

Sedentarization and the Creation of Alternative Livelihood among Saho Pastoralists in the Qohaito Plateau of Eritrea

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Sedentarization and the Creation of Alternative Livelihood among Saho Pastoralists in the Qohaito Plateau of Eritrea

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ABSTRACT

Owing to several interacting exogenous and endogenous (Fratkin and Roth 2010), or push and pull factors (Eneyew 2012), the reduction of mobility among the traditional pastoral societies in the East Africa led to higher rate of sedentarization phenomena, and transition to alternative livelihoods. Some of the causal factors for the occurrence of rapid sedentarization include shrinking pastures, frequent national and regional conflicts, and recurrent drought (Fratkin 1997, 2001; Fratkin and Ikeya 2005; Eneyew 2012), commoditization of livestock (Fratkin 1997), the introduction of modern institutions, and the emergence of new forms of inter-community relationships. The fast sedentarization led to another collateral process, i.e. the need to create an alternative livelihood for the former pastoral societies, who either co-practice pastoralism together with other economic activities, or totally replaced pastoralism with other subsistence activities. As Elliot Fratkin and Eric Roth (2010) noted, the processes of sedentarization and the creation of alternative livelihood are tightly interconnected because the former acts as the direct precursor of the latter. The Saho sedentarization process in Qohaito Plateau illustrates the causal relationship of modernity, colonialism and postcolonial conflict in the transformation of the society towards sedentism. This article examines the historical process of the formation of sedentary villages in the plateau. A combination of oral history, settlement and ethnographic data demonstrate that the Italian colonial era laid the foundation for the formation of sedentary villages in the plateau, and ever since the process intensified parallel to the introduction of alternative mechanism. To establish a concrete empirical measure to the ongoing sedentarization process in Qohaito, this article emphasizes the food consumption and the dependence of the inhabitant on non-pastoral food as a parameter to indicate the scale of the sedentarization¹.

INTRODUCTION

The main discussion presented in this article is the historical process and

ethnographic context of the socio-economic transition of Saho pastoralists in Qohaito Plateau from mobile pastoralists towards an agropastoral livelihood. The reduction in mobility and formation of sedentary villages was the result of environmental factors, lineage organization, colonial experience, inter-community interaction, and conflict that occurred in the plateau and its surroundings. The recurrent conflict in the Horn of Africa and the imposition of mobility restriction by governments played a major role in the transformation of these societies in the region. The central discussion in this article is the multidimensional and cross-sectional impact of the Eritrean War of Independence²⁾ in the reconfiguration of settlement pattern and the acceleration of the process of sedentarization. The search for an alternative livelihood and the ability to create it determines the society's success or failure of the process of sedentarization. The consolidation and success of perennial pastoral settlement needs to be measured by certain livelihood indices. This article takes the case of food consumption, classified into local (pastoral) and non-local (non-pastoral) categories, as an indication of the degree of sedentism and alternative livelihood in the plateau.

The research was conducted in the Qohaito Plateau located in the Adi Keih Sub-zone of Zoba Debub (Southern Zone) Administration in Eritrea. Qohaito constitutes a sub-regional unit in the Adi Keih Sub-zone, and is composed of five settlement centers; namely Safira, Igila, Masagole Zula, Subiraso and Dhamhina Districts. These clusters of district administrations are located in the Qohaito Plateau. The research was conducted in the Safira District Administration, which consists of eleven villages. The ethnographic account presented here especially on food consumption and process of sedentarization, largely represents the inhabitants of Safira District. The account of the Eritro-Ethiopian conflict in 1961–1991, however, is a general discussion on the impact of the war throughout the plateau.

The article is organized into seven sections. The introduction deals with the key discussion of the article, and section two presents briefly the conceptual background of sedentism in anthropology to assist in formulating an analytical frame for the research. Subsequently, a detailed and comprehensive ethnographic and historical background of the Saho society is discussed in section three. Comprehensive ethnographic study on Saho society is scarce, and this article attempts to provide an introductory account on ethnogenesis, language and settlement pattern of the society and economic activities. Section four discusses the impact of modernization and Italian colonial rule in the region from a wider perspective. The article analyzes the geo-political and military circumstances in the transitional period and their defining impact on the future livelihood of the people, and the elementary tendencies for sedentarization owing to a systematic reduction of mobility, and the new economic opportunities emerged in the colonial period.

Sections five and six comprise the main parts of the article. The former examines the impact of the Eritrean War of Independence in the reorganization of the settlement pattern, with particular reference to the location of the area at the

cross-fire of both armies, and the consecutive atrocities conducted by Ethiopian army against the civilian population. A detailed account of how the courses of the war and its effect in the mobility and settlement setup are presented in this section. Section six focuses on the post-conflict sedentarization and creation of an alternative livelihood and coping strategy in Qohaito, and deals exclusively with one aspect of the new living style; food consumption. A comparison between the consumption of primary (local) and secondary (non-local/exotic) foodstuffs forms the argument that the society's sedentarization is successful. Finally, the conclusion section discusses the analytical framework applied in this article based on Ellis and Swift's (1988) quantified scale in classifying pastoral, agro-pastoral and non-pastoral societies that was applied to assess the extent the pastoral style of living remains in these communities.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

The general concept of sedentism, as the process of sedentary settlement formation, has its roots in classical anthropological works. Lewis H. Morgan's conception of cultural evolution was based on broad-based social transformation rather than on a single institution (Marshall 2006), encouraged many culture historians and theorists to associate the development of complex interconnected cultural institutions. Later, this cultural conception was developed systematically into model-like theories, such as systems theory and cybernetics. Sedentism, as the process refers to the gradual or rapid transition from mobile to sedentary life ways, became culturally and epistemologically highly interconnected with the emergence of agriculture and complex societies in the Neolithic.

Yvonne Marshall (2006) presented an excellent argument that highlights sedentism is not entirely and necessarily analogous with an agrarian or complex society. The paper argues, by referring to various prehistoric and ethnographic societies, the possibility of transformation of mobile societies into sedentary without indulging into agricultural economy; for example coastal dwellings. She noted, "it is now clear from archaeological and ethno-historical data that significant reduction in residential mobility occurred without the benefits of agriculture [or with agriculture playing minor role] in a number of areas" (Marshall 2006: 154). The argument, although showing the revision of classical conception of sedentism in anthropology, largely represents the internal dynamicity of cultural change, or that simply the driving force of the culture change is derived from inside the culture. The situation of the sedentarization of East African pastoralists, however, is a slightly different process because the catalysts for their sedentarization are external factors; such as colonization, state policy, climatic change, conflict and the like. In this respect, the study of modernization process among East African pastoralists introduced by colonial administrations and inherited by postcolonial governments takes a different form than the conventional or mainstream anthropological studies on sedentarization.

One of the peculiar differences between the classical and the new concepts of sedentism in anthropology and the recent ethnographic studies among East African pastoralists refers with regard to the economic and social relationship between pastoralists and their non-pastoral neighbors. For the mainstream anthropological works, foraging, pastoralism and/or agriculture are discrete and mostly independent stages in the sequence of cultural evolution. As a result, there appears rare interest in studying the coexistence and interaction among societies with diverse modes of subsistence. Rather than focusing on the evolutionary trends, the anthropological studies on East African pastoralists devotedly focus on how pastoral societies cope with the fast changes in the social and natural environment they live in. Elliot Fratkin and Eric Roth (2010) discussed the symbiotic relationship among pastoralists, merchants and agriculturalists in Kenya. Earlier Kazunobu Ikeya and Elliot Fratkin (2005) identified four types of interactions widely practiced between pastoralists and their neighbors in East Africa and elsewhere. “We can clarify four types of resource interaction including herder-hunter (type 1), herder-herder (type 2), herder-farmer (type 3) and herder-townsmen (type 4)” (Ikeya and Fratkin 2005). Hence the principal focus for the anthropological studies of East African pastoralists remains how the pastoralists respond to the external threat (or opportunities) posed by modernization and its organic structures (such as state, market economy, new administration system, land policies, and large-scale conflicts), and to environmental stresses (drought, land degradation, over population, over grazing, and the like).

