

Ethiopian Village Studies

(Designed and edited by Philippa Bevan and Alula Pankhurst)

Geblen

Subhsaesie Woreda

Tigray

researched by

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Forward

All the reports in this series have been constructed from a number of sources:

- A background paper on aspects of the local culture in which the Peasant Association is located, based mainly on secondary sources;
- Some rapid assessment material collected in the PA by site managers and enumerators whose chief business was administering 3 rounds of a household economic survey which covered a whole year of economic activity;
- A field visit to the site by an anthropologist who took a draft village profile for correction and supplementation. In a few cases the profiles were not ready before the field visit was done, but the same questions were followed up;
- A questionnaire completed by the enumerators at the end of the survey;
- A community economic survey administered by the site managers.

A large number of people has been involved in the construction of these profiles. Most important are the people in the villages who answered questions, raised issues we had not thought of, and provided hospitality for our fieldworkers. The site managers, enumerators, and anthropologists played a vital role, but are too numerous to mention by name here; the names of some are on the title pages of the profiles. Etalem Melaku-Tjirongo and Joanne Moores constructed the majority of the first drafts of the profiles. Sandra Fullerton Joireman provided important assistance in the preparation of the final drafts. Backup in terms of translating, editing, word processing, mapmaking and general support were provided by Tina Barnard, Ziggy Bevan, Girma Getahun, Haile Redai, Sarah Smith, and Ruth Tadesse. Our economist colleagues at Oxford (Shukri Ahmed, Stefan Dercon, and Pramila Krishnan) and Addis Ababa (particularly Bereket Kebede, Getinet Astatke, and Mekonnen Tadesse) provided ideas and conversation from economics which stimulated our thought processes. The administration in the Economics Department at Addis Ababa University was extremely supportive.

Profiles are available for the following villages:

<i>Tigray:</i>	Geblen	<i>Gojjam:</i>	Yetmen
	Harresaw	<i>North Shewa:</i>	Debre Birhan environs
<i>Wollo:</i>	Shumsheha		Dinki
<i>Arssi:</i>	Korodegaga	<i>Gurage:</i>	Imdibir Haya Gasha
<i>South Shewa:</i>	Sirbana Godeti	<i>Wolayitta:</i>	Gara Godo
	Turufe Kecheme	<i>Kembata:</i>	Aze Debo'a
<i>Gamo:</i>	Do'oma	<i>Gedeo:</i>	Adado
<i>Harerghe:</i>	Adele Keke		

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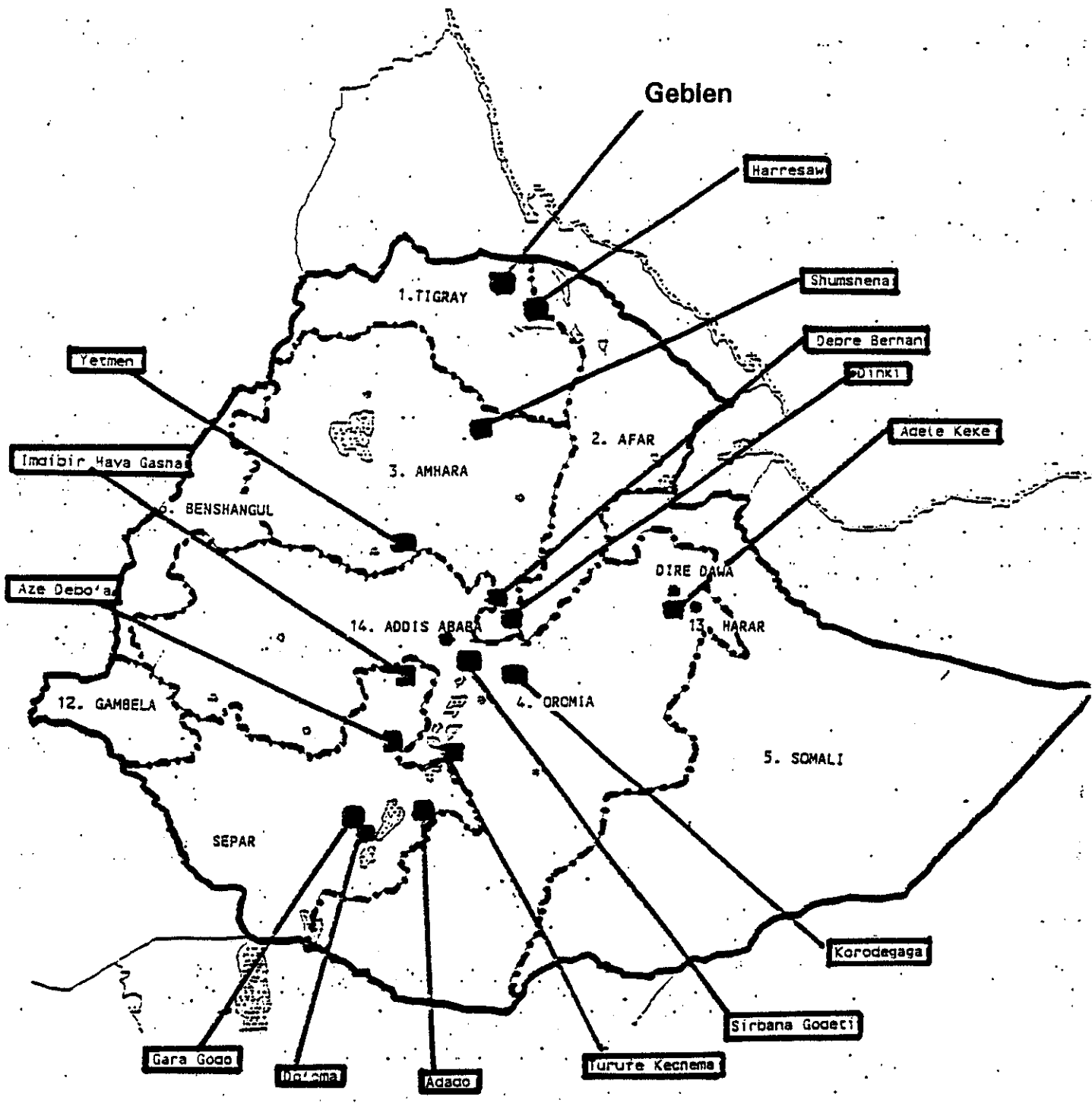
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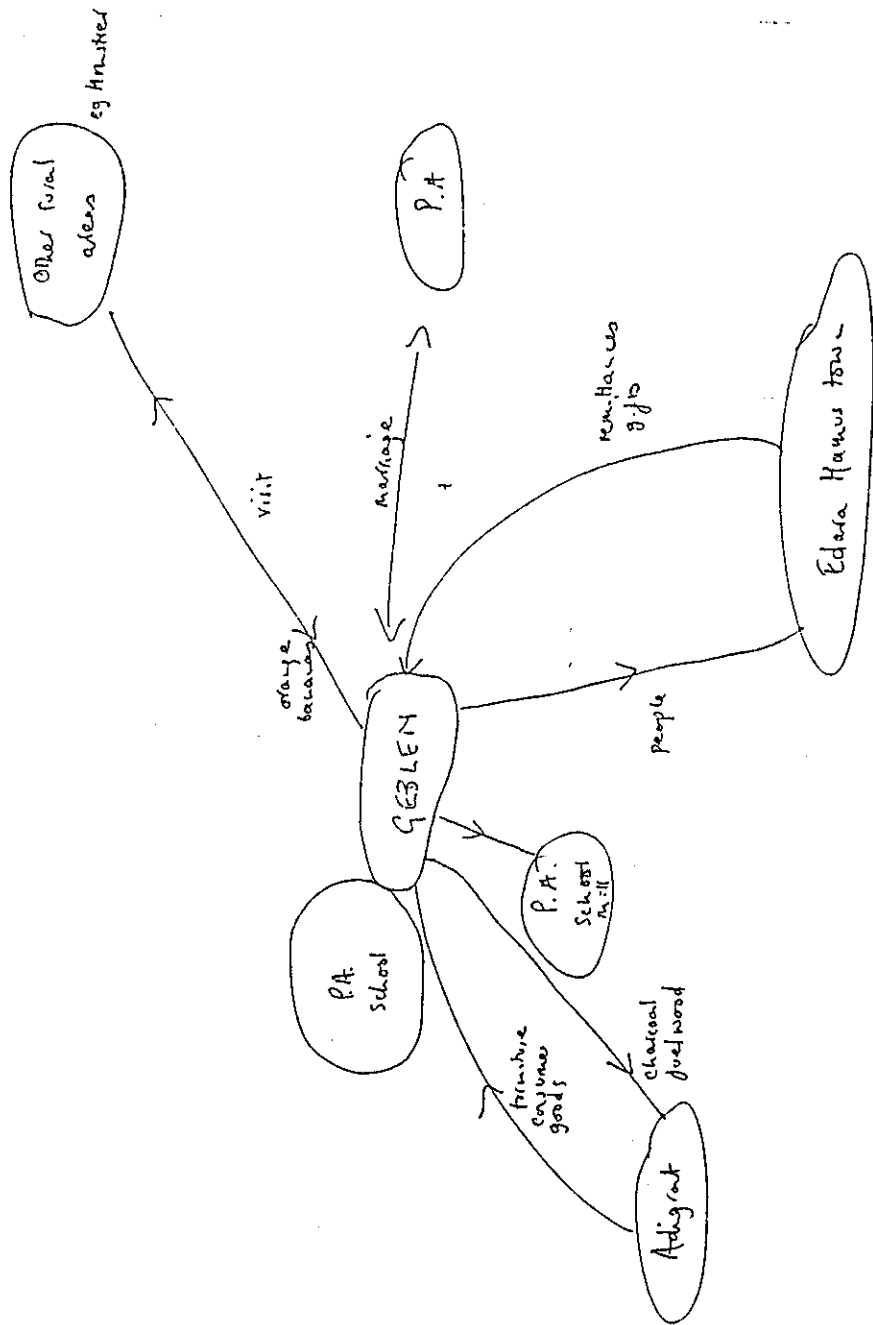
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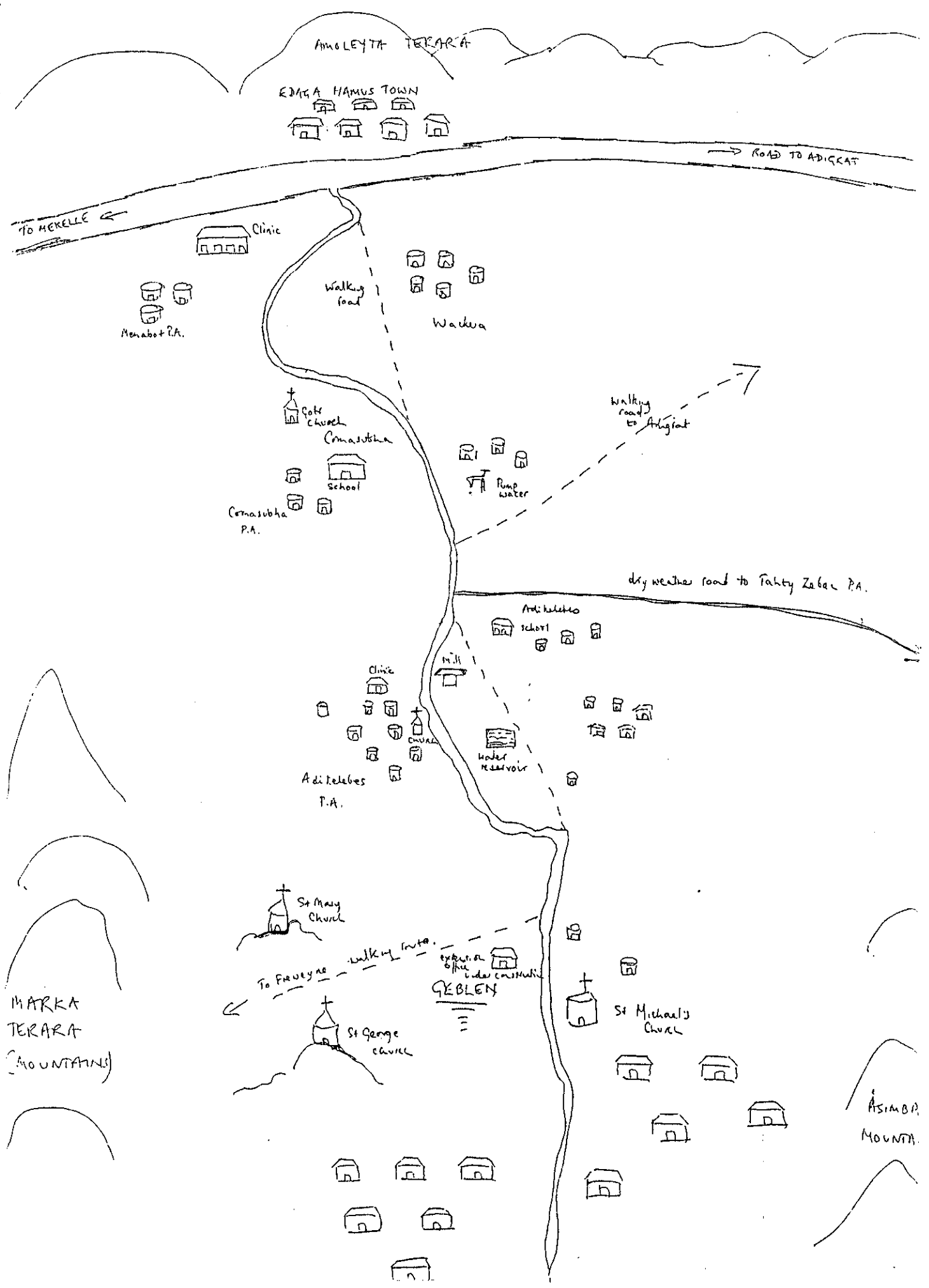
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ASIMBA MOUNTAIN

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1. Locating the Site in Time and Place

Geography and Population

Geblen is located in Subhasaesie *Woreda*, Eastern Zonal administration of Tigray with its capital at Adigrat (the capital of the former Agame *Awraja*). Subhasaesie is one of the 15 *Woredas* that make up the Eastern Zonal administration of Tigray (*Misrakawi Zoba*). The *Woreda* comprises 16 *tabia* and 56 *kushet* and the estimations of the population include 45,087 and 56,945 in 1993. The nearest towns are the capital of the *Woreda* Edagahamus (about 20km from the site depending where in Geblen one starts) and Adigrat (18km). Edagahamus is named after the former market day; "Edaga" means "market" and "Hamus" means "Thursday" and it means "Thursday Market". Edagahamus is situated 878 kilometres north of Addis Ababa on the main Addis Ababa-Asmara road. Geblen consists of four *kushet* namely Welae-labur (with 6 sub-units), Ereta (8 units), Kaslien (7 units), and Semuydaga (9 units). These four *kushet* are fairly large and are quite apart from each other, but are served by a single church, namely *Inda Michael Geblen* (Saint Michael's Church of Geblen). One report says that Geblen has a population of 2,637 in 675 households; another that the total population is 2216 (1048 males and 1168 females) in 853 households, and another that it was 2,437 in 1993. Most households have access to about ¼ hectare of land. About 30 people are landless. Almost all households are registered with the PA. There are a few non-registered and landless households who are mostly ex-soldiers, ex-fighters, displaced and refugees who returned after the 1990 land allocation. Geblen is the smallest village in the area.

Geblen is at an altitude of approximately 2700m and can be classified as a predominantly *woyna dega* area, although two *kushet* (Kaslien and Erata) fall under the *kolla* classification.

Climate

Table 1. The Seasons and Associated Farming Activities in Geblen

Months of the year ¹	English Equivalent	Name of Season	Weather conditions	Farming Activity
Sene Hamle Nehase	June July August	<i>Kremti</i> (main rains)	Rainy (mild temp.)	Planting (short cycle crops)
Meskerem Tikimti Hidar	September October November	<i>Qewii</i>	Dry (cold, windy)	Harvesting
Tahsas Tiri Lekatit	December January February	<i>Hagay</i>	Dry (Hot, windy)	Seedbed Preparation (anything before sowing)
Megabit Mazya Ginbot	March April May	<i>Sugum</i> or <i>Azmera</i> (Short or little rains)	Rainy (Hot, windy)	Planting (long cycle crops)

Source: interviews with peasants

¹There is a difference in the number of days in the months of the year between the Gregorian calendar and the Ethiopian calendar. Each of the months in the Ethiopian calendar except Pagumen has 30 days. Pagumen is a short thirteenth month of 5-6 days between Nehase and Meskerem.

