This research examines how elderly individuals make a living, the kinds of help they receive, and the kinds of relationships in which they participate.

I conducted my field research for total of 17 months from July 2008 to February 2012. I spent time with people while living in the field, lived in one of the households in my research area; conducted direct observations, interviews, and dietary and household-expenditure surveys; evaluated how people perform activities of daily livings (ADLs); and assessed the physical activity and energy expenditure of elderly individuals using an accelerometer activity monitor. I used the Aari language, in the absence of an interpreter, during interviews as I had

learned the local language in the process of my research. Most data were obtained from primary sources seen or heard by this author during field research.

This paper is organized as follows. Firstly, I describe the general living conditions in the study area, Metser village in southwestern Ethiopia. Secondly, I investigate daily living conditions and the ways in which elderly individuals spend their time by focusing on one of the elders in the research area. Next, I examine the relationships of one elderly person in terms of how that individual relates to others and the kinds of relationships in which that individual engages. Finally, I discuss the situation of the most elderly persons, with a special focus on how they make a living by relying on their relationships.

## GENERAL BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH SITE

I conducted my field research in Metser village, South Ari District, South Omo Zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Fig. 1).

Metser, is about 1,600 m above sea level in the basin of the Maki River, which is surrounded by mountains. It is one of places where the Ari live. Metser is located in southwestern Ethiopia, about 30 km north of Jinka, the administrative center of South Omo Zone, which, along with other cities and villages, has been rapidly developing in recent years.

According to two health workers employed at the Metser Health Clinic, the total population of this village was 4,639 in 2008. Historically, this area was invaded by the Amhara, whom the Ari call *Gama*, in the late 19th century. After the end of the imperial regime, some *Gama* settled in Metser. Many *Gama* work as government officials, teachers, doctors, or traders, and most depend primarily on cash income, including salaries or earnings from the sale of goods. A school, village office, clinics, a health clinic, stores, bars, and bakeries are located at the center of Metser, and a twice-weekly market attracts many people. The number of Ari living at the center of the village, where the market takes place, or along the street, where new businesses are emerging, has increased recently. In 2003, a dry-weather road was opened, and buses travel to neighboring cities or villages, including Jinka and Gazer, the administrative center of South Ari District, which is located about 7 km from Metser. As people from other cities or villages have come to visit the twice-weekly market, the latter has become crowded with many people. During coffee- and maize-harvest seasons, a cargo truck visits the market place. Additionally, many traders from Jinka or Gazer attend the Metser market to purchase Ethiopian kale, fruit, coffee leaves, and so on. The market serves not only as the place to which people from the highlands (*dizi*)<sup>(1)</sup> and lowlands (*dawla*) bring different products from their fields to trade but also as a social arena where people meet (Shigeta, 2004).

Metser village is divided into 10 locations (*budin*), and each location contains about 60–200 households. One of these 10 locations, Zelet, which is located 15–30 minutes from the center of Metser on foot, is the main focus of my research. With the exception of those living at the center of the village, most

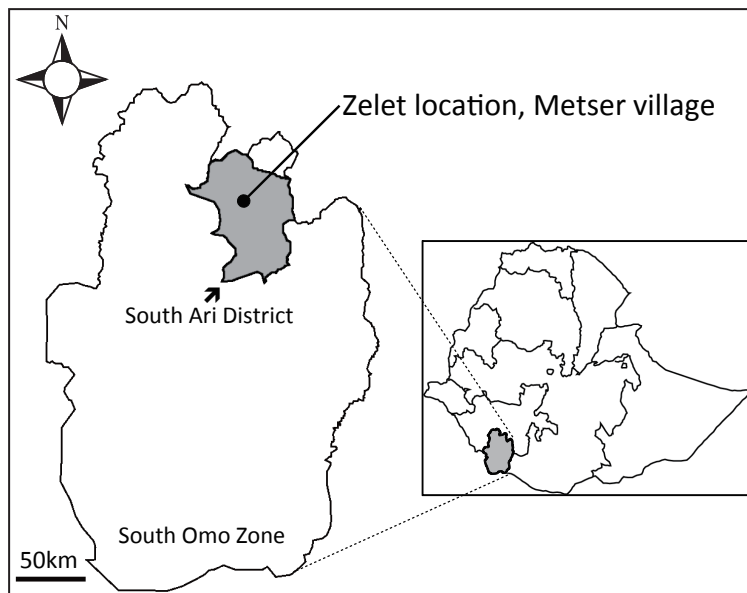


Fig. 1. Map of the study area.

people living in Metser, including those in Zelet, earn a living from agriculture. It is said that the Aari people have engaged in farming, primarily of ensete, for a long time. According to Shigeta (2002), ensete cultivation usually involves the following three elements: 1) Perennial root crops, such as yams and taros, are planted in the gardens surrounding houses. 2) Annual grain crops, such as sorghum or barley, and legumes, including horse bean or peas, are cultivated in the fields. 3) Excess ensete is kept in homes as a resource that can be eaten at any time.