The final point relevant for understanding pastoralists in East Africa refers to the State’s imposition of sedentarization on pastoral communities. “Is settling pastoralists a viable livelihood strategy?” asked Adugna Eneyew in his article published in the *Journal of Agricultural Science* (Eneyew 2012). He compared the widespread state organized sedentarization programs of pastoralists in Ethiopia and other countries in the region, and advocated a moderate and conditional intervention by the State. He concluded that it is possible to argue that efforts to modernize pastoralists through settlement are misguided. Settlement and progressive involvement of agriculture can, however, be an option for pastoralists who have lost their livestock and need to look for an alternative livelihood, including in urban areas, but it should not be considered for successful pastoralists (Eneyew 2012). Similarly, Fratkin (2001) recommended that the best way to deal with pastoral sedentarization as oppose to the State sedentarization programs is to follow a medial position that enables both parties to entertain the interest of the other, while maintaining their own. According to him, “a middle ground, which I share, proposes integrating pastoralists practices with contemporary realities of population growth, increased market integration, and the need to produce agricultural crops as well as livestock” (Fratkin 2001: 2). Both Eneyew and Fratkin presented adequate statistical data comparing settled and unsettled pastoralists in various countries of the region, and the data show the government plans of sedentarization in many cases failed to realize the objectives set at the

outset.

Sedentarization has to be understood as the continuous process of ex-pastoralists who tend to reduce their perennial or seasonal mobility in search of permanent livelihoods. In short, the replacement of mobile life ways by non-mobile is what sedentarization is all about, and this replacement requires certain period of time from the rudimentary stage until the consolidation of sedentary settlements supported by alternative subsistence. The processual nature of the transformation is therefore essential as Marshall said, "Sedentism is a process not a switch" (Marshall 2006). The more pastoral-centered definition of sedentarization according to Fratkin and Roth (2010) refers to the process where former nomadic individuals, households or entire communities adopt non-mobile lifeways seeking alternative livelihood mechanisms (Fratkin and Roth 2010). This shows that the idea of alternative livelihood emerged as an organic component of the process of sedentarization without which the process becomes incomplete. Fratkin strengthened the mutual relationship between sedentarization and alternative livelihood by noting "the creation of alternative livelihood is a concept initially used to former pastoralists who were impoverished due to ecological or political reasons, but later became a key concept in the narrative of modernization and development (Fratkin and Roth 2010).

This research paper seeks to understand the transformation of pastoralists in Qohaito in the way that the processes of sedentarization and alternative livelihood are inseparable phenomena. Second, the current effort and state of the creation of an alternative livelihood represents the ultimate end of the economic diversification adopted by these societies for a considerable time. Finally, since sedentarization and alternative livelihood are processual phenomena referring to the transformation of a particular society from nomadic or transhumant mobility into semi-sedentary or sedentary life ways, certain index measurement can be applied to show the degree and intensity of the transformation along the progressive effort for sedentism. The categorization of pastoral or agro-pastoral societies set by Ellis and Swift (1988) will be applied later in the discussion section to assess the degree of sedentary settlement in Qohaito.

The discussion on the sedentarization of Qohaito in this article follows a linear argument. The first argument deals with the impact of modernity (colonial history) and the postcolonial conflict in the reduction of mobility of the society. The largest portion of this section extensively discusses the frequent atrocities and military raids committed by the Ethiopian army against the inhabitants of Qohaito during the Eritrean War of Independence, which lasted 30 years. Qohaito offers an excellent case of the cumulative effect of the conflict on pastoral populations of the region and the greater Horn of Africa. The multidimensional effect of the conflict upon Qohaito pastoralists include a sharp decline in grazing land, a rapid shift to other economic modes, migration both within and across borders, and militarization (i.e., conscription of pastoral communities). In section V a detailed account of the course and impact of the conflict, especially between 1968 and

1979, both on human and livestock populations is presented.

The second line of discussion holds that, after thoroughly investigating the establishment of fixed (semi-fixed) settlements, the case of food consumption in Qohaito is an indication of alternative livelihood strategy. The article seeks to demonstrate the successful process of sedentarization, which is neutral from active government interference, by looking into the consumption of food in the area. The ethnographic research on the dietary type and frequency was carried out in 2011–2013, and, to understand the relationship between food consumption and sedentarization process, the research classifies the foods consumed in the villages into *primary* and *secondary* food types. The former in this context encompass the foodstuffs produced by the inhabitants, whereas secondary food types stand for non-local foodstuffs. The proportion of the *primary* and *secondary* foodstuffs provides an indication of the inhabitant's dependence on non-pastoral foods, and the index is compared against Ellis and Swift's scale of pastoral dietary scale³.

BRIEF HISTORICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF THE SAHO

The Qohaito highland is located in the Southeastern part of Eritrea, separating the Eastern Escarpment from the plateau, which stretches hundreds of kilometers in length and width. The five clusters of district administration collectively called Qohaito lie at the eastern edge of the highland and starting there the eastern escarpment descends sharply to the shores of the Red Sea. Geographically, the Qohaito Highland comprises the most elevated part of the tableland in Eritrea, with an elevation ranging from 2,600m to 2,700m above sea level. Situated between Wadi Hadas and Wadi Komali the high mountain range gives way to a flat plateau, which extends about 16km in a southeast direction and varies between 4km and 400m in the shorter east-west direction (CARP 2007). The Qohaito is inhabited by the Saho-speaking society, and an introductory note on the historical and ethnographic information of the Saho society is presented below.

The Qohaito Plateau is inhabited by three major Saho lineage groups. The Saho language belongs to the Eastern Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic language family along with Afar, Somali and Sidama (sister languages). The Saho language has been studied extensively compared to other aspects of the people, and most of this research has concentrated on the linguistic relationship among the sister languages. The linguistic studies are dominated particularly by the regional historical processes dealing with the expansion, migration and intermingling of different stocks of people in the region. Abdelkader Mohammad, for instance, compared the semantic similarity between Saho and Somali languages as; “the term Somali is derived from the words ‘soo’ and ‘maal’, which means ‘to go and milk’ ... ‘similarly the term ‘Saho’ means nomad (‘saa’ means animal, ‘hoo’ means care taker)’” (Mohammad 2013: 86).

The origin of the Saho language and its relationship with the sister languages have fragmented scholars' opinions. Two hypotheses emerged regarding the origin

of the Saho language. Alberto Pollera (1935), Abdulkader Mohammad (2013) and others suggest that the Saho language evolved around the second to first MBC when emigrants from different kingdoms in Southern Arabia crossed into the African coast of the Red Sea and intermingled with the indigenous people in the Horn of Africa. This hypothesis concludes that the Saho language is the result of the immediate cultural contact between South Arabian emigrants and indigenous people in the first millennium BC. The second hypothesis, proposed by Connell and Killion (2011) and Nadel (1946), suggests the evolution of the language took place at the later days of the Axumite Period. This hypothesis argues that the decline of the Axumite Empire⁴⁾ led to the infiltration of Afar-speaking communities from Dankalia, and the subsequent intermingling of the Afar emigrants with the indigenous people eventually gave rise to the emergence of the Saho language. Some scholars who advocate this argument even treat the Saho as the northern branch of the Afar (Lewis 1955; Nadel 1944). According to Mohammad, some authors defined Afar and Saho people as single ethnic group (Mohammad 2013). Although the two narratives have marked difference with respect to their chronology and historical processes, both are not radically antagonistic to each other; for they argue that the Saho language is the hybrid of the indigenous people and foreign emigrants.