Rainfall is erratic and inadequate. Peasants divide the year into four seasons of three months each. Each season is a period of three months marked by climatic conditions (dry or rainy) and a particular farming activity (seedbed preparation, planting, and harvesting).

Owing to the absence of a meteorological station in the area, it is hard to tell what the average temperature in Geblen on a *Qewii* day is. However, informants claim that Geblen gets very cold during the *Qewii* season. The cold does not cause serious problems to humans. But informants claim that it causes problems to vegetables, that is, the flowers of the vegetables fall so that the plants do not produce fruit.

During the rainy season the *tabia* of Geblen is cut off from the nearest town - Adigrat. It takes 3 hours' walk to reach Adigrat (the zonal capital) while it takes 4 hours to reach Edagahamus (the *Woreda* capital). Geblen is cut off from Adigrat and Edagahamus by a river called *May Nefay* or *Timaza* and a bigger river called *Waarat* or *Midimar*. These rivers cut off Geblen only during the rainy season when they flood after rainfalls. However, it should be noted that the *tabia* is not cut-off for a long time - usually rain in Tigray falls in the form of heavy showers and lasts a short time and thus the floods do not last long.

Informants say that a wind that blows from the west during the *Hagay* season causes health hazards to people. Sometimes it kills people, but usually it makes them ill. The sickness which is caused by this wind is called *Equb*. *Equb* is a rotating credit association that covers each member in turn and the sickness is so named because it is an epidemic and each member of the community catches this disease turn by turn just as each member of the *equb* takes the credit in turn.

Production

Tigrayans are predominantly sedentary agriculturalists and subsist mainly on the plough cultivation of cereal crops. Animal husbandry plays a secondary role and cattle are used as a source of milk, meat, and as draught animals. Sheep and goats are raised for their meat and milk, and equines are used for carrying loads. The ecological setting in which the Tigrayans farm is dry with little surface water and subject to irregular rainfall. The population of Geblen subsists mainly on the plough cultivation of cereal crops. The chief subsistence crop in the area is barley. Apart from this, maize, *tef*, red sorghum, lentils, and linseed are also grown in the area.

Besides these annual crops, a perennial plant locally called *beles* is widely cultivated in eastern Tigray in general and in Geblen in particular. *Beles* (known as the pear cactus) is used for human food, animal fodder, fences, and for sale. Vegetables, such as cabbages, onions, pepper and spices are also grown but on a very small-scale and only by a few households. The other production activity in which Geblen rural households are involved and which is an important means of subsistence, next to crop production, is animal husbandry. Cattle, sheep and goats, equines, chickens, and honeybees are kept for different purposes.

In addition to the two major means of subsistence (that is, crop production and animal husbandry), there are other supplementary sources of subsistence - trading, off-farm wage employment, food aid, and remittances. Not all households are engaged in trading but most households engage in some trade though income from it does not make up an important proportion of the income. Households may also bring in cash through wage labour in town or agriculturally productive areas but this is not very significant since there is no industrial base to Tigray's economy to provide employment. There were no industrial plants (except a small flour mill in Meqele) until a few years ago. Most rural households are not food self-sufficient and receive food aid. Households also receive remittances from relatives in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and from relatives working as civil servants or traders throughout the country.

The quality of the soil at Geblen is *tef*. *Belg* is not applicable in the village although it is said that the *meher* season goes from March to November. All harvests in the last 5 years have been insufficient due to shortage of rain, particularly in 1989 and 1992. There was no *meher* harvest in 1993 due to rain failure. This year's *meher* harvest was better than usual since the rain was better and on time.

The rural economy of Tigray in general and Geblen in particular is mainly one of subsistence in which the produce is largely consumed by the household. This does not mean that all that is produced is necessarily consumed by the household. It only means that the primary aim of production is consumption, not sale. Farming households sell a portion of their produce, such as live animals, animal products like butter and hides and skins, and grain to buy manufactured goods such as articles of clothing, kerosene, soaps, needles, razor blades, shoes, agricultural products such as grain², coffee, pepper, spices, live animals, and to pay taxes.

Infrastructure

The village is linked to the nearby town by a dirt track road. There is no school or health facility in the village, nor is there a marketplace. The nearest market is 3½ hours walk from Geblen. There are major grain and livestock marketing problems.

Social structure

The Tigrayans are numerically the most important ethnic group in Tigray and constitute more than 90% of the population. However, there are also pockets of non-Tigray peoples in Tigray. Geblen is one of the few communities in Tigray inhabited by the Irob, a sub-tribe of the Saho (a Cushitic group who also inhabit parts of Eritrea) as well as Tigrayans. The Tigrayans are the majority in 2 *kushet* and the Saho the majority in the other two. Saho is the main language spoken in the village. Many people speak Tigrigna. Amharic is not spoken. The Irob espouse both the major world religions - Christianity and Islam. However, the majority of the Irob in Geblen are Christians. The great majority of the Christians espouse Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity while a handful of them are Catholics. The *baito* (elected local council) officials of the *tabia* of Geblen estimated that the Christians and the Muslims make up 65 and 35% of the population of the *tabia* respectively.

The Christians and the Muslims mix with each other socially. For example, both Christians and Muslims become members of *idir* (mutual aid and burial association), celebrate each other's religious festivals, and attend each other's life crisis ceremonies. The fieldworker met two Muslims in a Christian household who came to partake in the celebration of the local church's annual celebration. Besides mixing socially, Christian and Muslim households also enter into the various indigenous economic arrangements for exchanging land, labour, and oxen. The fact that Muslims make labour and money contributions for the construction or repair of a church and vice versa shows that there is a considerable degree of mutual interaction and tolerance among the followers of the two religions. Besides this, the members of the two religions can also intermarry, though one of the spouses must change his or her religion.

Though the Christians and Muslims share some customs, values, and beliefs, some of these vary by religion. Thus, one can say that the community is not tightly-knit or coherent. There has been no religious conflict in the community.

There are many people who were displaced from Eritrea and returned to Geblen and about six demobilized *Derg* soldiers, and returnees from resettlement sites in the South and Western Ethiopia. Due to the ban on land redistributions by the TGE since 1991, these people have not received farm and housing plots and they are facing considerable hardship. These returnees are forced to live with their parents or relatives.

History

From the beginning Tigray did not produce surplus crops. Livestock were sold to buy grain. Tigray has

²Most farming households do not produce enough food for themselves and, thus, are buyers of food grain as well as sellers.

suffered considerably from wars, drought and famine. Elders talked about 7 years of continuous locust attack on crops in Tigray. In Tigray drought has been a recurring phenomenon and famine cyclical (Gebru, 1984). Records show that Tigray was hit by 6 famines in the 19th century and 5 in the 20th. The 1984/5 famine, combined with war, forced 200,000 Tigrayans to migrate to Sudan. In addition a quarter of a million died and up to one million were displaced (REST, 1993). The following wars were fought between the coming of Emperor Theodros II and World War II:

- Between 1867-1868, there was a British expedition against Theodros II;
- There was an Egyptian invasion in the mid-1880s;
- In 1889 Dervishes from the Sudan invaded which led to the death of Emperor Yohannes IV in battle;
- In 1895-1896 the first invasion by the Italians occurred;
- The second Italian invasion took place between 1936-1941;
- In 1943, there was a peasant revolt which seized Meqele, the regional capital. The revolt was put down by the British Military Mission and RAF planes from Aden, which bombed Meqele on a market day (REST 1993: 4).

The most important events which characterised Tigray during the last 20 years are recurrent droughts and a seventeen years civil war, a forcible resettlement scheme, the land reform, the introduction of the *baito* system and the institution of new laws known as *Sirit*. Three droughts - 1974/75, 1984/85, and 1994/95 hit Tigray in general and Geblen in particular. The first two droughts caused famines while the third was controlled. The two droughts which caused famines claimed human and animal lives. In 1984 people migrated as far as the Sudan.

Tigray was devastated by seventeen years of civil war. A year after the outbreak of the Ethiopian Revolution in 1975, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) began an armed resistance against the central government. From the start of the revolution, Geblen was administered by three organizations: EPRP, TPLF and the *Derg*. Both EPRP and TPLF existed in Tigray in the 1970's where they later fought and TPLF took over.

The military government (the *Derg*) backed by the former USSR's military hardware and expertise, acted fiercely and launched successive military offensives against the TPLF. Aerial bombardments of villages and towns were a daily phenomenon and even Meqele, the regional capital, was bombarded in 1989. During the seventeen years civil war, government troops used to make frequent sweeps not only to try to fight the TPLF, but also to ravage the rural communities. They stripped individuals and houses of all valuable articles, burnt houses, slaughtered and/or confiscated livestock, and killed people. One man said that the *Derg's* motto was "kill the two-legged; Eat the four-legged!". The whole population of Tigray was described as potential supporters of the TPLF and it seems that to eliminate the TPLF, it was considered necessary to weaken the people of Tigray to force the TPLF into submission. This was reflected by one of the top officials of the *Derg* who was in charge of the region under the state of emergency declared by the *Derg*. In one of his official speeches he stated; "To destroy all the fish in a sea, you need to dry the sea." The site is within range of former base areas of the EPRP (Assimba) and the TPLF (Marwa) and as a result there were some casualties when the *Derg's* military forces clashed with these groups.

Most of what little infrastructure existed before the war, including schools, clinics, bridges and housing, was destroyed. The aerial bombardments, including cluster and napalm bombs and the use of sophisticated Soviet-supplied armaments, have caused widespread destruction of homes, crops and livestock and the displacement of people. These bombardments caused loss of life and destruction of property, and disrupted socio-economic activity. For example, markets and most economic activity had to take place at night for fear of bombing raids. On June 22, 1988, the market town of Hauzien (not very far from Geblen) was bombarded for 6 hours by Migs and helicopter gunships and over 2,200 people were killed. Government soldiers were left to live off the land in Tigray because the soldiers were many times short of provisions as the rebels cut the supply lines. The site was not affected directly by the war but it was indirectly affected due to the banning of movement to marketplaces and other places. Very few men were conscripted for the army by the *Derg* but there was substantial conscription in the area by the TPLF. The number is not known but many people up to the age of 40 joined; most of

them have not returned yet. Apart from government conscription and forced resettlement the *Derg* took measures not to establish schools. People from the village were imprisoned, banned from marketplaces and fined during the *Derg*.

As thousands of peasants, most of whom were youngsters, either joined the fighting groups or migrated in search of a way to survive, a large part of the workforce was removed from productive work. This obviously had dire economic and social consequences.

Another major event which affected Geblen was resettlement. During the 1984/85 famine in Tigray, the *Derg* launched a forcible resettlement scheme. The people of Geblen were called to come to Edaghamus for food aid distribution. Then, government soldiers rounded up those who came to resettle them in the South and Southwestern parts of the country. All the people of Geblen were taken to the resettlement sites, except 7 households who did not go to Edaghamus to receive aid because they were suspicious. According to informants, lots of people were shot dead by government soldiers as they tried to escape from the round-ups, the heavily-guarded military camps where they were kept until they moved to the resettlement sites, and as they jumped from moving vehicles. Many were also killed by wild animals and robbers as they tried to return home from the resettlement sites avoiding the main highways for fear of being discovered. People are still returning from the resettlement sites, for example, 15 people returned in 1994. Those who returned after the last round of land redistribution in 1991 have not received land because the TGE imposed a ban on land redistribution since July 1991. As a result, they are facing problems. The *baito* officials say that these people are given priority during food aid distributions.

The other major event which affected Geblen and Tigray in general is the land reform. Prior to the land reform, Geblen had two land tenure systems - *risti* and *chiguraf-sehabo*. Access to land under the *risti* system was based on descent and inheritance and access to land under the *chiguraf-sehabo* system was based on the principle of permanent residence in the community. Land redistribution was first conducted by the *Derg* in 1977. But a year later, the TPLF took over the area, invalidated the *Derg's* land redistribution, and sponsored its own land reform. Through the land reform, rural land was made national property and households were granted equal use rights.

The land reform had far-reaching impacts. Prior to the reform access to land, particularly *risti* land, was constrained by a number of factors. Women in particular were victims in this respect. The reform altered the inter-household and intra-household relationships in a number of ways impossible to describe here. For example, descent ceased to be a condition of access to land, particularly *risti* land, and land ceased to serve as dowry.

The final event was the introduction of the *baito* system and the institution of new laws (*sirit*) or legal reforms. Prior to the introduction of the *baito* system by the TPLF, local administration in Tigray was carried out through appointed individuals and the tenure of office in local administration was a privileged tenure and only members of "noble birth" were legitimate to hold such offices. For example, a village which was the lowest unit of state administration was administered by a *chika shum* (village headman) an office which was hereditary in the sense that it passed from fathers to sons. In general, before the introduction of the *baito*, there was no elected system of local administration in Tigray, bar the Wajirat (a *woreda* in southern Tigray) *qenchi* (equality) system. The *baitos*, however, are elected local councils and all adult members have the right to elect and be elected for *baito* membership. Even women, who were totally excluded from local administration, were enfranchised and have the right to be elected for *baito* membership. The *baito* system, thus, represents a complete break with tradition.

But more important was the institution of new laws through the *baito*. The *baito* established *sirit* and ordinances. The laws were passed by the general assembly of the *tabia*. The *sirit* contained a number of provisions some of which are basically different from what has ever been done before.

Elders (*Shimagile*) play very important roles in Tigray Society, in the past as well as at the present. However, *Shimagile* have lost some of their traditional roles eroded by recent political changes such as the introduction of the *baito* system and the land reform. Elders are knowledgeable about the genealogies of families and this knowledge was key in relation to the *risti* land tenure system during the pre-1975 period. Rights of access to *risti* land were based on descent, traced through all genealogical

ties of male and female lines. This meant that there were always many potential claimants to a plot of *risti* land. The elders' knowledge of the genealogies of families was used by individuals to make and/or defend claims to *risti* lands. At present, elders have no role in this respect because the *risti* land tenure no longer exists. However, this knowledge of the elders is used, in the past as well as today, to decide marriageable categories, especially in terms of lineal "purity" and genealogical distance (custom demands exogamy up to the seventh generation). That is to say that elders are consulted to authenticate marriageable categories.

Elders also had key roles in the other land tenure system - *chiguraf sehabo* or land-share system. Under this tenure, an ad hoc committee of village elders elected by the village people conducted periodic redistributions amongst all de facto residents. The elders have retained this role. The TPLF's land reform has made all rural land national property and it was periodically redistributed by village elders elected by the general assembly of the people of the *tabia*.

Traditionally and at present, elders play a central role in maintaining good relationships between people by reconciling families and individuals who have quarrelled or who hold grudges against each other. The *Shimagile* may reconcile matters before or after they are brought to a court of law or to the *baito* courts. *Shimagile* used to play important roles as witnesses at the making of marriage contracts and wills. *Shimagile* have lost their roles as witnesses to marriage contracts with the introduction of the *baito* system. However, *Shimagile* still act as witnesses for wills.

Ad hoc committees of elected village elders used to represent their communities and were sent to lodge complaints against local authorities and to appeal against high tax payments on behalf of the people. They also used to deal with neighbouring communities over grazing areas, springs, etc. The role of elders as representatives of their communities has been replaced by the *baito*.

The people of Geblen suffered from considerable hardship during the 1984/85 famine in Tigray. The famine coupled with the *Derg's* forcible resettlement scheme caused a double tragedy. During this famine, people died from hunger and an epidemic and they lost their livestock through death and forced sale and they have not restocked yet. According to informants, Muslim members of the community were more affected than the Christians. This was because the Muslims rely, more than the Christians, on livestock production rather than on crop production.

2. Seasonal Activities and Events

There are a number of calendars to be found in the Appendix. These notes are supplementary:

As was pointed out earlier, there are four seasons of three months each. Each season is marked by specific weather conditions (dry or rainy) and a particular farming activity. Geblen and most of Tigray experiences a single rainfall season called *Kremti*, known in the literature as the main or long rains. *Kremti* rains normally fall from early June to mid September. The *Sugum* or *Azmera* rains, also known in the literature as short or little rains, normally fall from March to May. Peasants plant long maturing crops (maize, red sorghum, and *tef* during the short rains season. These long maturing crops are not harvested during this same season, but during *Qewii* (the harvesting season) together with the short-maturing crops (barley, lentils, linseed) that are planted during the main rains season. While the short rains are important in providing drinking water for both animals and humans and growing grass for animals, they are insufficient for crop production. Ploughing is carried out during *Megabit* for *tef*, during *Sane* for barley, and during *Genbot* for maize. Planting starts with the rains that generally begin in early to mid-June. Weeding for all crops is carried out in *Hamle* and harvesting begins with the cutting of the first crop in early October and ends in late December. Most crops have a very short optimal period after which each day of delay in planting increases the risk that the crop will fail because of insufficient amounts of water.

