

Social Relationships of the Elderly That Support Their Daily Lives: The Case in Aari, Southwestern Ethiopia

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This paper aims to explore the daily lives of the elderly living in the Aari community in southwestern Ethiopia by describing the social relationships that support their lives. Although the role of the elderly in household livelihood strategies has been mentioned, few studies have focused on their daily lives. The purpose of this study is to examine the daily interactions and mutual relationships between the elderly and other people who live in the same community, with a special focus on the livelihood activities and living arrangements of the elderly. The results reveal that the elders' living arrangements, such as choices regarding where and with whom to live, are deeply related to social norms. However, there are also cases in which elders lived with or received support from those who were not the expected caretakers. Relationships between persons who required help and respondents were not always fixed in supporting a person's livelihood activities or daily needs. People helped each other and met their daily needs in consideration of individual circumstances such as physical conditions, existence of relatives, and residence arrangement. The acts of *sbedin* (seeing face to face) contributed greatly to the understanding of each other's situations, and the elders were able to maintain their livelihood supported by responsive relationships.

Key words: daily lives of the elderly, social relationships, livelihood, care, rural southwestern Ethiopia

1. INTRODUCTION

When we think about aging in Africa, it is important to know what kinds of relationships support the daily lives of the elderly. Recently there has been global concern about population aging and care of the elderly, and this concern is growing in Africa too. It has been pointed out that there are elders who do not receive sufficient support because of the following reasons: their lack of children, the children's economic conditions, or lack of will among their children or any other relatives to provide care (Schwarz 2003; Aboderin 2004).

Although these points are certainly important, it should be noted that they are not based on concrete observations of the practices of care or the livelihoods of the elderly. For example, Schwarz pointed out that it is becoming more difficult for the elderly to receive care from their extended families, due to the rise of nuclear families in African society (Schwarz 2003: 2). However, hasty generalizations may make the social relationships of the elderly inconspicuous, or mischaracterize the elderly as persons who simply receive care.

The purpose of this study is to examine the daily interactions and mutual relationships between the

elderly and other people who live in the same community, with special focus on the livelihood activities and living arrangements of the elderly. Chapters 2 and 3 describe the cultural positioning of the elderly and how they manage their livelihood activities. The specific descriptions of mutual relationships between the elderly and other people within the community in chapters 4 and 5 give us a clear understanding of the daily lives of the elderly in Aari.

Anthropologists have shown a great interest in “age” for a long time, and not just in Africa. However, it was pointed out in the 1980s, when population aging became a popular research topic, that “aging” and “the aged” themselves had rarely been the object of anthropological studies (e.g. Fry 1980). Anthropological interest tended to focus on the role or the status culturally regulated by age, rather than on the livelihoods or daily lives of the elderly (who have been a great help as informants to a number of researchers). It was in relatively recent years that anthropological studies began to focus on the daily lives of the elderly in Africa (e.g. Rasmussen 1997; Rosenberg 1997; Makoni & Stroeken 2002; Cattell 2008).

One of the most important anthropological studies on care of the elderly in Africa was conducted by van der Geest, who described the care of the Akan elderly in Ghana. He pointed out two variations in their lives: on the one hand, some elders “enjoy” their old age with sufficient support from their children or kin, while on the other there are some who are “miserable, lonely and hungry,” without anyone to take care of them. This distinction is related to the relationships that have been built between the aged parents and their children, although even the “miserable” elderly receive “a minimum dignity and care” (van der Geest 2002). His study is quite important for the point that he raised, namely, that social relationships make a great difference in the living situations of people in their old age; however, he did not provide detailed explanations of specific points such as the activities carried out for the care and support of the elderly.

There are some studies on the roles of the elderly in household livelihood strategy (e.g. Nyambedha et al. 2003; Bock & Johnson 2008). However, few studies have focused on the livelihood strategies of the elderly. One study conducted by Cliggett investigated Tonga elders’ livelihood strategy for an emergency like famine in Zambia. According to her study, Tonga elders draw support in a creative and positive way from other people, including their families, who are not always concerned about taking care of the elderly unconditionally. Each of them has various strategies for surviving a famine: obtaining food from their children or neighbors, relying on food distribution, making a profit from businesses, and, most importantly, building social networks to access various resources. In particular, they obtain most of their basic needs, including food, by managing their living arrangements and building social relationships, which is recognized as one of the main “productive” activities by the people of Tonga (Cliggett 2005).

All people in Africa, not just the elderly, conduct negotiations in their daily lives in accordance with the resources that they have in their social context. Rosenberg (1997: 49) described that the daily lives of the elderly among the Ju/’hoansi in Botswana. According to this study, Ju/’hoansi elders are “independent and autonomous (as are all members of the community) in the sense that they can do what they wish when they wish” without the “social burden” of humbling themselves, even if they get food from their families, kin, and other community members. When we take into consideration the fact that anyone can develop the physical symptoms of aging, one of the most important points is to see whether and how they can display their livelihood needs as well as maintain their self-care activities or financial independence.