Similar to the origin of the language, the ethnogenesis of the people has proved to be an unresolved debate among scholars. Many agree that despite the common language, Saho tribes vary significantly in their origin, organization, tribal law and customs (Trimingham 1976; Lewis 1955). Alberto Pollera described the variability of origin of Saho people as ‘today the Saho people comprises the Assaorta, the Minifere, the Irob and represents mixture of aboriginals, Denakil (Afar), Arab, Abyssinians’ (Pollera 1935: 27). The Saho language is the core factor for the unity of the various tribes; otherwise they have marked difference in many aspects of their livelihood and cultural organization. “Although they speak a common language, the Saho tribes vary considerably in origin, organization, tribal law and custom” (Lewis 1955: 174). Many writers (Pollera 1935; Tringham 1976 and others) generally agree with this opinion, and argue the Saho language is the key unifying element of the Saho people.

Many ethno-historians argue that the Saho-speaking societies, who currently inhabit extensive territory in the lowlands and highlands of Eritrea, associate their expansion in the 11th century AD with the collapse of the Axumite Empire. This narrative relies heavily on the historical linguistic studies dealing with the linguistic, semantic and grammatical similarities among the Saho, Afar and Somali languages. Lewis (1955) and Connell and Killion (2011) considered the Saho as the northern extension of the Afar people. Connell and Killion wrote “they (Saho) seems to be the northern extension of the Afar people who moved along the eastern shore of the Gulf of Zula and into the foothills of Akele Guzai during the 9th – 12th centuries AD” (Connell and Killion 2011: 457). Although this hypothesis seems sound in some ways, the time scale and historical coincidence that support

this synthesis appear to be less scientific and more of speculative. The assumption to synchronize the historical phenomenon of the fall of Axumite Empire with linguistic evidence and the advent of Arab to the Red Sea coast lack proper syncretism. Or the model was simply the duplication of similar historical event of the 'Beja Expansion' in the Western Lowlands and Northern Hills of Eritrea precisely at the same time and in the same historical context.

Still another narrative on the ethnogenesis of Saho people is suggested by Alberto Pollera (1996 [1935]). Based on fragmentary archaeological data and rudimentary archaeological method this narrative assumes that the Saho people are among the indigenous communities of the area with an antiquity that may range to the early days of the 1st MBC. In the beginning of the 1st MBC the first historically and archaeologically recorded cultural contact between both sides of the Red Sea started, and the conventional view is that there were continuous waves of migration from the Southern Arabian coast to the Northeast African side. Pollera mixed epigraphic data in Himyar and oral tradition of some Saho tribes (Hazo, Teroa and Gaso tracing of ancestry to Arabia) to generalize the early existence of the ancestors of Saho, whom he assumed were by then speaking different languages. Later, similar to the opinion of Connell and Killion (2011) and others, the fall of Axumite Kingdom and its port city of Adulis gave way to the genesis of the Saho language and the people particularly due to the emigration of the Afar people from the Dankalia region. Pollera summarized his view, "then isolated when Adulis was abandoned and when maritime routes shifted to the north, they (Saho) were overwhelmed by successive infiltrations of Afar, i.e. of Dankali people. The intermingling of the Afar with the previous inhabitants gave rise to the Saho of the present day" (Pollera 1935: 27).

Regardless of the chronological accuracy of the genesis and expansion of Saho to the coastal plains and foothills of the Eastern escarpment, by the 15th century AD the Saho people had well established settlements in the area (Connell and Killion 2011; Pollera 1935). From the 17th and 18th centuries onward, there exists rare reference of the Saho people in early travelers' accounts in relation to the discourse on Abyssinia. In early European accounts the Saho are referred by the name 'Shiho' (Crawfurd 1868; Hoten 1868) or Schoho/shoho (Wegner Munzinger). Italian colonial records, however, register the term Saho, and ever since the term is used as the official name. Crawfurd noted, "the tribes I mentioned last (Saho) that seclude Abyssinia from the Red Sea occupy a strip of land along its coast of 700 miles to 100 miles in breadth" (Crawfurd 1868: 283). Hence, from their initial occupation until the end of the 19th century, the Saho controlled the trade route between the Abyssinian highlands and the international commerce in the Red Sea coast. The territorial and functional command of the trade route enabled the Saho to benefit by engaging in escorting and way-leading and other activities in the caravan trade along River Hadas (Crawfurd 1868; Hotten 1868) and sometimes provided them access to plunder (Blanc 1869).

Modern Saho-speaking society apparently lives in all climatic and

geographical zones of Eritrea, stretching from Red Sea coast, coastal plains, foothills, the escarpment, the highlands and the Western Lowlands. I. M. Lewis outlined the modern boundary of Saho territory as “they (Saho) occupy an area limited to the north by the Massawa-Gindae road to the south by the valley of Mai Muna and Endeli to the West by the lofty scarps of the Ethiopian Highlands and to the east by the Dankalia plains of Samoti and Wangabo” (Lewis 1955: 174). This extensive geographical location drew them into contact with three ethnic groups in Eritrea; Tigre, Tigrinya and Afar (Pollera 1935). The extensive territory of the Saho-speaking communities is divided through tribal lines. Francis Nadel (1944) noted that the tribal territory of the Saho is divided among three major tribes. According to him, the Assaorta lives in an area located between the rivers Hadas and Selima, the Minifere in foothills enclosing the Wangabo plain, Soira and upper Dandero, and the Hazu live in Lower Endeli and Renda Kono and the edge of Dankalia Plain (Nadel 1944). Generally, several new settlements were established during the Italian and British administrations, when many ethnic groups experienced expansion across the southern and western frontier of their territory. Pollera reported the expansion of Saho during Italian period as follows; “But over the last 10 years, they have gone beyond Belesa and have begun to take their herds into the vast plain of Seieba, and to go down the valley of Mereb spreading themselves on both the Eritrean and the Ethiopian banks, as far as Adiabo and Zaid Akkolom (Pollera 1935: 165).

During his fieldwork in summer 2011 and spring 2012, the author documented the overall tribal division of the territory and the location of each tribe within the area. The northern frontier of the Saho territory can be roughly demarcated as a belt running from the towns of Segheneiti, Mai Habar and Gindae. The Desamo tribe extends from the town of Segheneiti and the northern part of the escarpment as far as the coastal town of Foro, whereas the eastern frontier is inhabited by the Tor’a tribe. In the Qohaito highlands and Soira mountain range, including major towns like Adi Keih and Senafe, are located the Ga’as, Debri Mela and Hazu tribes. The Assaorta tribe, which is the largest tribe, dwell in a vast area that extend from the edge of Soira mountain range to the coastal plains that border the Afar people in Dankalia. South of Hazu across the border with Ethiopia lives the Irob tribe, including in major towns like Zalambesa. Finally, in the Western part of the Saho tribal area small tribes live in the towns of the Tsonona and Hazemo plains.