During the *Hagay* (dry) season seedbed preparation is performed. The traditional metal tipped plough does not break up and turn over the earth sufficiently and this has forced multiple ploughing of plots before sowing. Although there is not too much agricultural work involved during the dry season, peasants are not relieved of agricultural work. Thus, though the degree varies according to the season,

farming means all year round toil. However, the *Hagay* season is a less busy season and peasants are engaged in off-farm income earning activities which may involve seasonal or casual wage-labour or trading. During this season peasants go to urban centres to work as daily labourers. Rural households also buy and sell agricultural or manufactured products for the purpose of earning supplementary income.

The demand for money becomes very high mostly during planting season. The source of credit are mostly relatives and friends.

There are a number of diseases that affect Geblen. These diseases, except for one (flu or the "*equb*") are not specific to Geblen. The diseases that prevail have no specific calendars. However, the "*equb*" and malaria show some seasonality. As was said, the *equb* occurs during the dry season, particularly during the months of December and February. Similarly, people fall sick from malaria during the main rainy season, namely June to August and the first month of the harvesting season (i.e., September).

The river increases during the rainy season and lasts until October. However, the springs are more or less steady.

3. The Farm Economy

Crops

The main crops grown in Geblen, in descending order of importance, are: barley, maize, *tef*, red sorghum, lentils, and linseed. As was pointed out earlier, barley is the main subsistence crop. Geblen is a food deficit area both in crop and livestock terms, as is the *woreda* as a whole even under normal conditions (not more than 3-4 months supply of food is produced).

Vegetables such as potatoes, tomatoes, onions, and perennial plants such as *gesho* (hops), lime, and oranges are also grown by some households whose plots are found around the river both for household consumption and for sale. Apart from these, *beles* is very useful both for household consumption and for earning cash income. It is also used as animal fodder and to make hedges or fences. *Beles* may grow wild in a no-man's land or it may be purposefully planted by peasants around the homesteads. Anybody can collect the wild *beles*. The main problems in crop production are: shortage of land and oxen, drought, crop diseases, rodents, and pests.

Though intercropping is commonly known throughout Tigray and even in areas neighbouring Geblen, it is not practised in Geblen. It was indicated above that Geblen peasants practise a unimodal crop production system and the *Belg* season, locally known as *Sugum* is not applicable to the area. Last year's (1994/95) *meher* or *kremti* harvest was not good because the rains started late and the fields were swamped due to too much rain. Informants said that the years 1978/79, 1986/87, and 1992/93 were good years for the community. This was because of good harvests.

A group at Geblen listed 5 crops that have been grown in living memory. *Atena*, which is like barley and very white, was grown since before the revolution but now it is lost. Lentils have always been grown but now there is very little grown. They could not remember when barley and *tef* were introduced. Barley is still growing but there is hardly any *tef*. Maize was introduced after the revolution and is still grown. Fertilizers or other inputs are not used because the people think that they are not suitable for their soil.

Livestock

The main livestock raised in Geblen area include oxen, cows, calves, donkeys, sheep, goats, mules and horses. Cattle, sheep and goats, equines, chickens, and honeybees are kept for different purposes. Cattle are kept for supplying meat, milk, and more importantly draught power. Sheep and goats are raised for their meat and milk. Goats are more common in Geblen; because they can climb steep hills and rocks and eat almost anything, they are specifically suited to Geblen's difficult terrain and dry

ecology. Equines are used for carrying people and loads. Equines are not used for food because equines are non-ruminants and have no split hooves. The Bible forbids the eating of land animals that do not ruminate and that do not have split hooves (Leviticus 11:2). Households keep poultry (chickens) for supplying meat and eggs. However, poultry production is not carried out on a large-scale basis by rural households. It is just a sideline activity and it does not contribute significantly to household food and income. Rural households keep honeybees for supplying honey and wax. Honeybees are kept in *qofo* (a barrel-like object made of a mixture of dung, mud and straw) which are placed within the homestead in a veranda-like structure. The *qofo* may also be placed inside the houses.

At present, there are very few animals in Geblen; most common are goats and sheep. There is not much communal grazing land; each household mostly uses its own land for grazing. The communal land is only available because it is not suitable for cultivation. Farmers sell goats whenever they need cash. Rinderpest is the major cattle disease in the area. Animals also suffer from a wound-like thing on their body. No substantial income is earned from animal products, but honey and eggs are sold to a small extent. The compounds of homesteads are surrounded by either a masonry wall, a pile of stones, or a low pile of stones topped with thorn bushes to protect the homesteads against wild animals and thieves. The compounds surrounding homesteads are used as animals barns. The livestock are fed on crop residue and *beles* (cactus). According to respondents there are fewer livestock than there used to be. Almost all who have livestock use manure as fertilizer. They collect the manure when they clean their compound and enclosures and take it to their fields.

According to informants, livestock holdings have become smaller and smaller. This was because the 1984/85 famine caused heavy loss of livestock due to death and through forced sale (at cheaper prices). For example, a man from Geblen sold a cow at 20 *birr* and his lunch cost him 5 *birr* in Adigrat (the Zonal capital). Another man from Geblen bought an ox for only 20 *birr* from a woman from Geblen. The ox is still alive. Under normal circumstances, the cow and the ox would cost 600 *birr* and 800 *birr* respectively. Since 1992 livestock have become very profitable due to a rise in prices.

Peasants identified five prevalent livestock diseases in order of severity: *Weqii/nay demba* (black leg³), *mieta*, *megerem* (anthrax), *gulhai/beyene* (rinderpest), and *mendef* (African horse sickness). During the time of fieldwork there was a rinderpest epidemic which came from the Afar region and 3 cattle were reported to have died. However, the epidemic was controlled soon through a vaccination programme.

The livestock found in Geblen are of local breed. However, the zonal department of Agriculture has recently started an artificial insemination programme to improve the quality of the cattle.

Both men and women get involved in livestock marketing.

Land

Two basic types of land tenure systems, *risti* and land-share tenures, existed in Tigray before the revolution. In the *risti* tenure system access to land was based on descent and inheritance and in the land-share tenure system right to land was based on the principle of residence in a community. Both tenure types were communal tenure systems and virtually all households had access to land through one system or another. Ownership of land was by descent corporations in one system and by residential communities in the other and therefore land was not household property in Tigray. This land tenure system no longer exists in Tigray as a result of the land reform law carried out later by the TPLF. The land reform proclamation of 1975 was not carried out in Tigray because of the civil war.

In Geblen land was allocated according to the *risti* system before the revolution. Access to land under the land-share system was based on the principle of de facto residence in the community. There were about 3 landlords in the site. Most of the land was for grazing and the size of holding cultivated was 3 to 4 *timad*. The land was equally distributed between farmers. Land redistribution in Geblen was first conducted by the *Derg* and then later by the TPLF. Because the land redistribution conducted by

³Interpretation by staff of the veterinary department.

the *Derg* lasted only for a year, we shall describe the land redistribution carried out by the TPLF.

A committee was elected, from and by the assembly of the people, to carry out the land redistribution. A set of rules on how land should be allotted were established by the people. Available land, the number of households, and the fertility of the soil were surveyed. Then, farm plots were divided into categories according to their closeness to the dwellings and fertility. Accordingly, units of land or *gibri* were established. The criterion for land allotment was the number of mouths a household had to feed. A husband and a wife each received half a *gibri* and divorced or widowed persons received half a unit. Minimum age limits for land allotment were set and individuals who reached that age limit were given half a unit regardless of their marital status, sex, whether they were living with their families or alone. Children below the minimum age limit were lumped together for land allotment purposes and were given fractional shares of a unit.

Once land was allocated, minor adjustments were made continually. The adjustments involved reallocation of the shares of the deceased, transferred or betrayers (fighters or non-fighters who betrayed to the *Derg*) to those who reached the land allotment age, newly born children, new arrivals, or to those whose plots were damaged by flood or taken by the *baito* for a trail or for community projects. In land disputes, people go to the *tabia baito* courts. However, elders may reconcile cases involving land disputes.

Since July 1991, there have been no land redistributions. This is because the TGE has imposed a ban on land redistribution. Due to the ban, people who reached the land allotment age after 1991 and those who were displaced from Eritrea, and those who returned from the resettlement sites after the ban have not received farm plots.

At present, land is not private property and cannot be sold. Cropsharing is practised at the site. Both the sharecropper and the land supplier are equally responsible for seeds but the sharecropper renders labour service, including oxen.

Women can own and manage land by themselves although they leave the ploughing to male relatives. Women are entitled to half the land on divorce and all of it when widowed.

One *timad* of land is approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ hectare although there are variations depending on soil quality. 50x50 *gemed* = 1 *timad* of medium soil, while 50x75 *gemed* = 1 *timad* of poor soil.

An observer reported that there is a chronic and serious shortage of land because of bad terrain and sandy soil which is not suitable for crop-growing.

Labour

Household tasks may be distinguished into two categories - production and domestic categories. The production category includes: crop production, animal husbandry, off-farm income-earning activities (wage-labour and trading). The domestic category includes the entire range of activities associated with the daily maintenance of the household. It consists of food processing and preparation, care and upbringing of children, cleaning the house, fetching fuel and water, washing and repairing clothes, house building and repair, handicraft work (the making of utensils, implements, or clothes), caring for the sick and marketing.

The allocation of household tasks is based on gender and age. Generally, tasks in the production category of activities are assigned to men while tasks in the domestic category are assigned to women. The gender division of labour displays some degree of substitutability of female labour in the productive tasks while, on the other hand, it strongly circumscribes the substitution or the participation of males in the domestic activities. For example, out of the 12 tasks involved in crop production, as many as 7 tasks are performed by both men and women. However, women, by tradition, are prohibited from ploughing, sowing, and threshing by an indigenous supposition that their participation in these activities would result in a low yield. Boys begin to help with herding and learn to plough after they reach the "age of reason" at seven years. Daughters assist their mothers with the domestic activities such as food preparation, child care, and fetching water and fuel. In general, the husband is responsible for the management of the production activities and the wife and an adult daughter are responsible for the domestic activities. Men participate in ploughing, *mewkat*, weeding,

mowing and harvesting. Women participate in cultivation (*gulgualo*), weeding, mowing and harvesting, although *gulgualo* is less common in the village.

The tasks involved in animal husbandry include: milking, herding, cleaning the barn, and fodder preparation and storage. Herding is performed daily by young children, usually young boys. Though both sexes and all ages participate in all the tasks involved in animal husbandry, milking and barn cleaning are more women's tasks.

Honey production and poultry production do not demand day-to-day care or labour. The women make the beehives and men harvest the honey and store it. Poultry are left to care for themselves. Whatever little activity is involved in poultry production is performed by women.

The participation of women in off-farm income-earning activities (wage labour and trading) is minimal because they require absences of up to one month. Adult men and young boys are engaged in off-farm activities.

Women, assisted by their younger daughters, perform the domestic tasks. However, younger boys make substantial contributions in water and fuel collection. House-building and repair is mainly done by men but women help in various ways. Masonry is exclusively a man's job, but repairing leaking roofs and daubing and painting the walls of houses are women's tasks.

Women produce earthenware and basketwork utensils. Men contribute in the making of some household utensils. They carve wooden tubs for washing and storing, wooden pestles and mortars, and grinding stones.

Both men and women participate in marketing though women specialize in small-scale exchanges and low-priced products while men predominate in the exchange of large items, such as cattle, and large-scale exchanges that bring in a higher income.

People do not use casual agricultural labour; in fact they migrate to other surplus food-producing areas to hire out their own labour. There is wage labour in the community. Those who are skilled in masonry are paid 200-300 *birr* to build the walls of a one-roomed house. Besides, peasants work in the construction of a water reservoir run by the CRS as a food-for-work programme. The hours are 6 per day and the pay is 4-6 *birr* a day. 45 people are employed. People sometimes go to work as daily labour in Edaghamus or Adigrat where the rate is 7 *birr* a day.

When a household lacks enough personnel for each of the household activities, assistants may be recruited mostly by hiring. The relationship between hired personnel and the households for which they work varies. Some reside in the household for which they work and remain there for many years eventually becoming household members, others stay for only a year or two, and still others are hired on a day-to-day basis remaining in their original households. Full-time labourers are paid by the year with grain and clothing whereas daily labourers are paid in cash.

There are indigenous institutions for exchanging labour. These arrangements for exchanging labour are dealt with in the section below.

People do not work (no ploughing although light agricultural work is permitted) on the following days: 4 (*Abrahawoatsbaha*), 5 (*Abo*), 12 (Michael), 14 (*Abune Aregawi*), 21 (Mariam), 24 (*T/Haimanot*), 27 (*M/Alem*), and 29 (*Balegziabher*), besides the most commonly known days (eg *Senbet*). There are also a number of religious holidays observed during the year which include New Year, Easter, Christmas and Ramadan.

Interlinkages

The indigenous institutions of exchange in Tigray include: *wofera*, *lifinti*, and *bilae*.

Wofera is when a needy peasant prepares a feast and asks his friends, relatives and neighbours to help him work his land or build his homestead and acquires human labour, animal power, and other implements. The peasant is expected to reciprocate when another peasant needs this kind of assistance. Informants say that *Wofera* has become rare these days mainly for two reasons. First, individual household's plots have become smaller and they are not beyond the capacity of an average household. Second, it requires resources (mainly grain and human labour) to prepare the feast which is beyond the capacity of most households. Even households that could afford to prepare the feast find it more

expensive than using hired labour or renting oxen for cash (a recent development).

Lifinti is an institution by which two peasants exchange human labour and/or draught power. The arrangement works in the following manner. Two peasants with one ox each team up their oxen and work their land in turn. It also involves renting oxen in exchange for human labour. Here, an oxenless peasant works for two days for the animal owner and the renter uses the oxen for a day for himself. If the oxenless peasant happened to be a woman who cannot plough, she works for three days on the land of the animal owner and the animal owner ploughs her plots with his own oxen for a day. Two peasants may also assist each other with their labour only. At the present, *lifinti* is the most prevalent exchange institution. It is practised for ploughing, weeding, harvesting, threshing and transporting grain, etc. Renting oxen for cash is also being practised.

Bilae is an arrangement in which someone unable to farm his holding rents out his plots to another for an agreed upon share of the harvest. There are different kinds of crop-sharing arrangements. Depending on whether the labouring peasant brings his own oxen, seeds or uses those of the plot owner, whether or not the agreement involves only ploughing with other work to be done by the plot owner himself, etc. The plot owner could receive half, one-fourth, one-third, or one-fifth of the harvest. The reasons for renting out plots may be physical disability due to old age, poor health, being a woman and lack of or insufficient draught power. In *tiwfirti* arrangements, both parties contribute seed equally and the peasant who contracted the plots uses his own oxen and labour and the harvest is simply divided equally between the two. The crop residue (straw and stalks) is divided equally between the renting peasant and the plot owner. *Tiwfirti* is also used for sharing oxen. A peasant contracts out his ox or oxen for a fixed season and is paid in kind (grain) in return. *Melhi* is an arrangement where the landowner supplies all of the seeds and the partner brings oxen to plough the land. They share the harvest equally, but the landowner keeps the crop residues. Under *rebah* the landowner (usually female) only supplies labour, while the partner supplies all of the seeds and the oxen to plough the land. The owner is legally entitled to a quarter of the harvest but may often get less (this being at the discretion of the cultivator).

There is another arrangement for renting draught oxen. In this arrangement, the peasant renting oxen offers the owner all the crop residues (straw and stalks) on his plots for the use of the oxen after harvest. There is another variant of this arrangement in which a peasant loans his oxen to another in exchange for the grass on the edge of the latter's plots for his animals to feed on. These two arrangements do not have local names but they are like the *Ye-Aggeda* and *Ye-Geleba* arrangements in Wollo which have been described by Dessalegn (1991).