The Aari classification system recognizes two types of crops: *ishin* and *tika*. *Ishin* includes grain crops such as sorghum, barley, and maize. *Tika* includes yams, taros, ensete, coffee, and other vegetable crops. Gardens of *tika*, such as those with ensete, yams, and taros that surround houses, are known as *tika haami*. Fields of *ishin*, such as sorghum and maize, are known as *wony haami*. *Tika* crops are usually farmed by household members, especially women. Because working in the *wony haami* requires an ox plow and labor-exchange groups, men, as heads of household, usually manage this farming process. Many households also cultivate coffee or corarima in part of their *tika* or *wony haami*. Overall, this farming culture combines root crops in the *tika haami* and grain crops in the *wony haami* with coffee and corarima, which serve as cash crops.

The Aari also keep livestock such as cattle, sheep, and hens. Oxen are very important for plowing fields. When cows give birth, people milk them, and the milk is often fermented. This fermented milk is frequently used for dairy products, including butter and cheese. Additionally, sheep are kept for meat, and hens or chickens are kept for meat and eggs. Horses and mules are invaluable resources for growing cash crops. The Aari also keep bees<sup>(1)</sup> and sometimes fish, using fish

poison made from seeds of a tree known as *zaagi* (*Milletia ferruginea*), in two rivers flowing through the village. In recent years, Aari seeking new sources of income have increased the ranks of those selling daily necessities or lumber or reselling coffee or maize. It is common to use the market to sell daily necessities or produce, such as salt and oil for cooking or lamps, that cannot be produced on local farms.

The Aari territory was divided into 10 geographical sections: Sida, Kure, Baka, Shangama, Layda, Beya, Woba, Gayl, Argenk, and Goza (Naty, 1992). Each section has a local chief, known as *baabi* who has judicial, military, administrative, economic, and ritual authority and controls all boundaries (Naty, 1992). The Aari refer to the highlands as *dizi* and the lowlands as *dawla*. Shigeta (1988: 198–199) noted that the *dizi* and *dawla* are separated by an intermediate zone at approximately 1,600 m above sea level, although this folk classification of territory is imprecise. Each of the five sections described by Shigeta includes both *dizi* and *dawla*.

In general, Aari territory contains two types of settlements: a compact settlement, in which a number of related and/or unrelated families live in close proximity to one another, and a dispersed settlement, in which related and/or unrelated families are scattered throughout the village (Gebre, 1995: 24). Following a patrilocal residential pattern, Aari men construct their houses on the land given to them by their fathers when they get married. As a result of the recent increase in the migration to the center of the village and the street, a new type of compact settlement seems to have developed near the center of the village.<sup>(2)</sup>

The Aari people belong to either the *kantsa* or the *mana*.<sup>(3)</sup> The *kantsa* is a farmer's group, and the *mana* is an artisan's group that creates objects from clay, wood, or steel. Several taboos, including prohibitions on eating together and intermarrying, govern the relationship between these groups.

The Aari people also belong to one of two exogamous moieties: the *indi* or the *ashenda*. Each moiety consists of many *mata*, which are the equivalent of clans. The *mata* is also considered a unit for purposes of determining the rules governing marriage, and marriage within the same moiety is prohibited. Many genealogically unrelated lineages, *aka-wolaq*, belong to the same *mata*, and more than 60 different *mata* were identified by Gebre (1995). The royal clans of the Aari include the *baabi* clans, which provide the leaders of the 10 geographical sections discussed earlier, and those clans providing *godomi*, the ritual specialists assisting the *baabi*. In many cases, the names of locations are taken from the name of the clan to which most residents belong. It is said that Zelet was named after a clan called *zelet*, but this group has disappeared. It has recently been estimated that about one-quarter of the residents of Zelet belong to the *ulcha* clan. According to Gebre (1995: 26), the *ulcha* is among the clans believed to have the mystical power to harm those who encroach on their rights.<sup>(4)</sup>

#### Recent Trends: Formal Education, Medical Facilities, and Cash Economy

Most children in Zelet go to the Metser primary school, which is divided by grade into sessions before and after noon. Although attendance is free of charge, students need to buy several notebooks, pens, and a bag. These are not cheap

for families who are engaged primarily in farming, and some families do not allow all their children to attend school. Children in families with an elder, a pregnant woman, a woman with a newborn baby, or others who need care may stop attending school and become caregivers. However, many children want to finish school and get a job in which the salary is offered.

The current educational system in Ethiopia consists eight years of primary schooling (four years in the first cycle and four years in the second cycle) and four years of secondary schooling (two years in the first cycle and two years in the second cycle, known as preparatory school). After tenth grade (i.e., following preparatory school), some students can go to preparatory school for going to university, and other goes to vocational schools, such as institutions devoted to technical and vocational education and training (TVET), depending on the results of a national examination.

During the last two decades, major cities in the South Omo Zone have developed rapidly, and most cities and villages now have a school that provides primary education. However, only Jinka has a preparatory school that allows students to finish the 12th grade, and many students must lease a room or live in a dormitory with strangers to attend school (Lydall, 2000). In Metser, there is only one 8-year primary school, and students who want to continue their studies must move to cities such as Gazer<sup>(5)</sup> or Jinka. In the past, most of the teachers in Metser were *Gama* and did not speak the Aari language. As all classes were taught in Amharic, a language that many Aari students did not understand well, dropping out was common. Nowadays, however, the number of Aari teachers in Metser has been increasing. Additionally, non-Aari people, such as traders from other cities or villages, have started to visit Metser, providing Aari children with more opportunities to hear and speak Amharic. This may also have affected the school conditions in Metser.<sup>(6)</sup> Over the past decade, an increasing number of younger individuals have been moving to cities for schooling. In some cases, they even leave their villages to find a job. Some who stay in Zelet are hired as housekeepers by those who came from cities, and others make connections that lead to jobs.