THE COLONIAL PERIOD AND ITS IMPACT ON SETTLEMENT PATTERN

Saho society, particularly since the collapse of the Axumite Empire until the eve of colonialism, commanded the trade route that passed through Ruba Hadas and Ruba Komali connecting the Gulf of Zula (the Eastern Extreme of the Saho territory) and the Abyssinian Highlands. This opportunity opened for them access to double benefits from their seasonal pastoral migration, and the engagement in

the commercial traffic that cuts through their territory. According to Henry Salt, who led a large expedition in early-1809 to Abyssinia, the trade route from the coast to the highland passes through certain periodic stations including Arkeeko, Dukano, Dabi, Shillokee, Weah, Taranta, Hamhamo, Sadoon, Tubbo, Leila, and Assuba among others (Salt 1967 [1814]: 222–223). The entire caravan passage, starting from Arkeeko (present day Hirgigo) all the way to Qohaito Highland is inhabited by Saho-speaking societies, and this attests to the commanding position of the people on the caravan trade corridor.

A new trend in the geo-economic situation began to cloud in the second half of the 19th century brewing a determining impact in the future of the trade corridor between the coast and the highland, once completely controlled by the Saho people. The key factors in the emerging geo-political scenario were regional powers such as Anglo-Egyptian expansion from the north, the Tigrean influence from the south, and the ingress of the Italians on the Red Sea coast. In 1869 an Italian company, called the Rubatino Trading Company, contracted a concession in the port city of Assab, located hundreds of kilometers to the south of the Gulf of Zula (the coastal outlet of the Saho Land). Later the Rubatino Company sold its concession to the Italian Government, which then sent several exploration missions to the area to open a new trade corridor from Assab to Abyssinia. The repetitive exploring missions failed, and in one incident an entire mission was killed in the Denkalia desert by local people. This incident forced the Italians to abandon the attempt to establish a new corridor, and finally they occupied Massaua in 1885. Robert Woolbert (1932) described the death of Bianchi's exploring mission and its consequence as "Bianchi engaged in an attempt to open up a practicable route from the Abyssinia highland to Assab, when his party was murdered in the desert of Dancalia in 1884 ... and it is commonly held to be the one of the factors determining the government's occupation of Massaua" (Woolbert 1932: 439).

The regional powers which at that time had significant sphere of influence in the highland were the Egyptian and Tigrean forces. They began figuring out how to control the central highland of Eritrea, which led to several battles that ultimately gave way for stronger influence of the Tigrean emperor to exert long term impact on the future of the whole region. Ras Alula, the commander of the Tigrean force, defeated the Egyptian forces at the battles of Gundet and Gurae in 1875 and 1876, respectively. After defeating their Egyptian rivals and their local allies, in 1884 Ras Allula established his strong control in the newly occupied province in the highland with a new commercial and political capital city at Asmara:

By establishing the remote village of Asmara as his new capital, late in 1884 or early 1885, the Ras (Alula) turned it into a commercial, military and administrative center ... Alula's centralized regime in Asmara was economically based on the trade with Massaua, especially the profitable arms trade ... this could be achieved to some

extent by allowing the Italians to occupy parts of the turbulent borderlands such as the countries of the Assawurta and Habab. (Elrich 1974: 268)

The coincidence of the emergence of a new capital in the highlands, Asmara, in 1884/5 and the occupation and expansion of the Italians in 1885 had a long term impact in the geo-political future of the Saho people and the trade route that passed through their territory. The initial attempt of the Italian expansion seemed to follow the traditional trade route from the coast to Abyssinia. The occupation of Arkeeko and Weah by the Italian in 1885, followed by the formation of their garrison in Weah, justifies the concern that the Italian expansion strategy was more or less along the preexisting trade route via Ruba Hadas and Ruba Komali. Soon, the expansion of the Italians alarmed and posed a territorial and military threat to the Tigrean emperor. As a counter-move, the emperor deployed his army at the town of Sanafe, located at the top edge of the escarpment and the trade corridor. "The occupation of the peninsula of Buri on the Eastern coast of the bay of Zula ... Alula interpreted the move as a threat to Agame, and he subsequently lead a counter-force to Senafe where a new fort was being erected" (Elrich 1974: 98). Later, Ras Alula, who was following keenly the Italian military movements in the lowland, decided to ambush the Italian garrison in Se'atit and Weah. He defeated the Italian army in these battles. The cumulative effects of the victory of Allula, the establishment of both a new commercial and administrative center in Asmara and the Asmara-Massawa trade route, gradually weakened the trade corridor that cuts across Saho territory. Since that time the Saho people became completely marginalized from the regional and international trade activities.

The formation of the Italian colony, Eritrea, was officially announced in 1890, and the direct eco-political consequence of this new political and administrative system was the complete isolation of the Saho territory from the regional and international trade network. Because of the shift of the trade line from the Ruba Hadas valley into the Massawa-Gindae-Asmara line (Figure 1), and the subsequent cutting off from ongoing commercial activity, Saho society remained entirely dependent on pastoralism. This meant that their involvement in the trade activity, which they had pursued for centuries, suddenly disappeared. That is the reason why these communities consolidated their subsistence economy on pastoralism. Moreover, the ecological setting of the territory, especially Qohaito and its surrounding area, are not well suited for agriculture, both in terms of annual rainfall and topographical conditions. That the largest proportion of the territory is semi-desert and desert encouraged the people to practice pastoralism rather than agriculture. Similarly, the topography of the area, which is characterized by rugged gorges, deep valleys, and steep escarpments, repelled any development activity by the colonial administration and postcolonial governments. As a result of the above-discussed phenomena, for most of the colonial period the Saho society practiced pastoralism as its principal economic activity. Supplementary economic activities included agriculture, wage labor (including serving in the police and army) and

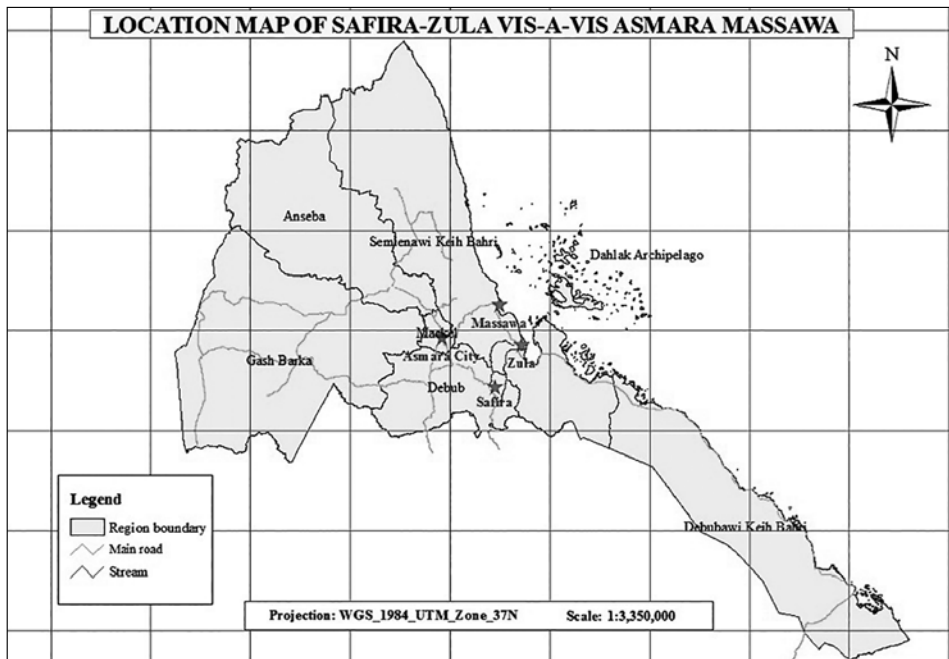


Figure 1 Pre-colonial (Zula-Safira) and colonial (Massawa-Asmara) trade routes
Source: Prepared by the author

trade (Pollera 1935).