Traditionally, share-cropping agreements were based on mutual trust and were made verbally. This has changed since the introduction of the *baito* system. At present, all share-cropping agreements must be made in writing and must be approved by the *baito* court, lest they will not have the force of law. Crop-sharing agreements are very common in the community. For example, one of my informants stated that he share crops five units of land. Though there is no specific criteria on which the share-cropping agreements should be based, informants agreed that a person would prefer to enter into share-cropping agreements with a friend or a neighbour than with a stranger.

Apart from these arrangements, there is outright charity in which a peasant loans his work animals to a friend or neighbour for nothing. Similarly, a peasant may assist another in some work without expecting a return. There are no arrangements for sharing farm implements in Tigray and ploughs, yokes, beams of plough, pitchforks, etc. are loaned for nothing.

In addition to the above discussed indigenous mutual aid systems, the local arrangements for sharing land, labour, and animal labour (oxen) could be viewed as indigenous forms of insurance against crises which affect particular households or a whole community. Dessalegn (1991) views the various arrangements for sharing assets, resources and services in neighbouring Wollo as playing critical roles during hunger and famine-induced crises.

The importance of kinship in terms of mutual aid and support is not all that strong in Tigray. Bauer's statement that "kinship does create obligations, but they are mutable" (1977: 100) suggests that kinship obligations are weak in Tigray. By investing their time and resources in the various indigenous self-help and mutual aid associations people could insure themselves and their household members

against unforeseen future crises. Besides, these associations have a great impact on the social life of people. They provide an opportunity to meet and discuss issues and problems (mutual and/or personal), enable people to form and strengthen good relationships among themselves, enable them to help each other and to embody the spirit of social concern and common understanding. On the other hand, these associations and particularly the *mehber* are often burdensome as considerable resources and energy are spent in the preparation of the feasts and peasants find it difficult to meet the obligations. The situation is more demanding when a peasant household has to prepare feasts for the *mehber* members of each of the couple.

Land rental for cash is not practised in the area. People own land which they use solely for grazing. This land is usually divided up by the local *Baito* to each user. Grazing land of this sort is usually land unsuitable for agriculture, often located on very slopy and stony terrain.

Technology

Tigray agriculture is especially prone to shortage of water. Farm tools have not changed over the years. Nobody uses tractors or other modern implements. Farming practices in Geblen are simple. The traditional metal tipped plough which is pulled by two oxen yoked together and guided by a man goes no deeper than six centimetres and does not break up and turn over the earth sufficiently. This has forced multiple ploughing of plots before sowing. Use of modern inputs such as chemical fertilizers and improved seeds is very limited. Similarly, peasants are aware that fallowing restores and rejuvenates the soil but holdings are so small that they cannot spare plots to leave fallow. However, crop rotation (usually the alternation of cereals and legumes) and use of manure are quite common and these may contribute towards maintaining soil fertility.

In Geblen they have been constructing terraces for a long time but the territory is bad and the terraces have not controlled erosion. There are a number of other indigenous water and soil conservation techniques employed by Geblen peasants. These include: contour ploughing, digging artificial channels (to bring rain water into the fields), stone bunding, furrowing planted fields, leaving ridges in between plots, and hedging (planting cactus, sisal in between or around plots).

Double cropping is not practised because the area experiences a single rainfall season and the heavy run-off leaves no surface water for irrigation. Only a few households grow vegetables utilizing the river for irrigation but the river goes dry during the dry season. Though intercropping is common all over Tigray (including communities neighbouring Geblen) it is not practised in Geblen.

There have been no changes with regard to farming technology. Informants recall that the Agricultural Department of the TPLF tried to introduce a single-ox plough (instead of two oxen) during the war. But this change failed because the fields in Geblen are stony and the terrain is slopy and a single ox could not pull the plough.

Fertilizers are distributed through the Ministry of Agriculture. The price in June 1994 was 143.70 *birr*. Six months earlier it was 107.60 *birr*.

Food crops are stored in *qofo* (a barrel-like object made of a mixture of dung, mud, and straw used for holding grain and as beehives) which are placed inside the houses. Rodents, particularly rats and weevils, feed on the grains and spoil them in the storage bins. Crops and other objects are transported using pack animals and on people's backs.

The technologies employed by women for the household tasks are time and energy consuming. Just to get an insight into the subject, let us consider see two of the women's tasks -grinding grain and cleaning the house/s. Most rural women do not have easy access to grinding mills and they have to grind the grain themselves at home using grinding stones. Grinding is done by pressing the grain between two thick flat stone slabs. The lower grinding-stone is fixed and has a flour bin in front of it. To make flour, the woman must press and move the upper grindstone backwards and forwards regularly. This is a backbreaking job and almost all women have thick hard skins or calluses on their hands.

Cleaning the house/s is women's task and they spend some time on it daily. The brushes used to clean houses have short handles and the women have to bend down to clean the floor and since the

houses are earthen-floored a cloud of dust rises and this may create health problems. The dust can be made to settle by making the ground wet but since the water itself has to be collected from the river or the springs, the women cannot afford to sprinkle the floor with water.

The technology employed by women for the different household tasks has been the same for generations and there have been no changes. During the war, women development workers working under the TPLF's Departments of Agriculture and Health started to introduce some new technology that could benefit women. For example, they tried to introduce fuel-saving ovens, but these have still not been adopted by rural women except those chosen as model women.

A dirt track road links the *tabia* of Geblen to the *Woreda* capital - Edaghamus. But there is no public transport and it takes 4 hours to walk to Edaghamus.

Innovations

Bauer suggested in 1977 that young men beginning their careers operating moderately successful households are the major innovators (pp150, 152). "The fluidity of Tigray social organization provides both a niche for innovators and incentives for a quick dispersal of innovations (154). However, evidence from the rapid assessment exercise suggests that there have been no innovations in Geblen that anyone can remember.

Common property resources

There is some land which is openly accessed which is used for firewood collection and as grazing land. However, the little livestock people have are mostly fed with crop residues (*beles* leaves) on private land. Common grazing on mountainous hillsides is only practised by a few since the vegetation is so scanty. Irrespective of the distance, every member of the community can fetch water from each spring or river. The domestic water sources are managed by the community. A five member committee set up by and from the general assembly of the *tabia* is responsible for making sure that the water sources (particularly the springs) are not polluted, that trees are not planted around the water sources, and organizes the community to clean and maintain the sources. As is usual the members of this committee are not paid by the community or otherwise.

The peasant association does not even have an office.

Environment

The area is highly exposed to erosion since it is mostly *dagetama* and *gedelama*. The fertility of the soil in Geblen is generally bad and has deteriorated over the years. Peasants employ various indigenous water and soil conservation techniques. They also use animal dung, chemical fertilisers (very limited), and crop rotation. Mass terracing has been going for some years in the community. The mass terracing work includes the construction of stone bunds, soil bunds, hillside terraces, and check dams. Farmers use contour ploughing, terracing and deep ploughing (when they need water) as measures to control water on their farms. They did these things 20 - 30 years ago.

Wood is used for a number of purposes in rural Tigray. Wood is the major source of fuel, construction materials, fencing homesteads and fields, and for making of agricultural implements and domestic utensils. This has caused widespread destruction of forests and today only a few thorny shrubs can be seen in the landscape. Upon realization of the problem, rural communities (including Geblen) established area enclosures and laws forbidding the cutting down of trees were included in the *sirit*. Thus, cutting down trees is forbidden by law and individuals who violate this law are fined by the *baito* courts. Individuals can cut only trees that grow on their plots.

One observer claims that the attempt to construct terraces has not controlled soil erosion as the topography is bad and not easy to control. Since the people mainly use trees as fuel and for construction the trees and bushes are being highly destroyed. Only scattered trees are observed in the area at present. The attempt to grow trees was not successful because of lack of water.

4. Off-farm Activities

Within the Community

The population of Geblen subsists mainly by farming - the growing of crops and the raising of animals. Thus, all households in Geblen are farming households. Apart from this people supplement their farm income by engaging in off-farm and non-farm income earning activities. Some off-farm activities involve seasonal or casual wage employment and trading. These activities require prolonged absence from home. And since women's domestic tasks are concerned with the daily maintenance of the household, they have to perform their work on a day-to-day basis and, thus, women's involvement in off-farm income earning activities is minimal. Their non-farm productive activities mainly involve handicraft production, that is, the making of utensils, implements, or clothes.

Though men also participate in handicraft production, women are more active in this domain. Women produce earthenware pots, pans, dishes, cups, dishes, and bowls and basketwork discs, bowls, food-tables, milking pails, plates, sieves, and strainers. Women also make the *qofo* which are used for storing grains and as beehives, and spin cotton into thread to be woven into cloth. The handicraft works are used both for household consumption and for sale. At the Edagahamus market, which also serves Geblen, women sell their handicraft products in a separate corner of the market. The prices of the handicraft works are listed below:

Table 2. Handicraft works Produced by Women and their prices.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Unit Price (in Birr)</i>
1. <i>Mogogo</i> (a round disc of clay used for baking <i>injera</i> over a fire)	9.00
2.. A small clay pot	17.00
3. Pitcher	40.00
4. Saucepan	2.00
5. Goblet	1.50
6. <i>Megudi</i> (cover of <i>Mogogo</i>)	3.00
7. <i>Mexombia</i> (cover of saucepan)	18.00
8. Food - table	36.00

Another non-farm income earning activity in which women are involved is hair plaiting. Women and girls normally wear their hair in plaits and there are about five ranked styles of plaits differing in thickness, with the quality decreasing progressively as the thickness increases. Those women who are skilled in plaiting earn money or grain by plaiting (the amount varying with the quality).

Men are also involved in handicraft production both for household use and for sale. The handicrafts produced by men include wooden tubs for washing and storing, wooden pestles and mortars, and grinding stones. Men can also earn income by doing masonry, weaving, by making and repairing agricultural implements and household utensils made of metal, and making leather articles such as leather thongs and pouches.

Women can spend the income they earn on buying household items like edible oil, kerosene, salt, soap, and spices. The women who earn money do not have to give it to their husbands and they can even spend it on themselves.

Because trading demands prolonged absence from home, married peasant women are not involved in it. However, peasant women who are unmarried, divorced, or widowed may participate in

trading provided that they can find pack animals and capital.

Migration

Individual members of households or households as a whole seasonally migrate to other areas (particularly to the western parts of Tigray) to work as daily agricultural labourers. They migrate for about six months from October to March or June. People also migrate to Saudi Arabia and Eritrea seeking temporary employment (casual agricultural labour, loader, etc). This migration usually occurs in November.

One observer said that people used to migrate in large numbers during the war and famine. People say that, if they could obtain fertile land in other regions, they would be willing to leave their homes.

5. Reproductive Activities

House management

The household, as the basic unit of agricultural management, ideally holds all the resources necessary for agricultural production (Bauer, 1977:58). Certain decisions are critical to the household's success and these include decisions relating to crop choice, livestock, labour, debt, and capital expenditure. Whether the management of production is performed by the husband or by the husband and wife jointly depends on the type of marriage they have contracted.

Household management tasks involve the entire range of activities associated with the daily maintenance of the household. It is difficult to tell the time spent each day on them in a household as this requires rigorous accounting of time use by women in the rural household over the whole of the working day. However, following observation and interviews the fieldworker concluded that women perform more than a day's work every day to complete each day. In a typical day, the peasant woman wakes when cocks crow at about day-break to grind grain, milk the animals, fetch water, and prepare food (breakfast) and spends the whole day performing the other household tasks until late in the evening. She is the first to wake up and the last to go to bed. Women are so burdened by their domestic work that they do not have time for rest and they are completely exhausted by the time they go to bed. Then, the women never feel they have accomplished anything.

Fuel and Lighting

In Geblen, the source of fuel is wood. Unlike other rural communities in Tigray, dung is not usually used as a source of fuel in Geblen. It is used to manure the fields. For lighting, small kerosene lamps and burning wood are used. During the cold season they may need heating.

Water

The main source of drinking water is streams. The time involved to fetch water for domestic use varies from merely 20 minutes to 2-3 hours a round trip. The water supply, particularly in terms of distance and hygiene, is a problem.

Sanitation

There are no latrines in Geblen.

Fertility

The fertility rate in Gebelen seems to be very high. Informants suggest that a woman may give birth to up to ten children and six to seven children is very common. With regard to family planning it is said there is general resistance in Tigray: there is a general lack of interest in trying something new, especially when it interferes with deep-rooted habits. Many people dislike inserting foreign substances into their bodies.

The inherent opposition to family planning in the teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox church are made clear, for example, by Like Siltanat Abab Habte Mariam Workineh:

"We cannot limit the number of children one has to have because in the marriage ceremony in our blessings we say "multiply and fill the earth". This is not only what we say, but what God himself has said. I cannot say that there is anyone who can lengthen or shorten God's words. (ENI 1972:74)"

Similarly the Moslem religion sustains high fertility patterns. In the Koran it is written:

"Marry the affectionate prolific woman, for I shall be proud of you among the nations and whichever soul is destined to come to this world shall come." (ENI 1972:75)

The TPLF (during the war) and women extension agents of the Ministry of Agriculture taught and still teach the women about family planning. At first people were opposed to the idea but due to extensive education, there seems to be a shift in attitudes and a few women have started to use contraceptives.

When a couple cannot produce children, it is the woman who is accused of being barren and the female relatives of the husband and the community insult the woman as a "mule" and the threat of divorce hangs over her. Sexually transmitted diseases often cause sterility and are referred to as "women's diseases". The treatments for infertility are immersing oneself in holy water and modern medical treatments (going to health institutions).

Childbirth and childcare

Pregnant women do not receive care. Expectant women continue to toil in the daily chores of household work, go out for marketing and even for agricultural tasks almost until the pains of childbirth starts. This is worse if there is no adult female, a daughter or otherwise, in the household. Sometimes women give birth while they are away from home for marketing, doing farmwork in the fields, or fetching water and firewood.

The traditional birth attendants help expectant mothers in giving birth. They are usually elderly women who have acquired the skill through apprenticeship or from their own experiences and offer the delivery services freely. There are also what may be called "trained traditional birth attendants". During the war, the Health Department of the TPLF and REST trained selected peasant women in pre- and post-natal care for mothers and babies, delivery services, and health education about family planning, nutrition, and communicable diseases. Though the *fanna tienna* (lit. torches of health), as they are called, were trained to give delivery services, pre- and post-natal care, and to impart their skills to the women of their respective villages, a number of problems have prevented them from carrying out these duties. They do not have delivery kits, they are not paid, and they do not have health posts where the women seeking the services could go.

A woman who has given birth to a baby is thought unclean for seven days and stays in confinement. During this period, she is fed with barley or wheat porridge and a sheep or a goat may also be slaughtered for her depending on the economic standing of her household. The neighbourhood women cook porridge and feed the new mother, entertain her visitors, cook food for her household members, and perform the other household tasks.

A new mother's body and her bloodstained clothes and rags are ritually washed in a *geleb* (a washing party held on the seventh day after a woman has given birth to a child). As indicated above, a new mother is thought unclean for seven days and must not touch anything holy, including food. On the seventh day, she is ritually cleansed and resumes the daily chores of household work. It is said that a new mother should not go out away from around the homestead until the new baby is baptised, lest she will fall sick. Baby boys and baby girls are baptised on the fortieth and on the eightieth days respectively after they are born.

Although the preference of the sex of a particular offspring may depend on the requirement of the individual household, generally males are preferred to females in Tigray for the following reasons:

1. The main reason is the importance of male children in production tasks. Since farming households must engage in both agricultural and herding activities which cannot be performed by a single man, adding a son either reduces the expense of hiring male labour or reduces the dependence of the household on other households. A daughter's work in the domestic fields is important but is not considered as critical as that of a son. This is because the tasks in the domestic field are not incompatible: i.e. child care and food preparation can be done by a single person with more hours of work.

2. Dowry: parents dread having daughters as they have to pay a dowry to marry them. A relatively rich household which has, for instance, three daughters would certainly be poor by the time the last one has found a husband. The opposite is true of a household which has only male children. Since post-marital residence is usually with the groom's father, the groom's household temporarily (until the couple set up their own homestead) increases in resources with the addition of the dowry animals to the household herd. It could be a period when failing households have a chance to recover.

3. Patterns of residence in Tigray: since daughters leave their parents to live in the locality of their husbands, their parents and other kin lose them. When daughters get married it becomes difficult to maintain ties with the parental households. As a result daughters cannot react quickly in times of difficulty.