In 2009, Metser had one clinic with two doctors and a single private pharmacy, which was located next to the clinic. Those needing more sophisticated examinations had to go to Jinka Hospital because of the lack of equipment in Metser. Additionally, the medical staff, including the doctors and pharmacist, did not speak the Aari language, which effectively prevented those who did not speak Amharic from participating in a medical interview without finding a translator. In 2011, a new clinic (*tena tabiya*, Am.)<sup>(7)</sup>, staffed by medical personnel from Gazer and Jinka who speak the Aari language, was built. Patients with serious illnesses can be treated in the clinic and referred to Jinka Hospital for more sophisticated tests. However, although the fees for examinations, medications, and injections are lower than those in the private pharmacy, they are not cheap in the context of the economic situation of most households. The medical facilities in Metser have been improved, but even now, many people do not promptly seek medical attention, despair about going to the clinic, and worry about their physical condition or illness rather than seek medical help.

Two health workers are employed by the health center (*tena kela*, Am). Both

speak the Aari language, and their main responsibilities involve providing nutrient injections and vaccinations for infants, information about birth control and pregnancy, contraceptive drugs, health check-ups for pregnant women, and hygienic interventions for the village. The health workers, who are responsible for all locations in Metser, visit communities to encourage sanitary practices and work with volunteers who support this work.

Each household economy is managed individually and independently makes decisions about selling or reselling the crops and processed goods from their fields to earn income. In most cases, the husband, as a householder, has the right of *wony haami* and grows crops such as maize for home consumption or sale. On the other hand, it is rare for a wife to have the right to work the field, but she does personally handle the family's food and medical expenses and the children's educational expenses. Wives grow crops, such as yams and taros, in the husband's *tika haami* for home consumption. When her husband allows her to use a part of the *wony haami*, a woman may grow grain for home consumption or to sell for cash. When the husband's farm is small or he does not allow his wife to cultivate the *wony haami*, the wife may ask her father for farmland or consider entering into a short-term or long-term farmland-use contract with her relatives or neighbors. In general, boys build new houses and form households when they marry. Unless an unexpected visitor arrives, meals are usually eaten only with members of the same household.

Recently, some children who are too young to marry have developed a need for cash. As mentioned above, although elementary school is free of charge in Ethiopia, all students must purchase notebooks and pens. Moreover, the number of notebooks needed increases as a function of grade, and such expenses constitute more than a minor burden for most households. Additionally, school clothes must also be purchased. Indeed, children wearing slightly soiled and tattered clothing are ridiculed by other children and scolded by the teacher. Thus, they also need to buy soap. Although a father may occasionally allow his child to collect and sell coffee or corarima, the mother manages the money used for buying products that are used primarily by children. In some recent cases, children have resold crops for cash.

Thus, the importance of cash is increasing in this area. However, even when women are able to earn cash, they do not have space to store the daily necessities such money could purchase. It is probably for this reason that various communal associations, such as the *iddir* (Am.), *sau'i*, and *iqqub* (Am.) prosper in the center of the village. One of these associations, the *iddir*,<sup>(8)</sup> is a funeral association that exists in each location. All residents must participate in this association, and both husbands and wives are obligated to pay a premium. The *sau'i* and *iqqub* are joined on a voluntary basis. The *sau'i* is devoted to saving money, especially for the purchase of tef, meat, and clothes for holidays such as Easter. People deposit money each week, use it to buy tef or meat at the appropriate time, and then divide the purchases among the members. The *iqqub* is a mutual financing association, and members draw lots according to the same frame every week by sharing, and the person with the winning lot receives all the money. As the importance of cash increases in Zelet, membership in these associations has also been increasing.

## THE LIVELIHOODS OF AARI ELDERLY INDIVIDUALS

The following life stages are recognized by the Aari: *yntsi* (childhood), *mard/goremsa* (Am.) (boyhood and young adulthood), *anza* (girlhood), *agli* (adulthood), and *galta* (elderhood). A boy is born, grows up, and starts to live alone in a house he has built and look for a wife when his voice changes. As described in the preceding chapter, marriage within the same moiety is prohibited. If a boy belongs to the *indi* moiety, he must to look for a wife who belongs to the *ashenda* moiety. Boys ask people to introduce them to a woman and, nowadays, write a letter to her proposing marriage. A mediator, also called a *galta*, then visits the girl's father to negotiate the bride-wealth (*dhakuma*). Boys pay the bride-wealth to the father of the bride, and a marriage ceremony called *entsa* or *sergi* (Am.), is held if the families are wealthy. After marriage, the husband is called *kii*, and the wife is called *ma*. The wife is usually called "(the husband's name)'s *ma*" instead of her name. After the birth of a child, the father comes is called "(the child's name)'s *baaban* (father)" and the mother is called "(the child's name)'s *inden* (mother)." The grandfather is called *aakiso*, and the grandmother is called *aakia* (*akin*, *aako*); grandparents are considered to be *galta*. A male member of the *galta* is called *galtsin*, and a female *galta* is called *geshen*. *Geshen* tends to imply "old woman," whereas *galtsin* is a familiar way to refer to male elders. Although *aakiso* and *aakia* are usually used to refer to a grandfather and a grandmother, respectively, these terms are also used for non-blood relations in some cases. Individuals known as *galta* serve as mediators in certain situations and ceremonies and as witnesses to purchases of the right to use land. The appellation of *galta* has a very important meaning that reflects its traditionally elevated status. Furthermore, an act that reflects the respect accorded to a *galta* (e.g., offering one's seat to a *galta*) is called a *bonchi*.