That economic pattern continued mostly unchanged until the 1950s, when the future of the former Italian colony was discussed by the United Nations. The UN resolution for Eritrea turned to be a federal resolution with Ethiopia, which by then was led by an autocratic monarchy. In 1952, the federal resolution took effect, but soon political problems began to emerge between the emperor and the Government of Eritrea. Gradually, the federal act and its principles began fading away as the office of the emperor violated critical terms of the federal constitution. Eventually, in 1962, after the erosion of the constitution, the emperor declared the termination of the federation and the annexation of Eritrea as a province of Ethiopia. A year earlier, however, in 1961 the growing discontent among Eritrean dissidents with the violation of federation resulted in the beginning of the armed struggle in Eritrea.

THE ERITRO-ETHIOPIAN CONFLICT IN 1961–1991

The beginning of the Eritrean war of independence had a profound impact on the mobility and pastoral activity of the inhabitants of Qohaito. When the war was started, in 1961, by the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), later led for the formation of Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF), the Ethiopian army began

counteracting in different ways, like military confrontation with ELF/EPLF, military campaigns against the civilian population living in the combat zone and so forth. Throughout Eritrea there were widespread atrocities or military raids by the Ethiopian army and special counter-insurgency units, because the guerrilla fighters operated covertly within the population, and their popularity guaranteed them widespread support from the people of Eritrea. Mary Dines (1988) noted, “some raids are directly related to military operations against the resistance and are either part of ‘softening up’ process prior to an attack on EPLF forces in the area, or are undertaken as a reprisal for some action taken against the army itself either by the EPLF or, in some cases, by the civilians in the towns” (Dines 1988: 148). Thus the Ethiopian tactic was based on the philosophy of ‘*to kill the fish, dry the sea*’. Initially, villages located at the war zone, including the Qohaito Region, became victims of this tactic, and there were reports of mass killings, burnings, looting and destruction. Later, as the operations of the guerrilla fighters penetrated deep into urban areas in the form of squad activities and hit-and-run operations, especially by the mid-1970s, similar action was carried out in villages surrounding major cities and towns.

During the initial phase of the movement, Qohaito was a frontier between the Eritrean Liberation Front and the Ethiopian forces. It is important to highlight here that the Qohaito Plateau, with an elevation of 2700m ASL, is located between two strategic points; the Eritrea-Ethiopia border, and the border between the Highlands and the Lowlands. In the early and formative stages of the ELF/EPLF in late-1960s and early-1970s, it was a kind of rear base for the freedom fighters in Eritrea, especially for the ELF (Connell and Killion 2011). The Eastern Escarpment and the Eastern Lowlands were critically important for the ELF fighters, and among the important ELF stations in the area were the Alamta Military Training base, logistical facilities, smuggling ports on the coast, and tax collecting posts. On the other side, the nearby town of Adi Keih was the garrison of the Ethiopian army and administrative center of the province. Thus the Qohaito Region lies exactly at the middle of the combat zone between the ELF and the Ethiopian forces.

The above mentioned circumstances made Qohaito among the first targets of a military raid by the Ethiopian army in the highlands, and a total of six violent military raids took place between 1968 and 1977. These military raids are summarized chronologically below.

1. 1968: Early in this year, the Ethiopia army made its first raid on the civilian population of the Qohaito Plateau. The residents of these villages were taken totally by surprise when the soldiers committed their first atrocity. Fortunately, in the raid the soldiers targeted only movable and immovable properties; livestock, haystack, granaries and houses. Later, when the people began protesting against the acts of atrocity, two villagers (Sheikh Sofi and Sheikh Taha) were shot dead by the soldiers.

2. August 1968: This month is the ripening season for the summer cereal crops, and the Ethiopian soldiers conducted this campaign to burn the crops and livestock because they suspected that the harvest might be shared between the villagers and the fighters. The soldiers burnt all the fields, and on their way back to base they killed Mohammed Sheikh Ali.
3. November 1968: This raid took place shortly after an ELF hit-and-run unit ambushed the Ethiopian army's position in Adi Keih. In retaliation, the soldiers rushed to the area before daybreak, but when the news of their arrival circulated quickly, the villagers fled to the escarpment, where the infantry unit of the Ethiopian army could not follow. The steep escarpment had been a safe refuge for the villagers throughout the conflict period. All villagers fled to their shelter except an old woman, Bekita Ahmed, who was killed by the soldiers.
4. 1969: Similar to the previous raids, the mission of the military raid was to cut the sources of supply of the movement from the civilian population to the ELF units, because the fighters partly depended on the local people for food. As a result, the soldiers machine-gunned most of the cattle in the area, particularly in the village called Saro. Saro was the first village to be attacked by the soldiers and the villagers had no chance to rescue their livestock as other villages partly did. Finally, the soldiers killed Mohammed Nur Ibrahim, and they burned some huts and granaries.
5. 1970: This was a large-scale military operation in terms of the number of soldiers involved, the amount of destruction, and the consequences of the raid. A preemptive shelling took place a day before a large Ethiopian army unit carried out the raid in Safira and the entire Qohaito Region – from northern end to southern end – simultaneously. Many people were killed during this raid, although the author's informants remembered the names of only two victims; Shifa Abdela and Halima Shum Ahmed. The soldiers killed all the animals and burned most households in the vicinity.
 The most disastrous consequence of this military operation was that the villages were totally abandoned, and the villagers were scattered in the valleys and the escarpment and the Eastern Lowland. It took the villagers about five years to return fully- to the Qohaito Plateau, and in 1975 some household began to reconstruct their huts there. Another important consequence of this raid was that many of the survivors joined the ELF and EPLF en masse. The villages disintegrated and their inhabitants either resettled in urban area, fled to refugee camps in the Sudan, or to the Gulf States.
6. September 21, 1977: As a continuation of the new wave of nationwide atrocities that hit Eritrea, the Ethiopian army invaded the civilian settlement of Qohaito. The inhabitants of Safira agree unanimously that this raid was the most destructive compared with its five predecessors especially in terms of the human loss. This raid depopulated the whole region, and like the previous one it took the inhabitants years to resettle in Qohaito. Many families have never returned. The incident still remains fresh in the minds of the survivors. The techniques of killing

were brutal including burning alive, mass slaughter, shooting and, the most dreadful was throwing people alive down the cliff (about 70 to 100m in height). The grandfather of one of the author's informants, Ibrahim, was thrown down the cliff at that time and his body has still not been recovered for burial. Moreover, Ibrahim stressed that the village women were especially targeted by the soldiers because they were recruited as messengers between the ELF field offices and their collaborators in towns.

During our focus group discussion, the discussants recalled some of the victims who died during the massacre. The family of Yossuf Haj Musa along with its four members perished when its homestead was set on fire by the soldiers. Other victims of the incident include Ahmedin Ismael, Ahmed Ibrahim Mohammed, Jem'a Abdela, Sa'eda Mohammed Abdu, Mohammed Ali Idris, Omer Halibo, Mohammed Ahmed Said, Mohammed Abubeker, Mohammed Daud Kelil, Shifa Abdela, and Suleiman Husein. All the huts, usually made from thatched grass and wood, were burnt to ashes, some of the livestock were stolen and the rest shot dead.