The bride visits her parents frequently, going back and forth between the two households until a child is born and the young couples' new house is built.

Socialization

The family is responsible for childhood socialization and non-school education in Tigray. Peer-group learning and church education also play important roles. In the family, children are taught the basic skills, the societal value system and the family value system. As soon as they reach the age of seven, boys are taught to plough and to perform other productive activities to become successful peasants and husbands. Girls are trained in domestic work in preparation for a married life as diligent housewives. The boys are taught by the senior men and girls by the mothers or older sisters.

Children are also taught to conform to the basic societal values. For example, little girls are told not to sit legs akimbo, since this is considered to be an immodest way of sitting by Tigrayans.

Through their relationships with each other, family members come to have certain expectations about how to behave towards each other. These expectations are associated with feelings of rightness or wrongness. Intra-household relationships are vertical, in that elders have authority over youngsters and men have authority over women.

Parental control plays a critical role in shaping the behaviour of children. Children are punished for their misbehaviour. Parents beat (with a stick), pinch (with fingers), or fumigate (with pepper) disobedient children. The frequency of children living with people other than their own parents is very high in Tigray.

The main quality considered desirable in men, by a group in the PA, is being a good leader. A person who thinks of improving the poor village is highly appreciated. According to a women's group from the village, qualities desirable in men are being hard-working, successful in any affair even in war, and concerned about wife, children and family. Both groups say some men are born with these desirable qualities and others learn them from their surrounding. Undesirable qualities in men include being

quarrelsome, aggressive and not agreeing with elders. In the case of women and children, prostitution, gambling, theft and anything illegal is undesirable.

A successful farmer is one who owns good farm implements, starts work early in the morning and finishes late at night, and removes the weeds from his crop. A successful farmer's wife is good at cooking and preparing *tella*, clean, manages the money and grain she is given and good at taking care of house matters. A successful farmer and his wife do not have any particular skill, except effort and experience. The most respected technical skills are building houses from stone and carpentry. Both the men's and women's group said that being able to read, write and do sums is very important to be successful. The most respected social skills in a man are being a good bargainer, convincing, or a priest, sheik, or trader. For a woman to be socially accepted she has to participate in all social affairs, such as visiting someone who is not feeling well, and attending funeral services and marriage ceremonies at any cost. Otherwise she will be treated like an outcast.

Education

According to a group of men and women asked, elementary schools are a first step to be an intellectual and church schools teach religion. The men said an educated person can be a good farmer. However, an educated person does not come back to the village to be a farmer. In both cases, they thought having been to school make it difficult to succeed in generating off-farm income since schooling and other business cannot go together. Nevertheless, the number of school years make a difference in that the longer children stay at school the better they think. A girl who gets married before completing high school (grade 12) could be a better wife, but if she completes high school she will not even live in the village.

There is no primary or secondary school in the village. The nearest primary school is located about 12 km from the site in another PA. About 5% of the boys go to elementary school and about 1% go to high school. At the time of the survey, six girls go to elementary school and three go to high school from the village.

Training

Some Geblen peasants (both men and women) have received training. First, there are the trained traditional birth attendants described in the section above. There are also peasants trained as production cadres and women development cadres. Particularly, the production cadres are using their knowledge very well - they do the surveying work for the community's water and soil conservation projects, namely terracing.

Health

People try to treat their illnesses themselves by using traditional herbal medicines, holy water, and cupping. There is healing water near the village (about 45 minutes journey on foot); no payment is required. The nearest traditional doctor is about ½km from the village; the initial consultation fee is a cup of coffee. The nearest clinic is located about 22km away in the nearest town which is Edaghamus (about 4 hours on foot). The next nearest clinic is St Mariam. No fee is required for a consultation. The nearest hospital is in Adigrat which is about 4 hours journey on foot (25km). If you do not have a free medical service letter from the locality office the initial consultation fee at the hospital is 0.50 *birr* and in-patient admission fees per patient are 5 *birr*. There is usually no transport to either clinic or hospital. Not many people use the clinic because it is too far away. The nearest doctor is 25 km away and his initial consultation fee is 10 *birr*. Both clinics have a full-time nurse and are open 40 hours a week. Edaghamus clinic has an irregular supply of antibiotics but a regular supply of malaria drugs. St Maryam has an irregular supply of malaria drugs but a regular supply of antibiotics. Polio and measles vaccine is regularly available at Edaghamus. At St Maryam both a treatment of antibiotics and malaria drugs costs 1.50 *birr*. At the Edaghamus clinic antibiotics costs 3 - 10 *birr* and malaria drugs

0-1 *birr*. Both clinics are well-maintained. Edagahamus has equipment to sterilize needles while St Maryam uses and throws each needle. Both have a minimum supply of bandages and compresses, sterile needles and syringes. Both have cold storage (without backup). The most frequent illnesses seen at Edagahamus (in order of frequency) are: diarrhoea; malnutrition; malaria; TB; other respiratory illness. At the St Maryam clinic they are: skin infection; other respiratory illness; diarrhoea; TB; malnutrition. The nearest pharmacy is the Abune T/Haimanot Rural Pharmacy which is about 22 km away.

A group of men ranked diseases as problems as follows: typhoid fever, flu and malaria. A group of women ranked diseases as problems as pain on the pelvic bone; headache; stomachache (gastritis) and eye disease (trachoma). In cases of children diseases were ranked by a group of women as malaria, dental pain, headache and stomach pain (gastritis).

Causes of Diseases and treatment:

Typhoid fever occurs at any time of the year. They do not know where it comes from. There is no prevention method before someone gets sick. The patient is taken to the nearest clinic at Edagahamus or Adigrat for treatment.

Flu: The cause of flu is the wind blowing from the Red Sea. There is no prevention or treatment. The patient will recover after sometime.

Malaria: They get malaria when they travel to the lowlands and are bitten by mosquitoes. Malaria can not be prevented. The sick are taken to the nearest clinic for treatment.

Headache: The cause is spending time in very hot sunlight for a long time and hard work according to the women. The only way to prevent it is by avoiding walking in hot sunlight and avoiding doing hard work. They get medicine from the clinic.

Pain on the pelvic bone: The causes of pain on the pelvic bone according to the women are hard work like carrying water from a distance, etc., during pregnancy. The problem can be prevented by avoiding those functions. The women suffering from the problem visit the clinic and take prescribed tablets. The problem is not curable and they always suffer from it.

Stomach pain (gastritis): Gastritis is caused by getting angry (hungry?) and by eating sour food. It can be prevented by avoiding sour food and not getting angry/hungry. The only treatment is sought by visiting the nearby clinic.

Eye disease (Trachoma) is caused from dust and lack of vitamins. Trachoma is treated by visiting the clinic but could be prevented by consuming vitamins.

Dental pain: This is mainly in children. Cactus is eaten in the area. Seeds from cactus harm the teeth and gums. The problem can be prevented by giving up eating cactus which is a wild food which sustains their life. However, giving up cactus will result in hunger in the area. Children are not taken to the clinic for dental treatment for fear of contamination by HIV. Instead they go to some people who pull out the teeth in the village.

6. Consumption

Food and other day-to-day goods

In Tigray, drought and famine have been a recurring phenomena. Tigray was hardly spared from any of the famines which hit Ethiopia, in earlier times as well as recently, and records show that six famines in the 19th and five in the 20th centuries particularly hit Tigray. Drought and famine result in massive death of people and livestock losses (through deaths or forced sale) in the short term, and destruction of the peasants' economies in the long term. The peasant sells every item he owns, such as farm animals, agricultural tools, clothing, furniture, etc. The 1984/85 famine, combined with war, forced 200,000 Tigrayans to migrate to Sudan (REST 1993: 7). In addition, a quarter of a million died and up to one million were displaced (REST 1993: 7). It is impossible, without more fieldwork, to tell how recent Government policies (such as, devaluation, the end of price-setting, etc) have affected the economy of Geblen.

All people in a household may or may not eat the same kind of food. This depends on whether there is enough of a particular kind of food or not. For example, if the household can afford *tef injera*, all household members may eat *tef injera*. But if it is not affordable, only adults may be served with that and the children may be served *injera* made of sorghum. In general, the husband and other adult males (who perform physically hard jobs such as ploughing) are served better. As a rule, all adult members of a household, with the exception of servants, eat from the same plate and the children eat from another plate. There is some discrimination in the act of eating. Though there is no gender-based segregation in the act of eating itself, customary rules about eating seem to favour men. Generally speaking, precedence is given to adult males; they eat first and better. The males are served by the females. Custom demands that females must not eat big mouthfuls and must not bolt down food while this is the opposite for males. There is segregation based on age and adults and children should eat separately.

Because maize is the crop that ripens before the other crops and because it is edible when it is partly ripe (by roasting or boiling), maize can be viewed as an emergency crop. People eat wild fruits, roots, and leaves, especially during the hungry season (that is, from May to September). The most important source of food during the hungry season is *beles*. *Beles* may grow wild or may be purposely planted by peasants around the homesteads. *Beles* ripens in mid-June and lasts until mid-September. Though *beles* is found in other regions of Tigray as well, it is widely cultivated and used as food in the former Agame *Awraja* in which Geblen is found. While *beles* is eaten in other regions, there it is not eaten as a meal in itself but as a whim or for pleasure. In Geblen people complain that when eaten alone, *beles* causes compaction or constipation, it does not give energy, and it does not satisfy. It is also said that it causes people to urinate now and then. To avoid constipation, people eat small amounts of other food or they first eat other vegetables as laxatives before eating *beles*.

Another wild food which is eaten is *kuuntee* which looks like peas. *Beles* is used during June, July and August whereas *kuuntee* is eaten between November and May. During droughts these foods cannot be eaten since they too get dried.

In local units 1 *menilik* = $\frac{3}{4}$ kg; 1 *gan* = 200l; 1 *ensira* = 25l.

Housing

Houses are made of stone with roofs made of wood. Stones are found everywhere in the area but eucalyptus wood is bought from other areas. Particular homesteads in Geblen consist of an *adarash* and a *gebela*. An *adarash* is a spacious, angular (rectangular or square), stone-walled, and earthen-rooted house. Usually, though not always, an *adarash* has *qesela* (flat thin pieces of dark grey rock) eaves and the inner surface of the roof is decorated with wooden slates forming a pattern of a fish's fin, a pattern in which two wooden slates slope in opposite directions. The *gebela* is a veranda-like structure and it may be built attached to or detached from the *adarash*.

All houses are earthen-floored and almost always built on only one level. Usually, the compounds of homesteads are surrounded by either a masonry wall, a pile of stones, or a pile of stones topped by thorn bushes to protect them against wild animals and thieves. Homesteads are usually owner-occupied and the practice of renting rural houses is almost non-existent.

Most homesteads in Geblen consist of an *adarash* and a *gebela*. However, some homesteads have more than one *adarash* and the type of compound varies. Thus, homesteads reflect the relative status of their owners in the community. A homestead containing two large *adarash* and surrounded by a high masonry wall indicates high rank while a homestead containing a small *adarash* and surrounded by a low pile of stones indicates low rank.

All houses in Geblen are earthen-roofed and there is not a single tin-roofed house. It is difficult to tell how much it costs to build a new house because the construction materials are not purchased. Informants claimed that a house may last up to one hundred years and houses are inheritable.

Household assets

The following assets were listed by informants to be found in a wealthy home: *gofla* (food-table),

barrel, radio, pitchers, *qofa* (grain containers), larger and white *maesi* (tanned hide of an ox or a cow used for sleeping on), blankets, beds and chairs made of wood and leather thong, saddles, and leather pouches. With regard to assets found in a poor home, some of these assets may not be found, or they may be found but may be lesser in quality or quantity.

Local services

There are no shops in the community and the people of Geblen go to either Adigrat or Edaghamus. Adigrat is the zonal capital and the nearest town (3 hours walk) while Edaghamus is the *Woreda* capital and takes 4 hours' walk from Geblen. There is no drug shop in Geblen and the people visit Adigrat for this purpose.

Two extension agents (one from the Ministry of Agriculture and another from the Ministry Natural Resources Development and Environmental Protection) serve an extension area consisting of three *tabia*, one of which is Geblen. There is also one woman development worker from the Ministry of Agriculture serving the extension area. Under the extension agents are two agricultural cadres and two women development cadres. These are local people and serve at *kushet* level. Below them are model farmers (20 in each village) and model women (20 in each village). Under each of the agricultural cadres and the women development cadres are 10 model farmers and model women. The extension agents visit the agricultural cadres and the development cadres only and not everyone. The agricultural cadres and the women development cadres in turn visit the contact farmers and the model women respectively.

There are two famous traditional doctors in Geblen. One of them is an old blind man aged 71 and the other also an old man aged 65. These traditional doctors repair broken bones, perform minor operations (they incise the body and put herbal medicines), perform cupping operations, and treat sprained joints and displaced muscles (by giving massages). The traditional doctors offer their services freely. There are also traditional birth attendants who provide very important services in the absence of modern delivery services in the area.

7. Local Institutions and Organizations

Households

The Christian Tigray are monogamous and all rural households are built around a nuclear family with more distant relatives often present (Bruce, 1976:18). The term *beteseb* (directly translated as house people) is used to refer to "persons who grew up in the same household" and to "those now living in a single household". Those still living together are referred to as *wisti bet* (inside house) and others as *beteseb* ("house people"). *Sidra-bet* (in Tigrinya) is also translated as "house-family" or *wiste-bet beteseb* meaning "house-people within the house". The term *bete-seb* used alone refers to those people with whom one has at any time in his life resided. In both cases, residence seems to be central to the definition of the household in Tigray. In Saho, the language of the Irob, the household is also called *dike* which means "family". It should be remembered that many of the residents of Geblen are ethnically Saho and that they are bilingual (they also speak Tigrinya). Informants suggest that there are people who do not speak Saho and use Tigrinya more frequently in everyday discourse. The terms for the household which are used alternatively are used to refer to those people living in the same home or house and this coincides more with the definition based on living under one roof.

However, the terms used to refer to the household also coincide with the other definitions based on other conditions. For example, all household members pool their resources, work together, live and sleep in the same homestead, eat together (though not necessarily at the same time and from the same plate), and so on. Let us illustrate this by taking land (one of the critical resources). In Tigray, farm plots are not allotted to the household but to individual household members. However, the household members do not farm their shares separately but, instead, they bring their shares and work the plots

together and the product is used together. Thus, though living in the same house is central to the definition of the household, it also coincides with other definitions based on other conditions ("farming together", for example).

Nearly all households consist of the nuclear family (most households consist of only parents and their children). But sometimes, aged parents of either spouse, children of a dead relative of either spouse, or hired herd-boys or ploughmen may often be present. Thus, though kinship is an important factor determining membership it is not an essential one. Hired personnel may sometimes become full members of a household (especially if the parents happen to be childless) and the household may even sponsor their marriages (as if they were their own children). But adoption as an institutionalized means of taking someone else's children does not exist in Geblen and in Tigray as a whole.

The rural household is the basic unit of Tigray society. McCann views the Amhara/Tigray farming household as a production/consumption unit. McCann continues "Amhara/Tigrayan farming households are single-generation units whose membership and property disperse with the death of the household head and/or the maturation of the development cycle." (1988: 291). This shows that no family exists beyond one generation. According to McCann, residence in northern Ethiopia was primarily virilocal excepting those cases in which the woman's potential land [*rist*] claims were more promising (1988: 291). Post-marital residence (for approximately two years) in the Inderta region of Tigray is expected to be viripatrilocal and the young couple is expected to separate to set up a new household.

If a household finds itself short of labour, it may bring in a herd-boy, ploughmen, and a girl to help with domestic tasks and, under certain circumstances these persons may be incorporated as members of the household. The incorporation of children other than the household members' own offspring is routine in Tigray.

There are a number of obligations that household members owe to each other. Concerning the authority relationships within the household, the household head (male or female) has the right to give orders to the other members. Even in households created through *birkinet* marriages (where day-to-day management decisions about the disposal of common property must be made by the consent of the husband and the wife), the male is the ultimate decision maker.

When it comes to task-related activities such as production and domestic tasks, one should obey the head of the task group, the husband for production and the wife for domestic tasks. Younger persons should obey older ones and females should obey males, although age tends to override sex in most contexts as a criterion for authority.