In 2008 and 2009, I translated, with the cooperation of Zelet residents, data that were collected in 2005 and were maintained by the Metser village office in Amharic into the Aari language to clarify the population distribution of Zelet in terms of sex and age. Based on these data, I conducted additional research on the households in Zelet.<sup>(9)</sup>

According to my research, Zelet contained 72 households (292 people) in 2009. Based on these data, the age distribution of the population of this area forms a triangular pyramid, with a few elderly individuals and many younger people, as is often seen in "developing countries" (Fig. 2). When I asked location residents about who the *galta* were, many people mentioned someone older than 60 years of age. Thus, I will treat elderly people aged 60 years and older as *galta*.

Although all *galta* men live with their wives and/or his children/grandchildren, half of *galta* women live alone (Tables 1, 2). As polygamy is common among the Aari, it is possible that no male elderly people live alone because they remain able to marry a younger wife and to have a child (Table 1: No. 6). Three elderly women lived in Zelet (Table 2: No. 12, 13, 15). Two (Table 2: No. 12, 13) had lost their husbands before having a child with him, and the other (Table 2: No. 15) lost her husband after bearing children, who had grown up and established their own households. One 85-year-old man (Table 1: No. 2) lives apart from his

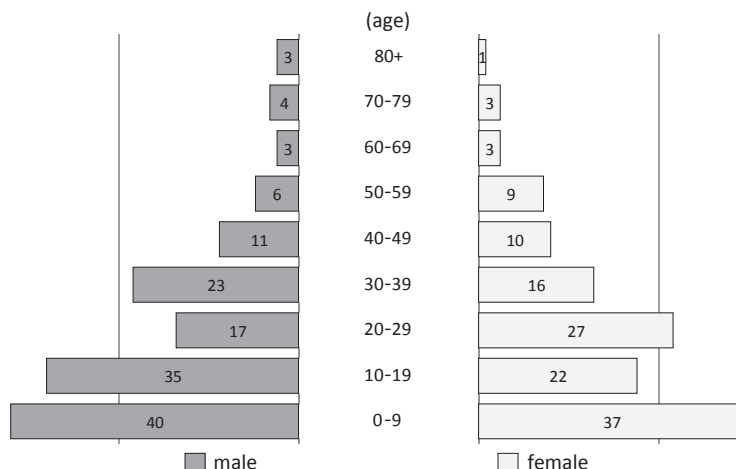


Fig. 2. Population pyramid of the Zelet location.

wife, but his daughter, with whom he lives, takes care of him. In any event, no Zelet household is physically isolated due to the aforementioned compactness of the settlement, and each household is in close proximity to others.

I evaluated the ability of the *galta* in Zelet to perform activities of daily livings (ADLs). All the *galta* people residing in this location during the study period (from December 2009 to January 2010) were able to perform their ADLs. Indeed, no *galta* individuals required help in performing any act indispensable to survival. The following section examines the life of *galta* by discussing the situation in AK's household (Table 1, No. 4).

#### The Daily Life of Elderly Individuals: The Case of AK

AK is an approximately 75-year-old male who lives with his 50-year-old wife and his fourth son, who is 12 years of age. He has six living children. His first son has two wives and routinely travels between two houses, one of which is in Zelet and the other of which is in the location next to Zelet. The second and third sons have houses in Zelet and are involved in AK's farming activities on a daily basis. His two daughters are married and live in other locations. His fourth son began the Metser primary school in 2008.

Fig. 3 shows the rates at which certain daily activities were performed by AK, his wife, and his fourth son during a 5-day (120-hour) period at the end of rainy season.<sup>(10)</sup> I recorded all activities that I observed and classified them according to type.<sup>(11)</sup>

AK spent about half of his waking hours (25.5/60.3 h) performing agricultural work. He devoted about 80% of this time to work involving his cattle such as milking or feeding. He spent the remaining 20% sowing maize or preparing seeds and fields for the next sowing. He devoted about one-fourth of his waking hours

**Table 1.** Age of *galta* men, their household, and the existence of thier children in Zelet location

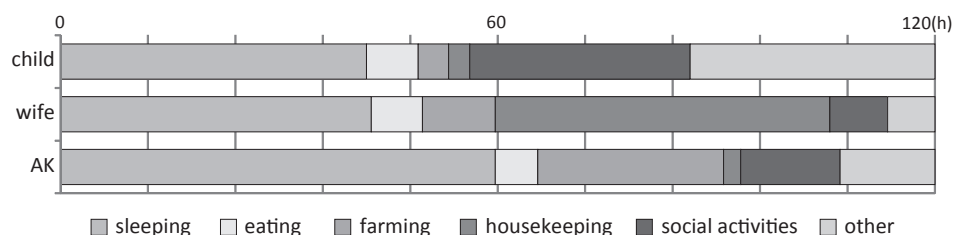
| No. | Estimated age | No. of household members | Existence of their children |
|-----|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1   | 88            | 2                        | no                          |
| 2   | 85            | 6                        | yes                         |
| 3   | 85            | 2                        | no                          |
| 4   | 75            | 3                        | yes                         |
| 5   | 75            | 2                        | yes                         |
| 6   | 70            | 7                        | yes                         |
| 7   | 70            | 2                        | yes                         |
| 8   | 65            | 4                        | yes                         |
| 9   | 60            | 2                        | no                          |
| 10  | 60            | 3                        | yes                         |