From 1977 to 1979, the Ethiopian army established a military camp in Qohaito. This was the time when the Ethiopian army launched a continuous and large-scale offensive against the ELF and EPLF on several fronts across the country, and hence the ELF and EPLF retreated from their captured cities and towns. The ELF finally ended as an armed movement in the 1981 and all its ex-fighters were either exiled or joined the EPLF. The EPLF on the other hand withdrew from its major posts, and was confined to a tiny mountainous area in the north of the country.

After the withdrawal of the EPLF from the cities, the military raid against the civilian population in Qohaito ceased immediately, arguably for two main reasons. The first might be that most of the civilian collaborators with EPLF withdrew along with the fighters, and were no longer in the area controlled by the Ethiopian army. The civilians who withdrew along the retreating EPLF forces were resettled the northern hill in IDP camps run by EPLF, and these camps were bombed constantly throughout the war period by Ethiopian air force. The second reason is because the government had strengthened its control and no longer felt threatened by the people.

The military camp established by the Ethiopian army on the Qohaito Plateau was abandoned in the late-1979, when it had become no longer strategically important. The villagers who escaped to the escarpment began to return slowly after the soldiers left. Finally, after the successful military operations, the Ethiopian administration shifted its policy toward the civilian population. As the result, in 1980 the provincial administration in the area located in Adi Keih town invited the villagers for a public meeting. Then a new administrative system was installed, a militia was formed by the local people, and the villages were

reconstituted.

ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOOD: CASE STUDY OF FOOD CONSUMPTION

The last military raid that took place in 1979 and the consolidation of Ethiopian military rule as the result of the relative weakening of ELF and EPLF (for instance restriction of the operational zone of these movements in Northern part of Eritrea) catalyzed the sedentarization process of the inhabitants of Qohaito. The people began to resettle in their village and reconstruct their livelihood in a more sedentary way. The new administrative system installed after the military raids imposed, although unofficially and indirectly, restrictions on pastoral movement fundamentally in two ways. The first appears to be through the military obligation of the inhabitants because many of the survivors of the raid became militia and hence needed to be around the village regularly. Second, since the war had not been finally concluded, there remained a minor security threat for the stability of the new administration. As a result, starting from the early-1980s the gradual process of the contemporary sedentarization of the inhabitants began to consolidate, and economic diversification also was gaining attraction as a means of sedentarization.

The process of sedentarization in Qohaito accelerated in the immediate post-independence years, when most inhabitants began to return. Under the new land policy, proclaimed in 1994, land was distributed for residential lots, agricultural plot and pasture ground. In 1995, the first round of land allocation took place and any descendant of the village, who had fulfilled national obligations, was eligible for residential land, even if they live far from Qohaito. The agricultural and grazing lands, however, applied only to the individuals or families who lived in Safira. The number of individuals grew steadily, so in 1998 a second round allocation took place. Parallel to the increasing population, modern facilities were constructed. Safira School started at the primary level in the 1970s, but soon was upgraded to junior high and senior high school levels. Construction of a new mosque was completed in 1998. Similarly, a health station operates in the nearby village of Tokonda'e, which is only thirty minutes on foot from Qohaito.

During the author's fieldwork in 2013, Safira District Administration was already a home for 799 families with a total of 2929 individuals, scattered in 12 villages and hamlets. The administrative center of the region is the village of Safira, in which live 289 individuals in 87 families. Most inhabitants live permanently in the villages, and a few, usually one or two from each family, migrate seasonally to the Eastern Lowland for pasture and water. The rest combine various economic activities to sustain their daily needs. Now the villagers engage in diverse income generating activities, including agriculture, bee-keeping and poultry raising; small businesses, like retail shops, a grinding mill, snack bars and the tourism sector; public posts including teachers, health workers, administrators, and other jobs such as in construction and transport.

The multiplicity of economic activities practiced by the inhabitants of Qohaito can be studied from various perspectives. This research, however, focuses on the acquisition and consumption of food as an indicator of the degree of sedentarization and establishment of new means of living. This parameter is consonant with the index set by Ellis and Swift (1988) that presumes pastoral societies categorically are those who depend for more than 50 percent of their daily meals on livestock and dairy products. Food is considered in this research as the culmination of the total effort of livelihood activities, and thus shows how much the livelihood of the people is composed of pastoral and non-pastoral components. And, the society's dependence on non-local food products and/or food ingredients is the measure of the diversification and sedentarization levels of a society. To create a comparison and food consumption in Safira, the author divided the foods consumed into *primary* and *secondary* types. The detail description of the food types and their main and supplementary ingredients is summarized in Table 1.

Primary food types in the author's classification refer to meals where principal ingredient is locally produced. Normally, meals are cooked from different raw materials and ingredients in variable proportions. But this classification does not differentiate the details of each ingredient, rather it takes the source(s) of the main ingredient(s) of a particular meal. For example, porridge is classified as a primary food but the ingredients required for making are principally barley or sorghum flour, and butter, and secondarily hot water, salt, chili powder and sometimes honey. However, the typical ingredients of the porridge, without which the meal loses its value and meaning, are barley/sorghum flour or mixture of both, and butter. Thus disregarding the other minor ingredients, the author categorized porridge as a primary foodstuff because the flours and butter are produced locally, regardless of whether the consuming family produced it or acquired it through exchange.

Secondary food types on the other hand are those whose principal ingredient(s) is acquired from an external source; either from the market, government-supplied provisions or food aid. In the case of tomato sauce, for instance, the sauce is cooked by mixing onion, tomato, cooking oil and salt, and the sauce is served with either *injera*⁵⁾ or *kicha*⁶⁾. *Injera* is made entirely from varieties of sorghum or teff and sometimes wheat flours. But *kicha* can sometimes be a primary or secondary food, depending on the flour used. If the *kicha* is prepared from barley or mixture of barley and local variety of wheat, then it is categorized as primary. Otherwise, *kicha* made of sorghum, is categorized as secondary. In other words, the classification of food types is based solely on the identification of the main ingredient(s) of a particular meal. And the logic behind the dichotomy is to show and measure the dependence of villages on non-local foods, which by assumption are acquired by exchanging their product or by engaging in non-pastoral economic activities. The ultimate objective of dealing with the societies' dependence on non-local food is to generalize about the

creation of an alternative livelihood.