Marriage

The Christian Tigray are monogamous and all rural households are built around a nuclear family, with more distant relatives often present. There are three types of marriages in Tigray and each create different rights over household property:

1. Dowry marriages are arranged by the sponsoring households. The Tigrinya term for this type of marriage, *mihab kefti* is composed of *mihab* meaning "to give" and *kefti* meaning "cattle". In this type of marriage, the sponsoring households of the prospective bride and groom arrange the marriage and decide upon the amount of dowry. A go-between makes the preliminary arrangements and the two sponsoring households make the final arrangements in the form of a contract. However, the prospective bride and groom must choose a marriage guardian to mediate in case of future marital difficulties and to aid in the division of property should divorce occurs.

A dowry type of marriage is normative for first but not second marriages. First marriages usually occur when the bride is about 15 and the groom 25. There is no brideprice in Tigray, which contrasts with other parts of the country, where gifts from each sponsoring household are matched. If the parents have some they might provide a son with livestock but if they are poor then they provide clothes for him and his wife. They give him houseroom and a share of land. The parents give more property for a daughter including oxen, cows and other property because she is not going to work with

them in future. A second reason is that when the parents die she is responsible for their death ceremony.

The marriage process begins with *hitse* (engagement) which, typically, is initiated by a household with a young boy seeking out a household with a marriageable young girl. The suitability of the girl for marriage is based on a number of criteria. Because of the rule of seven generations exogamy and the rule which prohibited intermarriage with the despised traditional occupational groups (such as blacksmiths and traditional musicians), descent is one of the major considerations in selecting marriage partners of offspring. The second major consideration is the capacity of the girl's household to provide *gezmi* (dowry) - livestock (mainly oxen) and money. Before the land reform, *risti* land was also given as dowry.

After a suitable girl is selected, a go-between is sent with an offer for marriage to the prospective bride's sponsors. The most important consideration apart from descent, on the part of the bride's sponsoring household is the potential groom's diligence as a future husband. The ability of the groom's sponsoring household to help the new household build its homestead and to provide it with grain and other utensils and implements until it gets on its feet is also considered.

If the bride's sponsor agrees to take the offer, the prospective couple and the parents of both must submit the betrothal agreement to the *baito* court and the *baito* court must approve the betrothal. After this the groom's parents and the go-between go to the house of the bride's sponsors taking with them gifts of various kind (a fattened goat or sheep, coffee, *arrack* (strong colourless alcoholic drink), *besso* (roasted barley flour) and a change of dress and decorations worn around the neck to the fiancée. The decorations are worn to show that the girl is engaged. Now the first phase of dowry is paid: the dowry animals (mainly oxen) and money (as a compensation for the expenses of the gifts and the dress and the decorations).

The next step is the wedding. Usually, although not always, weddings occur two years after betrothals. The wedding ceremony takes place at the bride's sponsor's house. The groom's wedding party, consisting of his father, the neighbourhood men, his close kinsmen, and a group of his close friends, go to the bride's sponsor's house for the wedding ceremony. The groom's party consists of men only.

The groom's party arrives at the bride's village and upon invitation by the host party, the guest party enters the enclosure where the wedding ceremony is held and is seated in the best corner. Then the guest party is served with drinks and food. At the wedding ceremony a feast is prepared at the houses of the bride's and groom's sponsors. Many people are invited and wedding feasts are usually large.

Then the bride appears in the festive enclosure swathed in clothes and then the swearing-in ceremony begins. Here, the groom's best men and the bride swear an oath of friendship to each other and the couple swears an oath not to betray each other in case he/she becomes ill, blind, deaf or otherwise. After the swearing-in ceremony, a representative of the bride's party makes a formal speech describing the dowry which is followed by a representative of the visiting party's speech of acceptance.

After this, the ceremony is over and the bride rides with the chief best man on a colourfully saddled mule or horse escorted by the groom's party.

The newly-wed couple spend their honeymoon for a period of about two months in the nuptial house in the house of the groom's sponsor. After about two month's honeymooning in the nuptial house, the bride is returned to her sponsor's house escorted by the groom and his friends. The groom and his friends return to their village, leaving the bride in her sponsor's house where she stays for about two years. During this time, the bride gets apprenticeship in housekeeping.

The next step is the setting up of the new couple's household. The pattern of residence after marriage is one in which both husband and wife leave their natal groups and set up a new domestic group of their own in the locality of the husband's parents' and his brothers. The groom's household is expected to help the new household build its own homestead and to supply it with grain and other household utensils and farm implements. When the new household is set up, the bride's household also supplies it with grain. The bride also brings household utensils partly produced by her and partly given to her by her parents.

Ownership of property in households depends on the type of marriage through which households are created. In a dowry type of marriage (*mihab kefti*), all property owned by either which

is appropriate to production or domestic fields is community property. In households created through this type of marriage, day-to-day management decisions that involve the disposal of community property may be made by the male partner without the consent of his wife.

2. The second type of marriage is known as *birkinet*; the heads of two partial households marry and a nucleus of community property (livestock, grain and all items of farming and household equipment) is formed from equal amounts of property contributed by each side. The excess that either side may have possessed remains the personal property of that partner. Items that relate to neither agricultural production nor domestic production such as clothing, jewellery, etc. remain personal property. In households created through this type of marriage, decisions that involve the disposal of common property must be made by both partners together.

3. The third type of marriage is *q'us'ar*. In *q'us'ar* marriages, a man whose wife has died or is divorced, temporarily marries by *q'us'ar*, literally by accounting, whereby a woman without property is hired to fill the position of head of the domestic activities. *Q'us'ar* wives' property rights are limited to the disposing of household property that are specifically delegated to them. Small children and older children assigned to the domestic field must obey them.

In Geblen polygyny is practised by both Muslims and Christians. Both brideprice and dowry are paid, but dowry predominates. In Geblen a widow can remarry after the ceremony of death which usually occurs after 1 year. She is not normally allowed to bring the husband to her house but must go with him except sometimes when they do not have children she may bring him to her house under pressure from his family.

When a son gets married, he is given some rooms within the parent's compound and a piece of land until he is allocated his own land by the PA. When a daughter is married she will go to her husband's house.

Divorce

Households are unstable in Tigray; the frequency of divorce is high. Bauer reports that the mean duration of marriages ending in divorce is 7.25 years while the mean duration of marriages ending through the death of one partner is 14.7 years. Similarly, McCann argues that because of early betrothals and the weak lineage investment in marriage, divorces are frequent and the expected outcome of most marriages in northern Ethiopia. When a household breaks up through divorce, the common property must be divided between the two partners depending on the type of marriage the two partners contracted. If the marriage is of the *mihab kefti* type, all property owned by either which is relevant to production or domestic fields is common property and must be divided equally between the two parties. All of the livestock, grain, farm implements, and household utensils are counted, divided, and assigned to each of the partners. However, if both parties agree to it, the man may keep the farming implements and the woman may keep the household utensils. As to the division of personnel/children, those below about seven years of age remain with the mother while older children have a choice but generally older boys go with the father and older girls go with the mother.

In *birkinet* marriages, only the common property is divided, the personal property remaining in the hands of its original owner. In *q'us'ar* marriages where the woman did not bring any property to the marriage, there is no need to divide the household property. Since land is not household property in Tigray, it has no relevance in the division of property.

There are second marriages. However, there will not be any wedding. Partners bring what they have in the presence of three elders (witnesses) and start their lives together. A widower can get remarried and bring a wife after the one year *teskar* ceremony. The widow can also get remarried after one year but in most cases is not allowed to bring the husband. The only time she could sometimes bring the husband over to the home is if there are no children from the previous marriage.

It is difficult to tell how frequent divorce is in Geblen. But, by general consensus, informants suggest that divorce is frequent. Men and women have equal rights to get a divorce. The spouse wishing

the divorce begins the legal proceeding by going to the *baito* court and applying for a divorce. The court returns the divorce case to an ad hoc committee of elders chosen to hear particular divorce cases and give their verdict on it. The elders first try to reconcile the couple. If they cannot achieve this, they return their verdict of divorce to the court and the court approves the verdict.

After this, the household property is divided. Grain is divided equally between the two partners. If the couple have contributed equal numbers of livestock, all livestock are simply counted, divided into two equal shares and are assigned by lottery. If both have not contributed equal number of livestock, livestock which were held by either of the spouse are kept by the partner who originally owned them and the common livestock and those produced during the couple's married life (from the common or personally held) are divided equally. The same procedure may be applied for agricultural implements and household utensils or the couple may agree and the husband may keep the agricultural implements while the wife keeps the household utensils. The homestead is also subject to division and is assigned by lottery. The partner who fails to win the lottery receives half the value of the homestead from the partner who kept it. Both of the partners retain their share of farm land. It is to be remembered that farm plots are allotted to individual household members (not to households) and that a husband and a wife each receive their shares of land.

Concerning children, those under 5 years of age go with the mother while those above 5 years of age could choose with which parent to go. However, the father must pay money and grain for the support of the children under 5. The maintenance grain and money is paid in so far as the woman never remarries. If she remarries, the former husband can terminate the payment for the support of his children under the age of 5.

Inheritance

The descent and inheritance system among the Amhara-Tigray was ambilineal and provided the right of access to *rist* land. Due to the land reform law, and the civil war, descent has ceased its importance as a condition of access to land. The ambilineal descent and inheritance system provides equal de jure rights of access to parental property for both men and women. A household may break up through death, divorce, or economic collapse. A household's dissolution involves the division of property and the dispersal of its members. When a household dissolves through the death of one partner his/her personal property and share of the community property devolve to his/her children while the living partner's share is retained by him/her. In Geblen, when a male household head dies, distribution is done based on the will he left. The property is divided into three and the children get one third. Daughters are not given fixed assets like houses, but things like oxen which can be taken to her husband's place. The widow gets one-third of the property and can stay or go with her share. The remaining one third of the property is used to cover the death rituals.

Illegitimate children had no traditional rights to parental property, though they might receive some in the parents' will. At present, because the TPLF carried out massive propaganda work, and due to the institution of new laws in the *baito sirit*, children born out of wedlock have equal rights with those born in wedlock.

Kinship

A household head has the obligation to look after and provide for the members of his household, and children born into his household have rights to such support. However, a father may fulfil this obligation by sending his children out to work for others or to be incorporated into more prosperous households. Children may dismiss the duty to support their parents in old age and lose any rights to support from the father by leaving and attaching themselves to other households. Kinship and contract are equivalent to recruitment principles for household relationships. This is to say that household members rights and duties toward each other may change depending on their decisions. This shows that kinship obligations are weak in Tigray.

Grown-up children owe their parents old age support. But, if their parents have not provided

for them during their childhood and have not sponsored their marriage, they may not have the obligation to support their parents in their old age. Another important obligation is that grown-up children must give memorial feasts for a dead parent known as *teskar*. This may be held once on the first anniversary of the parent's death or annually depending on the economic standing of the children. As has been indicated earlier, kinship is traced ambilineally and all persons up to the seventh descending and ascending generation are considered kin. However, kinship relations are not all that strong. It is true that kin groups have obligations toward each other, but these obligations are not to a corporate group but to individuals. Kin groups are weak corporations and the obligations are, to use Bauer's term "mutable" (Bauer 1977). Corporate activities, during the years of war and now, are limited to funerals. Apart from this, there are no corporate activities. In the pre-1975 period corporate actions were manifested in blood feuds and in organizing support for parliamentary elections. The absence of family names and inter-generational labels of identity reflect this. This is not to say that kinship does not create some obligations. Kinship creates obligations but the obligations are not to the corporate group but to individuals. And the obligations are not of the sort that involve great economic implications. In sum, kinship relationships are fantasies because they are more believed in than practised.

Lineages

Risti land rights in Tigray were based on descent traced omnilineally. Although the existing literature tells us nothing on the importance of lineage in relation to marriage, politics and the local legal system, it was important in Tigray society. For example, it was important in selecting marriage partners for one's children. Due to the land reform law, descent has lost its importance as a condition of access to land, especially *rist* land. Descent has also lost its importance as a recruitment principle to political positions. This is because the TPLF has introduced the *Baito* system. The *Baito* are local elected councils of a peasant association, etc., which provide the administrative structure of Tigray. These could be viewed as the impact of national politics and the national legal system on the institution of descent. There are no lineage organizations which act as corporate groups.

Clans

Lineages are not linked together in clans to act as corporate groups.

Life cycle changes and rites of passage

There is no age grading system in the community. As in every society, individuals in Geblen pass through a number of stages in their lifetime. Each of the stages are marked by a special, long-established ceremony. In fact, one can say that the people of Geblen display great interest in and obedience to rituals marking each stage in an individual's life from birth to death. Almost all of the life crisis ceremonies involve feasts. The important rites of passage in the community are briefly described below. Because the rites of passage for both men and women are almost the same, they do not warrant a separate description.

Birth, *Illilta* and the *Geleb*:

After a baby is born, the traditional birth attendants cut the baby's umbilical cord and utter *illilta* (cries of joy). The number of *illilta* is different for the sexes: seven for baby boys and three for baby girls. This shows that boys are preferred to girls. However, the traditional seven to three rule is not strongly adhered to at present.

Because delivery is fraught with danger and there is the possibility of death, the neighbourhood women and relatives are expected to visit the new mother to express their happiness that she is saved. A woman who has given birth to a baby is fed with barley or wheat porridge dipped in butter and a sheep or a goat may also be slaughtered for her. The visitors are offered porridge.

A woman who has given birth to a baby is thought unclean for seven days. Washing the body, clothes, and rags of a new mother and thus removing the bloodstains was traditionally forbidden until the seventh day. A new mother's body and her bloodstained clothes and rags are ritually washed in a *geleb*. The *geleb* is a washing party consisting of neighbouring women held on the seventh day after a woman has given birth to a child. On the seventh day, the *geleb* women wash the garments and rags of the new mother in a river and they also wash the new mother's and the baby's bodies by bringing water from the river.

As the participants of the *geleb* return to the house of the new mother, they enjoy themselves eating, singing songs of praise to St. Mary, and dancing. The *geleb* women make a toy of pointed bow and arrow for baby boys or a toy sieve for baby girls and hang it on the wall of the room where they hold the *geleb* feast. This act has a very important symbolic meaning. The toy of a pointed bow and arrow (weapon of war) symbolizes and licenses the baby boy's future role outside the home in the task of government and provides him with the means of gaining the control of it, while the toy sieve (a kitchen utensil) symbolizes that the baby girl's future is bound up with the kitchen.

Circumcision, Christening And Naming

Babies are circumcised on the eighth day after they are born. But circumcision may be deferred until baptism for health reasons or otherwise. Baby boys are circumcised by cutting off the foreskin at the end of the penis, and especially in the days before the war, baby girls were circumcised by cutting off the clitoris. In the days before the advent of the TPLF female circumcision was ubiquitous. These days things are different. The TPLF has fought against the practice of female circumcision and it has been successful in convincing the masses to give up the practice. As a result, the practice of female circumcision has nearly died out.

The next stage in the life cycle is *Kristina* (Christening), that is, making a baby Christian by the ceremony of baptism and the giving of a name. Baby boys and baby girls are baptised on the fortieth and on the eightieth days respectively after they are born. The reason for the delayed baptism of baby girls, according to informants, is because God made *Hewan* (Eve) forty days after he made Adam.

On the day of baptism, the baby is taken to the local church and a priest baptises the baby by sprinkling holy water and by giving a name. The baptismal names may be used as personal names or the parents may give other personal names to their babies. An individual is addressed and referred to by his personal name and the father's name is added to distinguish between namesakes. There are no family names.

Upon baptism a baby is accepted as a Christian and if it dies, its body is buried in the churchyard and a funeral ceremony is held. But if a baby is born dead or if it dies before it is baptised, its body will be buried in the backyard without a burial ceremony.

In baptism too, as in the *geleb*, there is an act which has very important symbolic meaning. As the mother, the women accompanying her, and the godparent return from the church where the baby is christened, the mother carries the baby on the back and sits on a beam of a plough if it is a baby boy or on a grinding slab if it is a baby girl. The beam of the plough is a farm implement while the grinding slab is a household utensil. Thus, the act symbolizes the future role of the baby boy as a ploughman or as a producer while it symbolizes the future role of the baby girl as a domestic worker.

Baptism involves feasts. The neighbourhood people partake in baptismal feasts and may bring with them food or grain flour on a reciprocal basis.

Marriage

The next stage in the life cycle is marriage. Because the institution of marriage has been described previously in this paper, we will restrict our description here to a few points.