**Table 2.** Age of *galta* women, their household, and the existence of thier children in Zelet location

| No. | Estimated age | No. of household members | Existence of their children |
|-----|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 11  | 87            | 2                        | no                          |
| 12  | 77            | 1                        | no                          |
| 13  | 75            | 1                        | no                          |
| 14  | 70            | 2                        | yes                         |
| 15  | 65            | 1                        | yes                         |
| 16  | 60            | 2                        | yes                         |

(13.7 h) to social activities, which meant that he spent much time outside the house.<sup>(12)</sup> He walked around and visited several houses to arrange for assistance with ox plowing for seeding or hauling maize kernels to the market. He also went to the twice-weekly market (about 2 km from his house), where he chatted with people at the roadside or went for a drink with them.<sup>(13)</sup>

The term *shedinkan* refers to AK's practice of spending a quarter of his waking time outdoors. AK places great importance on this activity. *Shedinkan* means "seeing" in English, and it refers to viewing or encountering. For example, instances in which AK himself went to inspect his field or livestock are *shedinkan*. *Shedinkan* also refers to instances in which AK heard that an acquaintance was ill and immediately visited that person. Additionally, acts of *shedinkan* may include visits to the houses of relatives during breaks in daily agricultural work in that he negotiated for help with activities such as ox plowing or harvesting during these meetings.

**Fig. 3.** Record of daily activities during 5 days (120 hours) for AK, his wife and son.

Acts of *shedinkan* are important facilitators of livelihood-related activities.

On the other hand, many people also visited AK. The son of AK's wife often visited him from a distant village, and neighbors visited him to negotiate about his wood, bamboo, or products. Many people visited without a clear purpose. On one occasion, he told his first son, who did not visit often, "It is quite important that children come to see their parents. My sons also have to come to see me." When AK became sick and stayed in bed, all the people in the location sometimes visited him. AK remembered who did not come to see him, and he visited them when he has recovered to show them that he is alive and healthy.

AK went to the market place even when he did not sell or buy anything. He drank and talked about several work-related topics with those he met there. Some say that the site of such drinking may be the best place to talk about work and to engage in negotiations. An invitation to a bar is proffered as a sign of gratitude for a request that was fulfilled or as a signal of welcome to a visitor. Encounters and interactions in the market are important not only to AK but to many others as well.

When asked why they work, Aari often responded with *norti mishikan*. *Norti* means stomach, and *mishikan* means "to fill up." That is, they work to fill their stomachs. However, when Aari individuals become sad because someone close is sick, they say, "My *norti* is hot." When they say "I do not understand that person's *norti*," they mean they do not know how to understand what that person thinks. Thus, the word "*norti*" does not refer only to the stomach. Similarly, *norti mishikan* does not refer only to the eating of a meal to fill one's stomach, leading to the feeling of satisfaction. Instead, they also believe that satisfaction can be achieved by filling one's stomach metaphorically. Additionally, many people who become ill or pregnant need the help of daughters, granddaughters, or sisters to cook for them, as the Aari are greatly concerned about eating a healthy diet. It is clear that they consider procuring, cooking, and eating food to be among the most important activities.

## THE ROLE OF LIVELIHOOD IN DAILY INTERACTIONS

This chapter describes AK's actual relationships and discusses whom AK works with to make a living. According to my observations, 75 people, excluding members of his own household, interacted with AK during the 74 days from August to December 2009. The author lived in AK's household during the time, this research was conducted to record the relationship between AK and all visitors as well as the purpose of each visit. I also recorded the destination and purpose of AK's trips outside the house. Those interactions between AK and his wife that I could observe were also recorded. With AK's permission, I also accompanied AK when he went out. However, interactions that occurred by chance during such excursions, such as roadside encounters, were not recorded. Data about trips on which the author did not accompany AK were gathered via direct interviews with AK.

Fig. 4 shows the percentages of the Zelet population who were AK's blood relatives or relatives by affinity. As noted above, the population of Zelet, where AK resides, was 292. According to these data, most of the Zelet inhabitants AK was able

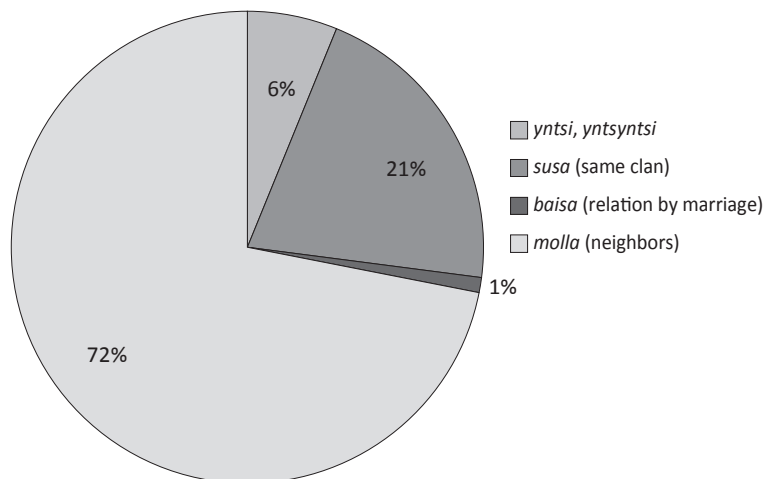


Fig. 4. AK's relationships with the residents of Zelet location.