Table 1 Primary and Secondary Foods consumed during the field trips in Safira

Food Type	Meal Name	Main Ingredient/s	Supplementary Ingredients
Primary	Porridge	Barley/Sorghum flour and Butter	Chilli powder, salt, honey, buttermilk
	<i>Kicha</i>	Barley/Sorghum flour	—
	<i>Tihni</i>	Barley/Sorghum flour	—
	Meat Sauce	Beef/mutton/chicken	Onion, cooking oil, chilli powder, salt, butter, and sometimes tomato
	<i>Kolo</i> (supplementary)	Roasted barleycorn and wheat berry, sometimes with pea or groundnut	
	Prickly pears (supplementary)	Wild fruit collected in summer	—
	<i>Shiro</i>	Powder made from beans, peas or black-eyed peas	Onion, cooking oil, salt,
Secondary	<i>Injera</i>	Sorghum/teff flour	
	Cabbage Sauce	Cabbage	Onion, cooking oil, salt, and usually potatoes and carrots
	Lentil Sauce	Lentil grain	Onion, cooking oil, chili powder, salt and sometimes tomato/canned tomato paste
	Potato Sauce	Potato	Onion, cooking oil, chili powder, salt and sometimes tomato/canned tomato paste
	Tomato Sauce	Tomato	Onion, cooking oil, chili powder and salt
	Coffee	Coffee grain	Sugar
	Tea	Tea leaves	Sugar

Source: Author's fieldwork

The household survey on food consumption and dietary diversity was carried out in the summer of 2011 and the winter 2012. During both field trips the construction of Igila-Foro road that starts from Qohaito Highland reaching the coastal town of Foro created new job opportunities in the area. The construction of the Igila-Foro road has created a food-for-work project for villagers since 2008; where every participant gets 100 kg of sorghum per month in exchange for his/her labor. The project offered initially a total of 2000 job opportunities for the Qohaito Region, and all the districts shared equally these opportunities. Safira District Administration received a total of 490 quotas that must be divided among the villages in the district, according to their demographic proportion. Hence, these 11 villages under Safira District Administration had a total of 490 individual

employment opportunities. Safira District Administration has total of 799 families with 2929 individuals, and the village Safira has total of 87 families with 289 individuals. In Safira, 77 families participate in the project whereas the remaining 10 families are composed of elderly members who cannot work in the project.

Laborers work six days a week from 9 am until 11:30 am, but in the last field trip the construction of the road proceeded far from the village, and the workers had to travel more than three hours over the mountainous terrain to reach their work place. Saturday is holiday, because it is market day in Adi Keih town. In April 2012, the road construction was nearing completion, and the number of vacancies in the food-for-work project had declined sharply. More than three quarters of the vacancy had been cut, which left only 500 quotas for all villages in Qohaito. As a result, Safira village's quota declined to 130 from 490. After the employments reduction, women and unskilled laborers were fired from the project, while employment for masons was prioritized.

The method used in the household survey was a thorough documentation of the food types consumed by each family for seven consecutive days. The research adopted the methodology introduced by an anthropological study of food security by a research project initiated and led by Professor Eisei Kurimoto and his team at Osaka University. The method uses multivariate aspects of food consumption in a particular community, such as the source of food, means of acquisition, family composition and structure, seasonality, and other factors that influence the food consumption in a particular area. The main focus of this kind of research is to assess whether a particular community is food secure or not, and these cross-cutting variables of food consumption help to evaluate the food condition in a research community. The collection of ethnographic data used here was guided by this research orientation, and among the important features of this research practice is the collection of bi- or multi-seasonal data. To fulfill this essential component, research the trips were made to be in summer and winter.

Five families were selected in the village of Safira for this research through a combination of systematic and random statistical sampling method. First, the author used a complete list of the families in the village, and then calculated the interval at which he would have to select his sample. In Safira, there are 288 households and the author divided this number by five to yield an interval value, i.e. 58. In the next step, the author started randomly from the half of the serial number in the list, and the final sample list was derived as; i (initial number i.e., 144), $i + 58$, $i + 2(58)$, $i + 3(58)$ and $i + 4(58)$.

A detailed description and record of each meal in the selected families was collected in the household survey. Technical problems emerged during the course of data collection regarding the ability to collect the dietary data for all the families simultaneously. It proved to be difficult, and as a result the collection for two families at one time became fairly manageable, and the research proceeded that way. The fundamental objective set in the household survey was to compare the consumption of primary and secondary food types in the selected families, to

assess the degree of dependence of the village on non-local food. The following table presents the statistical summary of the consumption of primary and secondary food types during the study period.

Table 2 shows in most meal times during which most of the families consumed secondary foods. The table contains the aggregate data of primary and secondary food types consumed in Safira in the research days. As mentioned above although the data for the five families was collected on different days, all corresponding days of the observation were correlated to facilitate a comparison. Secondary foods dominated the consumption frequency, and sometimes in overwhelming proportion. The percentile of primary food to secondary foods, as shown in figure 2, serially from day 1 to day 7 is 27–72 percent, 26–73 percent,

Table 2 Comparison of Primary and Secondary foods consumed in Safira during the research

	Day 1		Day 2		Day 3		Day 4		Day 5		Day 6		Day 7	
	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S
Family A	1	6	2	3	1	4	1	6	1	4	—	7	1	6
Family B	1	6	2	3	1	6	3	5	1	6	2	4	—	7
Family C	2	3	3	3	1	5	2	5	—	4	1	5	2	5
Family D	2	5	1	6	—	4	3	4	2	5	1	2	1	4
Family E	3	4	1	4	2	1	2	1	2	4	—	5	3	4
Total	9	24	7	19	5	20	11	21	6	23	4	23	7	26

Source: Author’s fieldwork

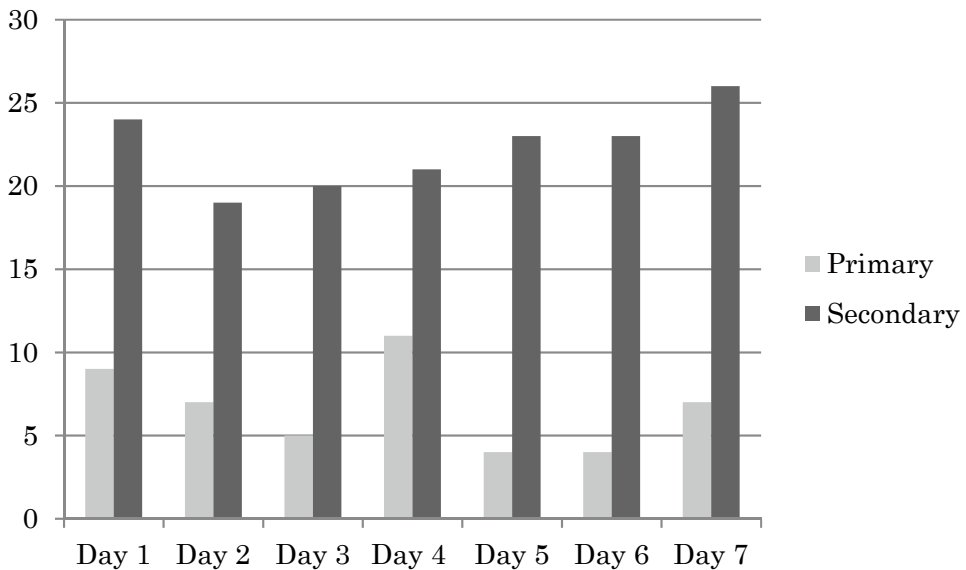


Figure 2 Aggregate of primary and secondary foods consumed in Safira during the research
Source: Author’s fieldwork

25–75 percent, 34–65 percent, 21–79 percent, 14–85, percent and 21–78 percent, respectively.

The huge dependence on non-local food, meaning secondary, exemplified the society's degree of economic diversification and the trend of their sedentarization. The inhabitants of Qohaito acquired the raw materials of the secondary foods during the research partly from government provisions in the food-for-work project, and partly from the market in the nearby town of Adi Keih, which is inhabited by Tigrinya and Saho ethnic groups, and served as a provincial capital until 1995, when it became just a sub-zone (administratively lower than before) in the new administrative system introduced that year. Yet, the town continued growing with new residential complexes, public and business institutions flourishing. A recent addition to the constant infrastructural growth of the town is the construction of the College of Arts and Social Sciences.