In the pre-1975 period, weddings occurred when the brides were as young as 9 years old and the grooms about 20. In the post-1975 period, however, the TPLF agitated against child marriage and laws prohibiting child marriage have been included in the *baito sirit*. Marriages are ideally sponsored

by one's parents. Sponsoring marriages involves large feasts and, thus, expenditures in terms of money and grain. A marriage ceremony attended by a large number of people is a pride while a poorly attended one is a disgrace.

Death

There are two funeral ceremonies for the dead regardless of age and sex. The first funeral ceremony is held as soon as a person dies. After a person dies, his body is prepared for burial and fellow villagers and people of the neighbouring communities are called out to help bury the corpse and to attend the burial ceremony. Soon after the call, mourners will turn out for the funeral procession. Funerals have considerable socio-political significance. The size of the mourning procession is very important for it is a measure of one's *wegen* (lit. side), that is, one's potential supporters; a well-attended funeral is a pride on the part of the bereaved while a poorly attended one is a disgrace. As a result, relatives, affines, and acquaintances of the deceased and the bereaved should come in large numbers to funerals and should express their sadness. To feel and express deep sorrow for the dead is a time-honoured custom and there are a number of institutionalized expressions of grief. These include: crying, giving up food, and destroying one's beauty and avoiding everything that beautifies oneself.

The second funeral ceremony is a means by which persons who missed the first funeral (it may be because they were sick or away on a trip) express grief. Second funeral ceremonies are usually held within a few days after the first funeral.

Friendship

Friendship relationships are based on gender and age. To associate with a member of the opposite sex outside the home is thought inappropriate. A man who spends too much time with women, even with his own wife, is thought womanish and a woman who spends too much time with men, including her own husband, is thought mannish.

However, children of opposite sexes may associate together as childhood playmates until they reach "the age of sense" at about the age of seven. The most loved and frequented game by children of opposite sexes is one in which a male child and a female child build a playhouse and amuse themselves by playing a husband and a wife. The game is an exact copy of the behaviour typical of a husband and a wife and may be viewed as a means through which behaviour considered proper is passed down from generation to generation. After about the age of seven, girls associate with girls and boys associate with boys.

Persons with considerable differences age-wise (an adult person and a child, for example) could not become friends. For adults to associate with children or vice versa is supposed to be improper and even the presence of children when adults hold discussions is strongly avoided. To discuss with children about important matters is also thought improper, as reflected in the following adages:

"Do not consult with a child
Do not hide with a dog."

"Do not show a child your teeth
Do not show a wound to a fly."

Friendships are honoured and play important roles in the life of individuals. First, they serve the role of socialization outside the home during childhood. Second, they are important in certain life crisis ceremonies, especially marriage. At marriage, the friends of the groom accompany him to the bride's place. Third, they are important in gaining access to resources, information, and employment.

Social networks and social capital

Two types of relationships, personal and economic, can be observed in rural communities. Personal relationships are based on kinship, marriage, friendship, and religious ties and economic relationships are those involving economic arrangements and exchange. These two forms of relationships operate jointly in a manner that reinforce each other. Peasants often attempt to spread their relationships and utilize these networks of relationships to get access to the different resources, information, credit, employment, etc. Bauer (1977) discusses the importance of patron-client relationships for gaining access to oxen, land, and labour in Tigray. Oxen, land, and labour are crucial resources to household economic flow in these forms of relationships. The poor households gain access to oxen through their ties with richer households and the rich gain access to labour and land through the poor. Bauer points out that the precariousness of Tigray households as economic enterprises prevents these vertical ties from becoming permanent and concludes that ecological and economic considerations produce shifting vertical inter-household relations.

Citizenship

If we take the concept "citizenship" as involving belonging to a particular community and the rights of the members, the people have a concept of citizenship. Geblen is a *tabia* (the smallest unit of local government in rural Tigray), with its own territory, its own *baito* and is served by a single church. Thus, Geblen is a territorial unit, the lowest unit of government, and an ecclesiastic unit. Therefore, the government, the church, and households intersect at *tabia* level (in the case of Geblen). A local man gains access to the state and the state to him through the *baito*. The *baito* collects taxes from him and, during the war, he could be recruited for war service or for local militia participation through the *baito*. He goes to the *baito* court to seek justice, and he has the right to receive housing and farm plots, to elect and be elected for *tabia baito* membership and receive extension services. There is no special treatment for non-citizens except that they could not receive the above services. However, strangers who came to Geblen (whether or not they are born there) could become citizens of the *tabia* after living there for six months and could receive farm and housing plots or other rights. This is included in the local laws, but due to the recent ban on land redistributions it is difficult to receive land at the moment.

Markets

There is no market in Geblen and the people of Geblen have to visit either the Adigrat market (3 - 4 hours on foot, or 47km via Edagahamus, held weekly on Mondays) or the Edagahamus market (about 22 km from the site, held weekly on Saturdays). The Adigrat market is bigger and is the nearest while the Edagahamus market is smaller and further (it takes 4 hours' walk).

Weights (machines) are not used (except in shops) to measure goods in the weekly market places and traditional measurements are used instead. For example, cans or tins are used to measure grain, and bottles are used to measure liquid items (such as edible oil and kerosene), and cloth is measured by cubits or the length of arms. But these measurements are non-standard. The *baito* or local elected councils control the markets and the local police force polices the markets. Incidents could be reported to the police.

Credit and Social Security

Although insurance in its modern sense is a recent phenomena, indigenous self-help associations have existed for centuries in Ethiopia. These include:

Mehber is an association for mutual aid based on attachment to a specific patron saint; a group of people organizes monthly feasts in the name of a particular patron saint in turns. *Mehber* are widely formed, each with a recognized name. Membership does not involve ascription as a principle of recruitment and *mehber* cross-cut neighbourhoods, wards and parishes. They are social gatherings

which enable members to get together, and at the same time they serve as a mutual aid system assisting a member in trouble, consoling the bereaved, and settling conflicts. *Mehber* are based on a good spirit and members who quarrel with one another can be expelled from membership. Membership may involve couples or individuals. About 12 couples (one for each month and Apostle) form a *mehber* and each couple has to host the monthly meeting once a year. *Mehber* may also be organized on the basis of gender. There may be a *mehber* exclusively for men and another for women (usually in the name of St. Mary) in a community.

Senbet mehber: there are also meetings held weekly on *Senbet* (Sunday). These are held after church services. Here too, the host member has to serve food and drinks for the participants. Regarding membership, both sexes are eligible to become members and even children go to such meetings with their parents.

Idir which is a society for mutual aid and burial;

Equb which is a rotating credit association; and

Kusukus which is a one time self-help or aid contribution made by interested group members to cover the commitments or needs of one or all the members. When members of a community need to buy an expensive item i.e., when they cannot afford to buy the thing individually, they temporarily form *kusukus* for that limited purpose and start to raise money together. For instance, during the various religious festivals it is customary to slaughter an animal. The rich can afford to buy one on their own but the poor cannot and they turn to *kusukus*. At such moments, the elders call a meeting on a Sunday (after church services) and discuss ways of buying an animal to slaughter for the occasion. When they reach a decision, they appoint individuals who can implement the decision. Then the appointed *ad hoc* committee collects the contributions from every individual member and buys the animal. The animal is slaughtered on the festival day and the meat is shared among the members proportionally. If a person contributes more money, he gets proportionally more meat.

Kusukus is also used on such occasions as when a woman becomes a widow, when a person becomes destitute, or when someone is sent as a representative to a distant place. The community discusses and decides what kind of assistance should be collected and provided. According to the decision, the contributions are collected and handed over to the beneficiary in the presence of some elders of the community.

A neighbourhood, defined by the Tigray in residence terms, is an ego-centred quasi-group and there is a reciprocal set of obligations between neighbours. Neighbours have reciprocal rights and duties in supporting one another's life crisis ceremonies. At baptisms, marriages, funerals, and such, the sponsor provides the food and his neighbours provide the labour of doing all the preparations. For women the neighbourhood is the main arena in which day-to-day interaction, involving help and borrowing, takes place.

Neighbourhood membership may overlap with membership in other groups in which mutual aid and support takes place, for instance *mehber*. Therefore, one's neighbour could be one's *mehber* co-member, relative, etc. at the same time.

In Geblen if a house burns down relatives contribute a piece of wood each to rebuild the roof (the rest is of stone). When an oxen dies there is no assistance unless during its illness the owner tells others it is ill and invites them to share the meat. Usually it is split into 12 parts and each person pays 10 *birr*. Relatives and *idir* also assist in times of crisis. There are four *idir* (one in each village) and many *mehber*, but there are no *equb* in Geblen. These organizations are not differentiated by wealth. The *idir* are a recent introduction (the oldest *idir* is 10 years old). There are no restrictions on *idir* membership and Christians and Muslims and men and women can become members. The *mehber* are only for Christians and there are separate *mehber* for men and women. Membership in one association usually overlaps with membership in the other and, thus, people who belong to the same *idir* could belong to the same *mehber*.

People borrow small sums of money from friends and relatives. Besides, people also borrow money from the *idir* at the rate of 5% monthly. Apart from this, there are no other local moneylenders. The RRC, REST, *Egre-mitkhal* and the Ministry of Agriculture have a credit programme to help the poor and to assist people to participate in trade. Loans are provided for seed and fertiliser for those who

have land, oxen for those who do not have them; donkey and money for potential traders; chickens, sheep and goats for those who are too old; ploughing tools for those who do not have them. Households go and ask for a loan from 30 *birr* to 1500 *birr*. The rate of interest charged is 2% for the period except that REST charges no interest. Repayment depends on the loan: 1 year for loans below 100 *birr*; 2 years for goats; 3 years for sheep; 5 years for donkeys and oxen. More than 10% of villagers have obtained loans (287 people). The basis for selection or approval was age, landlessness, and the willingness and responsibility of people.

Community decision-making

During the pre-war period elders had a number of important roles. However, the elders have lost many of their traditional roles as a result of recent processes, the introduction of the *baito* system for example. An ad hoc committee of elders still reconcile disputes involving many aspects of life. For example, an ad hoc committee of elders reconcile marriage disputes and the elders are chosen by both parties.

Decisions are made by the general assembly of the people of the *tabia*. All development and policy matters are discussed and decided at the general assembly of the people of the *tabia*. The executive committee of the *tabia* council implements the decisions made by the general assembly. The executive have the power and duty to carry out decisions and to deal with the day-to-day affairs of the council. The council of the *tabia* is elected by and from the general assembly of the people and the executive committee members are elected from and by the council of the *tabia*. The *baito* system in Tigray provides the basis for grass roots level participation in the decision making process and for participatory development. The *baito* members are accountable to the general assembly and the legality of the actions of the *baito* members are appraised in the general assembly.

The member of the *tabia* executive in charge of financial matters collects or organizes and looks after the payment of taxes in the *tabia*. Taxes are decided by the regional council. In 1994/95, the regional council decided taxes based on the size of *gibri* (unit of land). According to the decision, the amount of tax one pays depends on the size of *gibri* one farms. Tax was divided into three groups and households with half, full, and more than a *gibri* would pay *birr* 10, 15, and 20 respectively. The people opined that the taxation is fair.

The people try to get the *baito*, other government officials, and researchers to classify them as poor. This is not for taxation purposes but for aid purposes.

Redistributive mechanisms

There are a number of feasts involving sacrifices. These include: life crisis ceremonies (such as baptisms and marriages), religious festivals, and *mehber* (which may be viewed as religious feasting associations). Individuals may sacrifice an animal for fame (in the life crisis ceremonies for example) or to please the patron Saints and to be forgiven for their sins and become righteous so that they might go to heaven (in the case of the *mehber*). In the *mehber* only members are entertained with feasts. In the life crisis ceremonies, other members of the community may be invited.

The animals must be ritually slaughtered. A male (females are prohibited from slaughtering animals) should first bless the animal "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit", and then slaughter the animal by cutting its throat. This ritual is called *mixistan* (to make Christian or holy). If animals die (from natural causes or otherwise) before they can be made holy, they are unclean and therefore not edible.

Teskar (commemorative feasts for the dead) could be viewed as redistributive mechanisms. When a person dies, the heirs to his property are expected to give feasts and they expend his property in the *teskar* feasts.

8. Beliefs and Values

Land

People are not buried on the land they farmed. There are separate burial sites for Muslims and Christians. The Christians are buried in the churchyard and the Muslims are buried in an area specifically allocated to serve as a burial site for the Muslims outside the mosque. No importance is attached to the burial site of ancestors. However, children may visit the grave of their immediate ancestors, that is, parents, but no rituals are performed on the grave.

The people regard the land as sacred because they believe that human beings were made from the ground; it grows food for them and when they die, they return to the ground.

When asked about the idea of private ownership of land on the Western model, people reacted negatively. This is because land has never been owned privately. Even before the land reform, ownership of land was communal, that is, ownership of land by descent groups in the *risti* land tenure system and by residential communities in the *chiguraf-sehabo* or land-share system earlier.

Religion

Data available tells us that 70 per cent and 30 per cent of the Tigrayans are respectively Christians and Muslims (REST 1993: 3). In Geblen the Christians are Orthodox and Catholic. Different fasting rules are respected in all the three cases. Orthodox members do not work on church holidays, Catholics do not work on Sundays, and Muslims observe Fridays. The followers of both religions go on pilgrimages to holy places in the country and abroad. The Christians make pilgrimages to Axum, Lalibela and Gishen (in Wollo), and Debre Damo (an ancient monastery in Tigray) and the Muslims make pilgrimages to Mecca.

Explanations of misfortune and illness

In the olden days explanations of illnesses and accidents were said to be from evil spirits, etc, but it is a crime to say that now. There were some local witchfinders but they are not practising any more. It is only God who makes rain and that is why they do not have rain. The people of Geblen follow Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity or Islam and they believe in the will of God. Virtually all phenomena and events (good or bad) are thought to be the will of God. They maintain that every phenomenon and event is God ordained and nothing takes place without God's will. Therefore, explanations of misfortune and illness are based on the will of God. Apart from this, the people do not believe in sorcery, witchcraft and evil spirits as causes of misfortune and illness and they do not practise ancestor workshop.

Community values

There are a number of traditional cultural beliefs in the community. Some of these are in the process of changing and others are still held by the community. For example, women were thought to be weaklings both physically and mentally and some occupations (such as metalwork) were looked upon with contempt and were left to the traditionally despised occupational groups. However, recent events and processes have started to change these cultural prejudices against women and the despised occupations. But many cultural beliefs (such as respecting elders and parents and cultural beliefs about the gender division of labour) are still held by the community.

With regard to rituals, those associated with the life cycle of individuals and religious rituals are still important and practised by the community. People reconcile scientific or modern beliefs about practices, life activities, etc with traditional ones by resorting to religious beliefs and teachings. For example, people recognize that modern medical treatment and medical practitioners can cure diseases and save lives, but they maintain that the modern treatments developed because of the will of God, and the power of curing diseases and saving life is given to the medical practitioners by the favour of God.

Political beliefs and attitudes

As was pointed out earlier, there was no elected system of administration before the war. However, the introduction of the *baito* system during the war, gave the people their first lessons in elections and the setting up of local laws through the participation of the general public. The people held that the elections and the process of establishing the constitution which were undertaken by the TGE are correct, free from the influence of political groups, and based on the participation of peoples. The people opined that courts of law free from government or other influence are necessary to make the government accountable. The people also felt that the *baito* leaders are elected by and from the general assembly and are accountable to it.

The opinions of people about what should be done about land varied. Those who received land before the TGE imposed a ban on land redistribution in 1991 opined that the ban should not be lifted because the existing holdings are very small. However, those who did not receive land before the ban dissented from the opinion and said that the ban should be lifted and land redistributions should be carried out.

9. The Community

Community organization

Geblen is a *tabia* community. The *tabia* is the smallest unit of local government in rural communities in present day Tigray. It was pointed out, that Geblen consists of 4 *kushet* which are fairly large and quite apart from each other. Therefore, the *tabia* of Geblen may best be understood as a "political community" in that it consists of a number of villages (four) sharing a political structure - the *baito* structure.