to identify as blood relatives were *yntsi* (children) and *yntsyntsi* (grandchildren);<sup>(14)</sup> these individuals accounted for about 6% (18 persons) of the Zelet population. This group includes not only those in the direct line of descent but also children of parallel cousins who are also known as *yntsi*. Relatives by affinity, called *baisa*, accounted for about 1% (3 persons) of the Zelet population. Although *susa* refers to an individual in the same clan who is recognized as having the same ancestor (*aq-a-wollaqa*), such individuals cannot directly specify a common line of descent. AK's *susa* accounted for 21% of the Zelet population, and more than one-quarter

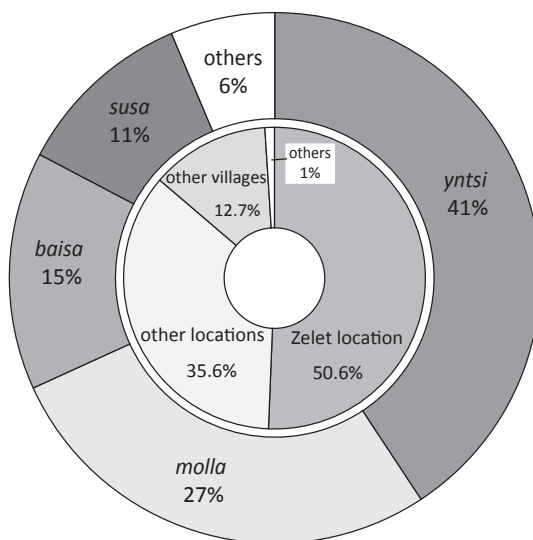


Fig. 5. AK's interactions with various sort of other people.

of the residents of Zelet were related to by blood or marriage.<sup>(15)</sup>

I observed 393 interactions between AK and 75 people outside of his household, and these are analyzed in Fig. 5. About 41% (160) of the interactions observed during the period involved AK and his *yntsi* or *yntsyntsi*. A total of 27% (108) of the interactions involved AK and *molla*, neighbors who are not related by blood or marriage. In terms of place of residence, 51% (199) of the interactions involved residents of Zelet, and 36% involved residents of other locations in Metser village. Thus, AK usually spent his days with his *yntsi* and *yntsyntsi*, who lived in the same village as AK, and with *molla* neighbors.

In terms of the focus of the interactions observed during the period in question, many related to farming, such as ox plowing or weeding in the *wony haami*, harvesting operations, or crop transport (Fig. 6).

The research period, August, was planting time as well as the time that maize, which is the basic crop in this area, is harvested. Whereas some people brought the harvested maize to AK's house, others used oxen to plow the field that was just harvested or sowed it with seeds. The primary assistance was provided by AK's *yntsi*, his second and third sons, and others who were visiting from distant locations. AK also asked the communal association for help, and entrusted its members with harvesting one portion of his field. The communal association, called the *iddir* or *aldi*, generally consists of about 15 men and women. As noted above, the primary function of the *iddir* involves funeral ceremonies for residents of Zelet. However, members sometimes gather to perform farm work. In general, each household dispatches one member to provide labor and, in exchange, receives enough help to farm their own *wony haami*. During weeding and harvesting seasons, AK spoke with the head of the *iddir*, and they set the time for the collective farm work. As AK cannot participate in this work due to his age and as other

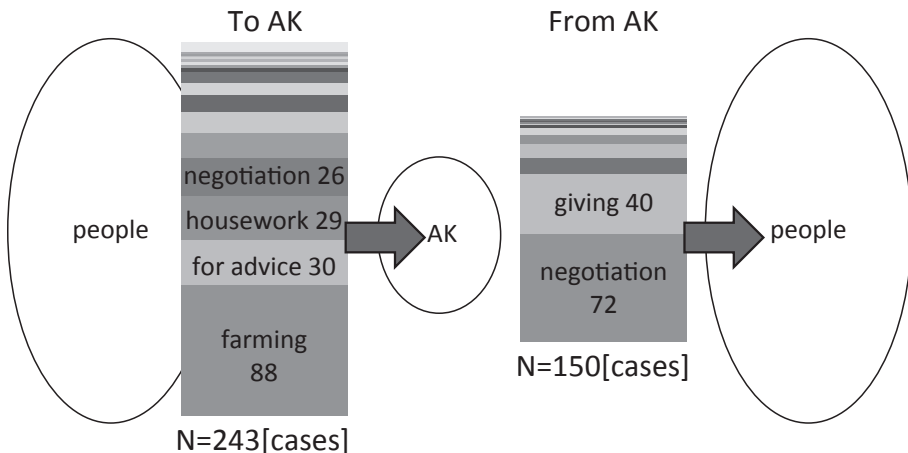


Fig. 6. Kinds of interactions and their frequencies for AK.

household members also did not participate, AK gave money or crops to the *iddir* in exchange for labor.