Every market day people from Adi Keih and the surrounding villages, including Qohaito, travel to the market to sell, buy and exchange their commodities. The livestock market operates only on Saturdays, and during these days cattle, sheep, goat, donkeys and camels are transacted. The vegetable, fruit, grain, outfit and plow tool market is open on both market days, and people transact in open space, enclosed lots reserved by the municipality, and in shops. Men and women of Safira carry their merchandise either on their back or by pack animals, and sell them in the market. Currently, the town of Adi Keih hosts a largely one-way-traffic with respect to commerce, because it depends heavily on foodstuffs brought from other towns or cities. The inhabitants of Qohaito take commodities such as eggs, dairy products, chickens, honey, livestock, bead ornaments, and some spices to Adi Keih, and they bring back various foodstuffs obtained in exchange.

The diversification of income generation activities and the exact contribution of each sector in the transformation of the society require detailed research separate from the present one. Previously, Qohaito's unique tradition of beekeeping and honey production (including wild) attracted some researchers. Moreno Vergari and Roberta Vergari conducted an extensive and detailed research on honey production in the villages of Eyyago, Safira, Damhina, Tisha and Mako, in 2009, as part of the *Atlas of the Traditional Material Culture of the Saho Project*. They studied the seasonal production of honey in the area and documented the rich lexical data of this business. They said, "...beekeeping is one of the traditional productive activities for which the Saho population is well known. Even though not produced on a large scale, there still are several people who engage in honey production, either for their personal consumption or for commercial purposes" (Vergari and Vergari 2009: 61). The diversification of economic activities and its relationship with the process of sedentarization of the people is an impetus for the author's future research plans.

Returning to the balance between primary and secondary foods, the impact of the heavy dependence on secondary food types in Safira grossly is understood and

felt by the inhabitants as a general shift in the traditional seasonal rotation of food types. According to the author's informants, the society's food consumption tradition was based on an annual cyclical flow of three seasonal food types. In other words, the seasonal availability of food in the locality divides a year into three dietary seasons; summer of the highland, summer of the lowland, and winter. The duration of summer of the highland is from June to October, Summer of the lowland from November to February, and winter from March to mid June. Before the advent of sedentarization the society customarily consumed limited food types that were easily accessible in the area. At present, however, the sedentarization process, the diversification of economy and access to non-local food types has diluted the seasonal division of food habits in Qohaito.

During the author's research trips, much of the traces of the existence of the traditional food cycle remained largely invisible or had disappeared. Foods eaten in summer and winter, except for their intensity and frequency, are more or less similar. Beles is an exception because this wild fruit ripens only in summer. Other food types, however, both primary and secondary, were still being consumed for much of the year.

CONCLUSION

Sedentarization and the creation of new livelihood strategies reinforce each other, and the key component in the process of alternative livelihood for former pastoral societies is the tendency to diversify the economic bases of the society. Many anthropologists and others follow Ellis and Swift (1988) in labeling a society as pastoral where more than 50 percent of its economic subsistence relies on dairy products, and 25-50 percent for agro-pastoralists. This quantitative figure is useful as an index to assess the process of sedentarization and alternative livelihood in Safira, and diversification is the entry point in the quest for a new mode of livelihood. The food consumption case in Safira opens a small window to view the degree of transformation, and that the society depends heavily on non-pastoral food items confirms that it has travelled long way along the track toward a fully sedentarized life. A total of 205 meals were consumed by the five families during the author's research, of which 23.9 percent were primary and the remainder (76.09 percent) secondary. Thus, the high level of disparity between the primary and secondary indicates a successful and sustainable sedentarization process in Safira.

Andrew Smith (1992) noted in his investigation of the origin and spread of pastoralism in Africa that anthropologists and historians tried to project their data back in time to determine how early the colonial period changed traditional social and economic patterns (Smith 1992). Similarly, the paper attempted to historically analyze and ethnographically prove the fundamental factors accounting for the transformation of pastoral societies to a sedentary life strategy. The Italian colonial period plowed the distant seed of sedentarization in the Qohaito region by

regulating pastoral movement, introducing new land policies, and creating new job opportunities. The postcolonial conflict accelerated the process of sedentarization to a fuller scale by abruptly halting the free mobility of pastoralists, and food consumption among other parameters in the areas illustrates the permanence of settlement.

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NOTES

- 1) This article is based on the firsthand accounts gathered during successive phases of ethnographic fieldworks carried out among the Saho inhabitants of the Qohaito Plateau. Since the summer of 2011, the author had been conducting constant several-weeks-long field research in the area principally for his postgraduate dissertation work, and secondly for other research projects that with which he is affiliated. The preliminary field trip was conducted between August and October, 2011 focusing on the ceremonial exchange of body adornments, social and tribal organization, lineage study, food security issues, settlement pattern and other aspects of socio-cultural organization of the society. In March and April, 2012, the second round of fieldwork focused on examining the seasonal pattern of herding, and nutritional and dietary aspects of the inhabitants. The third fieldwork followed in December, 2013 and January, 2014, and concerned chiefly the ethno-history of the inhabitants of Qohaito, impact of the Eritrean war of independence, and the settlement history of the area. Supplementary fieldwork was also carried out for two weeks in the United Arab Emirates in March 2014 among Saho migrant workers in the kingdom. At present, the field research is underway as of September, 2014 studying several aspects of the livelihood of the people with a greater focus on material culture and material relations in the area.

The author had been engaged in presenting part of his research findings since the inception of the research in workshops, symposia, conferences and other academic gatherings like the International Symposium on Anthropological Study of Food Security held in December, 2013 in Osaka University; Development and Pastoralists (panel 43) in the joint congress of International Union of Ethnological and Anthropological Sciences, and Japanese Association of Socio-Cultural Anthropology held in May, 2014 in Chiba, Japan. This paper is extracted mainly from the latter conference, and the title of the presentation exactly matches with the title of this article. Nonetheless, reports from other presentations are also included in sections where their reference is necessary.

- 2) The Eritrean war of independence continued for 30 years, from 1961. The war was fought against the Emperor Haile Sellasie I of Ethiopia and his successor – the military government that ruled from 1974 to 1991. The EPLF armed group led the war for independence, and in 1991 it liberated the entire country. In 1993 a UN observed referendum was conducted, and 99.98 percent of the population voted for independence.
- 3) Here emerges an important limitation of the research. Since the Qohaito pastoralists' sedentarization process operates locally, i.e., without the government's active involvement, it could have been a wonderful opportunity to compare it with other government-organized settlement or resettlement programs and their outcome. Unfortunately, there had been no large-scale pastoral settlement schemes in Eritrea because of relatively short postcolonial period and the sedentarization of pastoralists had less priority compared with other related needs of the country. Other segments of society, who were in more needy situations, such as refugees, were given priority to reconstruct their livelihoods in the postcolonial period. At the time of the overthrow of the Derg (which marked the independence of the nation) it was estimated that nearly 100,000 internally displaced (IDPs), 95,000 ex-combatants and nearly 500,000 returnees would have to be resettled in Eritrea (Kibreab 2001). Hence, this paper's discussion is limited to the scope and degree of economic diversification of the inhabitants of Qohaito, which leads to their permanence of settlement or reduction of their seasonal migration.
- 4) The Axumite Empire arose in the highlands of Eritrea and Ethiopia, and the coastal lowlands of Eritrea in the 1st Century AD. The empire reached its apogee in the 4th and 5th Century AD, when the empire became a regional and international power by conquering territories in Central Sudan and the Arabian Peninsula. By the 8th and 9th centuries the empire began a gradual decline and soon it collapsed.
- 5) Injera, a soft and spongy bread-like food.
- 6) Kicha, a thick disc-shaped bread.

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