Though the people recognize that they belong to the *tabia* of Geblen and share some common ways of behaving, thinking and feeling, the community cannot be said tightly-knit. This is because households in the four villages are far from each other and because of religious diversity. However, there is a lot of social interaction between households in the community. The household is integrated into the wider community through various networks of relationships. These networks of relationships include relationships based on neighbourhood, kinship, affinity, friendship, and church and church-related groups (religious associations) and those relationships involving the various indigenous institutions for exchanging land, labour, and animal power (mainly oxen). The inter-household relationships are not sharply divided so that they function in a manner that reinforces each other. For example, a person would prefer to enter economic relationships with a friend or a neighbour than with another member of the community.

Politics

Community decisions are usually made by the Peasant Association Assembly locally known as *baito*. Some decisions are left to the elders and decisions beyond the capacity of the *baito* will be sent to the *Woreda* Council. Things beyond the *woreda* go to the Zone council and finally the Regional council or court. Because this study is based on a single *tabia* community, it is difficult to tell what has been the effect of the regionalization policy of the TGE on the relationship between national political, legal, social, and cultural policies and local ones.

Social conflict

There are no ethnic or religious conflicts and political factions in the community. Individuals hold differing opinions about differing issues. But the differing opinions are not specific to particular

groups. For example, there are varying opinions about the recent changes with regard to the status and roles of women (to elect and be elected and to speak in public, for example). Some individuals of both sexes approve these changes while, on the other hand, other individuals of both sexes disapprove of these changes.

Poverty and wealth

There are no wealthy persons in the village. Now a days, all the residents of Geblen are poor for the following three reasons:

1. The forced evacuation and resettlement to the south western part of Ethiopia during the 1984 drought. Most of the residents lost the little they had before, like farm implements, etc.
2. Unpredictable weather condition as a result of the region's proximity to the Red Sea. Some years the rain comes when the crop is ready for harvest and farmers lose their harvest and other times it does not rain when expected.
3. The fertile top soil has been washed away and what is left is stone. This breaks the ploughshare.

Geblen is the poorest village of all the villages in the *woreda*. The land is *tef* and the area is *dagetama* and *gedelama* as compared with the others. However, there is no begging or robbery. The richest households are those with a number of livestock and hives. There are no educated people and no traders in the village and the skilled farmers do not use their skill to generate income. Since the TPLF controlled the area inequality has decreased.

During the pre-1975 period, rural society was highly stratified. One of the causes of inequality was the size of land holdings. But recent ecological and political factors (such as the land reform and the repeated droughts) which had a levelling down effect on the rural society have replaced the pre-1975 inequality with relative equality. However, this does not mean that there is no social differentiation at all at present. Unlike the pre-1975 period, the cause of inequality at present is not the size of land cultivated but capital livestock (particularly oxen), labour, and off-farm or non-farm activities (such as trading). Of all these, oxen are the most important cause of inequality. Informants divided rural households into 3 categories of self-sufficient, medium, and poor. According to the informants, a self-sufficient household is one which has a pair of oxen, a medium is one with only an ox, and a poor household is one which does not have draught power.

Social mobility

The economic status of individuals depends on their own achievements. Thus, a person born into a rich household could become poor and a person born into a poor household could move upward depending on his own achievements. Likewise, the position of individuals is subject to change and the wealthy could become poor and the poor could work their way out of poverty. A child of a poor farmer can move upward through a number of ways: through share-cropping or through engaging in non-farm or off-farm activities. It was pointed out earlier that parents are expected to help their children to build their own homesteads and to supply them with grain and other household utensils and farm implements when they set up their own households after marriage. Once new couples set up their own households, they are expected to manage on their own.

Status

Status has a number of components. These include: wealth, age, sex (maleness), political position, piousness, personal attributes such as eloquence, and status symbols such as the homestead as a physical entity. With regard to caste groups, though there were traditional despised occupational groups (such as blacksmiths), these cannot be viewed of as caste groups in the proper sense of the term. For example, there was no untouchability and even the lower respect for these groups is becoming a thing of the past.

According to Bauer (1977) Tigray status-honour (*kibri*) is a product of a number of component

qualities including spirituality, age, political power, wealth, ability to speak well in court, heading a viable independent household etc. It is manifest in a variety of ways in almost all non-religious public contexts: it determines the use of terms and address between ego and alter, the order of passage through doorways, the order of coffee service, and the order of seating (Bauer, 1977:37-38).

Until the advent of the TPLF, the "feudalist" ideology and the social norms consecrated male supremacy and chauvinism while maintaining female subservience. It inculcated in women a consciousness deluding them into accepting male supremacy as intrinsic in man's biological make-up; as something natural and immutable. These ideas were also related to religion. It was held that women were weak both physically and mentally. To cite some proverbs:

"Just as there is no donkey with horns, so there is no woman with brains".

"Where is the gain if one marries a woman, to give birth to a woman"

This ideology was reflected and reinforced by depriving women of the political, economic and social rights enjoyed by the men of the society. In the village assemblies where issues of concern to the entire village such as land distribution are discussed and resolved, only men were allowed to attend. Women were considered incapable of contributing to social discussion, as expressed by the saying "If women gather, they overcook the meal." Today, however, the active participation of women in the liberation struggle, as fighters, workers and administrators, and the introduction of sweeping legal reforms to protect their rights in marriage, divorce and access to land have led to a significant improvement in their status.

Consequently, the multifaceted prejudices against women are gradually withering away. In the elections of 1992, women won 25 per cent and 19 per cent of the seats in the *woreda* (district) councils and the Regional Council (Tigray's elected parliament) respectively (REST 1993: 14).

In Gebelen landowners used to be respected but now all are equal. Status is given to elected representatives, the priests, old people and those who perform well. A respondent said that the only way a man or woman can become famous in the community is through owning many cattle. Another said that in this country people become well known either through power or ownership of property. Since land size is similar for everyone, well-known people in the community today are those involved in the administration of their areas. Another said the elites are those elected to serve the people. They participate in meetings in the community and at *awraja* levels. As a result of spending a lot of time at meetings they are getting poorer. Divisions and conflicts are sometimes created between them and there is competition for government positions and other advantages and privileges.

Social stratification

Dessalegn has recently suggested that, following the Revolution and the land reform, social classes no longer exist. Rural inequality is based on differential distribution of assets and particularly traction power, labour and the "enterprising spirit". Inequality is also intra-household, inter-community and inter-regional. Wealth and power are two of the components of status. However, neither wealth nor power alone brings a person status, that is, a wealthy person does not necessarily acquire high status and the same is true with power. The people consider individuals who possess the above mentioned components of status as their superiors and they behave in a deferential manner to those they consider their superiors. For example, persons of higher status are given priority in being served coffee or other drinks, are given the best seats, and are referred to and addressed in a polite manner.

There is a high degree of social homogeneity in rural communities and the peasantry may be viewed of as a single class differentiated into analytic strata of poor, self-supporting and well or better off. At the present, there is no evidence of incipient class formation.

One observer said that the elites in the area are those who work for the new government. They are occupied in spying on others, so when the people are called to meetings they do not dare to tell their

grievances to the elites. They hold many meetings and this is demoralising the farmers because they cannot use this time for their farming activities. Another respondent said the people are happy because they can discuss anything in their meetings. Another said the elites are the elders and mostly they are not getting wealthier. Another said the elites are part of broader economic and political structures. They take directives from government departments nearby and inform members of the community. If they do not implement government instructions they may face penalties.

Dissent

There have been no signs of political dissent in the area in the last 10 years.

10. Relationships with Other Communities and the Wider Society

Some indication of these is given on Map 2 of the profile.

Clans and tribes

There are no clans or tribal organizations in the community.

Villages and regions

The residents of Geblen have a number of relationships with people in other communities. The relationships may be based on kinship, affinity, friendship, religious associations, and on the indigenous exchange institutions described earlier.

Relationships with wider Ethiopia

The people have no enemies at present. However, informants said that their ancestors who lived seven generations ago had enmities with the Afar and they used to kill each other and individuals who killed the Afar were given the title "*Hanta*". The answer to the question whether the people consider themselves Ethiopians or something more local depends on the type of question asked or on the place in which they find themselves. For example, if you find a man from Geblen in Edaghamus (the *Woreda* capital) and if you ask him from where he is, he will tell you that he is from Geblen and if he is in Adigrat, he will tell you that he is from Subhasaesie (the name of the *Woreda* in which Geblen is found). Similarly, the same man will identify himself as "Agame" (the name of the *Awraja* in which Subhasaesie *Woreda* is found) when he is in Addis Ababa, and as Ethiopian when he is in Saudi Arabia. But if you ask him whether he is an Ethiopian or not, he will tell you that he is an Ethiopian. In general, the people of Geblen consider themselves Ethiopians. One man said, "our ancestors have been Ethiopians, we are Ethiopians and we want to remain Ethiopians".

Effects of government policies

The previous government's villagisation programme was not carried out in Tigray because of the then ongoing war. The effects of recent government policies have been considerable. For example, devaluation and the end of price setting have caused a substantial rise in the price of food, agricultural inputs (such as chemical fertilizers, and manufactured household items) the people buy and the agricultural products they sell.

One observer said the community is better off now because there is no longer any war and their youngsters are not forced to serve the *Derg's* army or that of the Front. However, there are no schools, clinics, or clean water yet. They do not know much about the Constitution and understand democracy to mean peace. Some think that regionalization is a good idea because if a person works in his region

there is the advantage that he knows the people, culture and beliefs. Others think that anyone should be able to go anywhere in the country to live and work as it used to be.

Another observer said that people support regionalization because it has allowed them to look after their affairs independently. There are no security problems in the area. People can get loans either interest-free or at a low rate. People hate the repetition of meetings and the free work service demanded now and then. Another said that most of the households in the community are poor and not affected by economic change. The poorest households get aid or loans (sheep, goats, chickens, etc). Another said most people support regionalization, approve of the Constitution, and practice democracy. Some believe that regionalization is going to cause more separation and problems among the various peoples of the country. Another said people support regionalization as it gives them freedom to govern themselves and use their own language when doing business. Another said that although the cost of living is higher than it was during Mengistu's time the people are better off today because they can move about in peace. Most people support the new economic and political policies apart from those who served with the *Derg* and those who had wealth and power during Haile Selassie's time.

Another respondent said that there are no security problems in the area; one can travel all night without fear. Another said that the economic policies of the government have enabled the community to build roads and other infrastructure. However, the main issue is that the cost of living has gone so high that the poor cannot afford to eat when they are hungry. The government is not doing anything about it so everyone complains that its economic policies are only good for rich people.

Government activities in the community

Descent has ceased to be important as a recruitment principle for political positions. Now Tigray's highly mobilized and zealous population, along with its grassroots level system of administration (the *baito* system) provide the basis for participatory development. The elected local Councils, or *baitos* mobilize the people for community projects. In the *baito* meetings, development projects are discussed and decisions made on how to raise money, how to recruit labour, how to collect materials, where the project should be located, etc. Similarly the implementation of the decisions is evaluated and corrective measures taken. The fieldworker has observed this during his fieldwork in Central Tigray.

Since the end of the war the TPLF and REST have supported ex-fighters through the provision of oxen, food (through the RRC) and fertilizers. REST has plans for the construction of a factory for ex-fighters. Currently the Ministry of Agriculture, RRC, (with REST) are active at the site in agricultural development programmes. They supply loans for the farmers in cash for trade (for those without land with 2 donkeys) and seeds, fertiliser and oxen for those who have land (here only 50kg of fertilizer was used in the last season), and chickens, goats and sheep for old people. The RRC have been active since 1984 and the Ministry of Agriculture since 1992. The Ministry of Agriculture also supplies extension advice about terracing and farm activities and how to keep the remaining trees (aimed at males) and how to use less fuel (for females).

NGO activities in the community

CRS have been active at the site since 1984 and REST since 1985. Now CRS are involved in the construction of a water reservoir (*diga*) as a food-for-work programme.

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GLOSSARY

<i>Awraja:</i>	The second level in the three-tier administrative divisions of Emperor Haile Selassie and the Derg.
<i>Baito:</i>	Elected council
<i>Beles:</i>	A perennial plant, <i>perhaps</i> equivalent to cactus.
<i>Belg:</i>	A short rainy season usually occurring during February/March/April; the harvest takes place in July/August
<i>Birr:</i>	The currency of Ethiopia (9 birr= approximately £1)
<i>Dagetama:</i>	Steep land (sloping upwards).
<i>Derg:</i>	The name of the military government that ruled Ethiopia from the revolution until 1991; Amharic for committee.
<i>Equb:</i>	A rotating savings and credit association.
<i>Gedelama:</i>	Downward sloping land with ravines.
<i>Gulgualo:</i>	The removal of debris from a ploughed field: dead weeds and roots are removed by hand.
<i>Injera:</i>	Fermented Ethiopian flat bread.
<i>Kolla:</i>	Lowland country.
<i>Kuuntee:</i>	The roots of a wild plant similar to a radish.
<i>Kushet:</i>	Village.
<i>Mehber:</i>	A religious society which meets monthly on a Saint's day. Each member takes a turn to host the group, providing food and drink.
<i>Meher:</i>	The main rainy season - in most places from June to mid-September. Crops sown during this period are harvested from October to December
<i>Mewkat:</i>	Threshing.
<i>Qofo:</i>	A hive or grain store made of bamboo and mud.
<i>Sirit:</i>	Local laws set up by <i>Tabia</i> communities
<i>Tabia:</i>	The smallest unit of local government in rural communities in present day Tigray.
<i>Tef (grain):</i>	<i>Eragrostis abyssinica</i> (The staple cereal crop in northern Ethiopia).
<i>Tef (soil):</i>	Fallow land or land of poor quality.
<i>Tella</i>	Home-made beer.
<i>Woyna dega</i>	The temperate zone (intermediate altitude for Ethiopia).
<i>Wereda:</i>	The lowest administrative unit in the old administrative divisions until 1991. Presently, it is the second administrative unit above the <i>tabia</i> .

ACRONYMS

REST: Relief Society of Tigray
TGE: Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TPLF: Tigray People's Liberation Front

Geblen

		Men's activities											
		Mesqerem	T'eqemt	Hedar	Tahsas	T'er	Yakatit	Magabit	Miyazya	Genbot	Sane	Hamle	Nahase
Barley		harvesting									soil preparation		
					processing						planting		
Maize		harvesting						soil preparation					
					processing			planting					
Tef		harvesting						soil preparation					
very little					processing			planting					
No weeding is necessary as the land is very stony and the sun very hot.													
Migration					to Eritrea and sometimes to other weredas in Tigray								
Off-farm activities					casual labour in town								
Credit needs		they need credit whenever there is a problem as well											
		credit is mostly from friends and relatives											
Livestock sales		whenever they face a problem they sell goats; there is no fixed time.											
Rain													
Pests		locusts									army worm		
											locusts		

Geblen

Women's activities													
		Mesqerem	T'eqemt	Hedar	Tahsas	T'er	Yakatit	Magabit	Miyazya	Genbot	Sane	Hamle	Nahase
Consumption													
	barley	from own production					from purchase						
	maize	from own production		if they get the money they purchase									
	teff			can't purchase it									
	cactus	wild food		wild food									
	milk	those who have only											
	butter	those who have only											
	eggs	those who have only											
	chicken	those who have only											
	wheat	we purchase all the time when we run out of crops											
Labour	barley	collect the harvested crop					cultivate						
	maize						cultivate and weed if any						
	teff						cultivate and weed if any						
women's fields		Those who live near river in lowland area grow potatoes and tomatoes for home consumption and sale											
		They can be grown all year but are insignificant											
Hungry season		very hungry season: they used to get aid but not nowadays											
Credit needs		It is forbidden for women to ask for credit: it is men who should ask. However she may ask her brothers.											
Festivals				marriage month									
all are for 1 day		New year		Christmas		Epiphany		Easter					
Fuel availability		wood											
		they don't use dung for fuel but rather for fertilizer											
Off-farm activities		Shuruba and sifet are done any time but mostly during holidays and the marriage month											

Geblen

Water												
Water supply name	Description											Time to walk from centre of village (in minutes)
Dalte (spring)												
My Nefaie (river)	It is difficult to describe all this water. People have settled near water but on the escarpment and from one house to another you can walk for up to four hours just in this PA. The closest to water is 20 minutes and the furthest											1
Dil Anbesa (spring)	3 hours.											8
Ela (spring)												20
	Mesqerem	T'eqemt	Hedar	Tahsas	T'er	Yakatit	Magabit	Miyazya	Genbot	Sane	Hamle	Nahase
Dalte	steady											
My Nefaie	good		fair				decreases			increases		
Dil Anbesa	steady											
Ela	steady											