AK not only received support; he was also observed approaching or helping others. The most frequently observed example of this process involved AK approaching people to facilitate the success of work on his own farm. During this season, especially in August and September, maize must be harvested and seeds must be sowed. AK also had to finish harvesting the maize on his 0.5 ha and then had to finish plowing and sowing before it rained again. All of this work required help, and AK was busy seeking help from his son's household, from neighbors who wanted to work, and from the communal association, negotiating work hours and remuneration. On the other hand, AK was also observed giving others maize, root crops, and sometimes money. Indeed, some people faced shortages in the grain that they had saved for their own consumption. A total of 71 of the 75 persons who did something for AK also received something from AK, although it is possible that these acts were not directly related. That is, it is possible that "open circulation, so-called 'general reciprocity'" (Ueno, 2008: 29) was occurring. This daily series of reciprocal acts surrounding AK demonstrates that elderly individuals in this area rely on the labor of younger people to manage and maintain their livelihood activities and that the younger people use their labor to obtain money or food. Thus, close and interdependent relationships exist among generations.

#### Elderly Individuals Who Are *Langta*

The previous section discussed *galta* such as AK who are proactive in managing their own livelihoods. However, not all elderly individuals in Zelet are active. As people age, they face physical limitations. When an individual falls ill and stops attending meetings or funerals, they say that he/she is *langta*. The word *langta* means "tired," and some *galta* in Zelet are *langta*. In this section, I discuss the life of a *galta* who is *langta*.

##### (1) The case of AG (88-year-old male, No. 1 in Table 1)

AG lived with his 87-year-old wife, BI (No. 11, Table 2). They had three children, all of whom are dead. Their brothers and sisters are also dead, and there are no "*susa*" of the same clan in the location. AG himself had cultivated a 2 ha *wony haami* and had vast coffee fields and many livestock. However, in 2008, when we first met, he had already sold his livestock and turned over his 0.2 ha field to others for cultivation because he was downscaling most of his livelihood-related activities. AG and his wife were exempted from paying a weekly premium to the *iddir*, as well as a tax imposed on his field. He also enjoyed drinking and often travelled to the market on foot, stopping at bars run by his distant relative who lived in another location. He did not require much money to get drunk because younger people who knew him bought him drinks so they could drink together. When he had trouble finding food or money, he visited *molla*, neighbors, irrespective of geographic proximity or ties of blood or marriage, to talk about getting food or money. His wife, BI, also visited the market. She has difficulty hearing, but I observed her talking with others in the

market. It was not clear what she brought to or bought at the market. When we met on the street, she was returning home with only a handful of broad beans.

AK revealed that AG and BI had visited him several times to ask for money and food. I observed this on one occasion. At first, BI visited AK to talk about their shortage of food. Two days later, AG himself visited AK and asked, “you said you would give us food, but was it lie?” AK said, “No, no. It was not. But could you wait for the next harvest because now we are finishing the stored maize. Today, please take this money and use it for drinking.” AK gave AG the money for two glasses. Why did AK do this? AK explained to me that “He used to take care of us. He had worked very hard for us, although he does not do so now.” He added, “*saabikan*” (for the God). The first answer means he gave money to AG because AG had asked him, whereas the second answer means that even if the person who had asked AK were not AG, AK would have had to give him money anyway.

(2) The case of BN (77-year-old female, No. 12 in Table 2)

BN has lived in the Zelet location since she got married. She is from the lowlands to the west of Metser, and her husband’s grandchildren and the daughter of her husband’s ex-wife live nearby. Although her daily activities were limited as a result of age, she still performed housework at her own pace. For example, she was not able to gather and chop thick firewood, but she gathered dried twigs from a coffee field and cooked simple meals. She drew water from a river near her house using a small container that holds 3–5 liters. She often complained of pain in her knees, elbows, and other joints and sometimes stayed in bed due to feeling sick. However, she spent most of her time with her husband’s ex-wife’s daughter, who lived next to her house. When she prepared a meal, they ate it together. When she did not cook but felt hungry, BN visited AK’s second son, and members of his household gave her a piece of injera. BN is very tranquil and was called *aako* (grandmother) by local children. When her husband died, she converted to Protestantism. When she had a problem (e.g., needing food or clothes), the church helped her with money or food. Members of the church sometimes visited and talked with her. However, when she needed items essential to her livelihood, she visited neighbors such as AK to ask for food. I observed this once during the research period. AK explained that he gave her food because “She is Protestant, like me. Besides, she does not have her children.”

When she was not very ill, BN went to the twice-weekly market held at the center of Metser and sold crops such as taro or herbs from her *tika haami*. Although her house in the Zelet location is about 2 km from the market place, she left earlier than other people and walked slowly to the market because it was difficult for her move more rapidly when carrying crops on her back. Other *galta lanqta*, such as AG and BI, also walked to the market slowly, at their own pace. As noted in the discussion of AK, the market place is important as a venue for interaction; it may be it is especially important for *galta lanqta* to go to the market despite their physical limitations so that they are able to maintain their relationships.

## CONCLUSION

This paper examined the situation of elderly Aari individuals, known as *galta*, in southwestern Ethiopia. In the Zelet location, the research site, those who are 60 years of age or older are called *galta*. These individuals live in close proximity to others. All of the 16 *galta* living in Zelet received perfect scores on their ability to perform the basic ADLs. It is clear that these individuals are active and able to perform the activities required for survival. Although it was difficult for AK to complete his farm work by himself, he often visited others, making and maintaining good relationships with his neighbors as a way to recruit needed labor as well as meet social needs. That is, interactions with others resulted in *norti mishikan*, “a full stomach.” Moreover, AK often spent time with his children, grandchildren, and neighbors. Observations of interpersonal interactions involving both AK and others underscored the importance of these encounters for the procurement of food. Indeed, people are able to compensate for what they lack by engaging in mutual exchanges, thereby helping themselves and others to achieve *norti mishikan*.

The relationship between *shedinkan* and *norti mishikan* was also manifested in the situations of *galta lanqta*. These individuals interact with others at their own pace to establish and maintain social relationships and avoid isolation. In fact, *galta lanqta* beg for food if they cannot rely on relatives.

The relationship between caregivers and persons who require care is asymmetrical. Although such relationships are characterized by mutual dependence, one party may become dominant. One might ask if this was the case for AG or BN. As *galta lanqta*, AG and BN were able to live by begging for food. However, they were not dominated by those who contributed to their survival. As mentioned above, when AK, who was often asked for food or money, gave money to AG, he did so because they had lived in the same village for a long time as well as because charity is consistent with his religious beliefs. AK also gave food to BN for religious reasons and because she had no children. Most importantly, AK's life experiences, shared with AG and BN, let him know what they needed. AK was not alone in this knowledge; many people agreed about the nature of their needs. Thus, other neighbors also contributed a little food or money. The people who surrounded AG and BN were in accord about their needs, and this enabled them and others in similar situations to beg without much hesitation and to justify doing so when encountering those who did not contribute. Indeed, at the market, they greeted, talked with, and drank with others. They sometimes interacted with individuals whom they saw only infrequently to confirm social relationships that had been established and maintained before they had reached the status of *galta lanqta*. Indeed, engagement in interactions with many persons may prevent dominance relationships. This also may be why *galta* take the initiative in relationships when they become *lanqta*.

On the other hand, most of those who interacted with *galta lanqta* on a frequent basis were relatives by blood or marriage. However, the Aari people have been affected by outside influences during the past 100 years, and their traditional values have changed. Moreover, the situation in Metser is still changing as a result of the penetration of the cash economy during the previous decades. More

children have moved to urban areas to attend school, and some individuals who graduate from school do not choose a life spent farming in their rural hometowns. It is important to follow up on how these people face and adapt to this situation of inexorable and continuous social change.

## NOTES

- (1) In this area, people place a local artificial hive made from bamboo in large trees and wait for wild bees to enter. After the bees settle into this new house and accumulate honey during the next dry season, people remove the honey or bring it to their garden to keep it.
- (2) In recent years, some people have moved their houses to the side of the road, but, with the exception of women who emigrated for marriage, most people who lived in the location were longtime residents. It is believed that the location has been compact since the current occupants were born.
- (3) People belong to a particular *mana*: *gashi-mana*, *tila-mana*, and *faka-mana*. *Gashi-mana* are said to have been engaged in weaving (Kaneko, 2005), but most members now perform farm work. Women in the *tila-mana* make clay pots, and men in the *faka-mana* make ironware and woodwork. The clay pots and ironware are sold to *kantsa* and members of the *gashi-mana* in the market.
- (4) I heard that people who belong to the *ulcha* clan must not hand things to someone in another clan because doing so would cause the receiver to have a bad experience. For this reason, members of the *ulcha* clan have to place objects on the ground so that others can then take them.
- (5) A school in Gazer that offers a 10-year course of study (at the time of 2010).
- (6) A support system allowed children with no parents to buy notebooks and pens. When a child dropped out, the police asked them about why they did so. If the reason was marriage, the police may, depending on the circumstance, threaten to arrest the parents.
- (7) Words in Amharic or Amharic origin are indicated by “Am.”
- (8) An *iddir* is a communal association focused on funerals, especially in urban areas. In the Zelet location, the *iddir* does not confine its activities to funerals; it participates in various activities, such as tree planting, which raises funds, and working together to help members rebuild their houses.
- (9) As many Aari elders do not keep track of their age, I carefully examined such phenomena as birth order and life events (e.g., marriage and childbirth) and correlated them with the history of southwest Ethiopia.
- (10) They were ready to perform the second seeding for maize during this period.
- (11) I classified these activities into six categories: sleeping, eating, working on the farm (working in the field or with livestock), doing housework (e.g., cooking, washing clothes, and cleaning), engaging in social activities (spending time with persons other than household members such as by hosting guests and visitors), and other.
- (12) AK’s wife spent most of her time picking crops for self-consumption, cleaning the house, and washing clothes. Her “social activities” were very limited and included shopping at the market for food and going out for ceremonial occasions or meetings. His fourth son spent much time on social activities because he attended school. The time he spent on “other” activities included watching his parents work and playing alone.
- (13) AK often napped in the early evening before dinner and spent more time sleeping than did the two other featured here.

- (14) All of AK's brothers and sisters lived in other villages, and AK's two daughters had emigrated to other villages for marriage.
- (15) This study included relationships with people who did and others who did not live in the Zelet location. Those individuals who were not related to AK by blood or marriage and lived in a neighboring location were treated as neighbors, *molla*, and those who lived in more distant areas were treated as "others."

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Author's Name and Address: Mariko NOGUCHI, Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University, 46, Shimoadachi-cho, Yoshida, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606-8501, JAPAN.  
E-mail: noguchi [at] jambo.africa.kyoto-u.ac.jp