2. GENERAL BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH SITE

The research site is Village M, South Aari District, South Omo Zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Figure 1). According to the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia, there are 290,453 Aari people in Ethiopia (CSA 2008). Village M is divided into 10 locations (*budin*). One of these 10 locations, Location Z, is the main focus of my

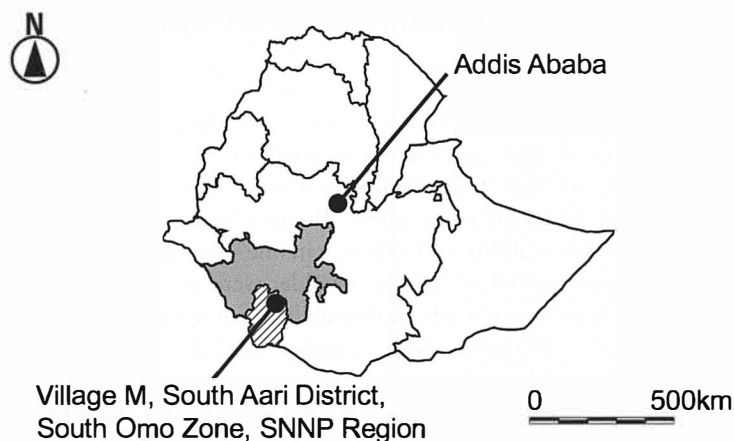


Figure 1. Map of the study area

research. The field research was conducted for a total of 20 months from August 2008 to September 2014. The national pension scheme is available only for employees of government and private companies, and some NGOs run institutional services for the elderly, especially in big cities. However, in the research site, few people get any benefit from these services.

Traditionally, the Aari people do not keep track of individuals' ages. In conducting the research, 17 people who were enumerated as *galta* (elderly people), are the main object of this research.⁽¹⁾ By examining the seniority order, individual life-events, and the local history, I estimated that those 17 elders were over 60 years of age.

The Aari people are mostly self-reliant through household agricultural production. Annual grain crops called *ishin* such as maize, sorghum, and pulse crops such as runner beans and cowpeas, are usually grown in fields called *wony haami*. Perennial root crops called *tika*, such as yam, taro, ensete, and other vegetables, are grown in the garden called *tika haami* surrounding the house. The agricultural activities in *wony haami* are conducted through mutual support between households. During sowing periods, people often negotiate with others about securing oxen for the ox-plow, labor exchanges, or contracts for farmlands. Many people join the mutual support organization and engage in farming activities in cooperation with households (Shigeta 1990).

People usually cultivate *wony haami* with the ox-plow, and apply the hoe in a subsidiarily manner or as a supplementary tool. They recognize ox-plowing as one of the toughest activities for the elderly, and the elderly usually retire from ox-plowing if they have someone to do it on their behalf. If the area of *wony haami* is small, they do not use oxen but hoe. The elderly normally ask their grown sons or sons-in-law for the ox-plow because people think it natural that children and their parents help each other with their agricultural activities. Only some households maintain oxen for the plow; children can use the services of the animals their fathers own.

Following a patrilocal residential pattern (Gebre 1995), Aari men first construct their houses on the land given by their fathers, and then get married.⁽²⁾ In many cases, an Aari woman marries a man who lives outside the locality or village. A son who becomes the head of a household never lives with his father.⁽³⁾ This is one of the most important social norms that many people still follow and all such households are nuclear families. In some cases, unmarried boys stay together in the house that one of them has already constructed, or together in one rented room. However, grown sons usually insist on keeping the land transferred from their fathers, and aged fathers generally prefer continuing to live in their own house to living with their son's family.

3. THE AARI ELDERLY AND NORMS OF CARE

3.1. *People who are called galta*

The Aari people do not count their age in the way that we do: adding each year it passes. They do not consider someone who is of a certain age or above as “aged” or “elderly.” They do not have a rite of passage for this either. However, they understand who is younger or older in order of birth.

In the Aari language, the elderly are called *galta*. The word *galta* often means a person who has *galtalmi*, a decline in one’s physical ability and a change in one’s appearance as one gets older. All the 17 elderly people who were estimated as 60 years or older were recognized as *galta*. The *galta* are recognized not just by their appearance or physical disability. Someone who already has independent sons, or even grandchildren, can also be considered a *galta*. This is because they regard one’s status in the generational reproduction cycle as being more important than mere appearance. Those who mediate ritual ceremonies, negotiation meetings, and contracts, are also called *galta*. In this case, the *galta* is the keeper of public order. Besides, the *galta* is defined by the degree of engagement in one’s livelihood activities. Some informants say that *galta* refers to “those who were freed from work (*wony garta ed*)” or “those who do not work (*wonywonai baab*).”

Nonetheless, the *galta* rarely retire entirely from their livelihood activities, and try to remain active. Most of the mentioned 17 *galta* also continue to engage in livelihood activities. Those *galta* who are active in agriculture or housework are called “young *galta* (*galta ageli*),” while those who rarely engage in these works are called “tired *galta* (*galta langta*).” An expression such as “he is *galta* but *ageli*” may be valid when a person is gray-haired and wrinkled but is still working. On the other hand, the word *langta* is usually used when one gets tired. The sentence “he is *galta langta*” means that his activity has been declining.⁽⁴⁾ From the single word *galta*, people tend to imagine *galta ageli* rather than *galta langta*. Here is an example:

In recent years, the “groups of five” system⁽⁵⁾ was introduced, taking the place of a conventional mutual-aid association. Moreover, I saw those people who are working together. I asked them whether *galta* people also join this cooperative work. They answered, “Of course, they do.” At that time, they were making a wall of a new house and the task seemed to be so hard for him (an elderly man who is almost house-bounded). Then I asked again whether he would also participate in such work, and they said, “No, he doesn’t. If necessary (if that elderly man wants a workforce for the construction of his house, cultivation, and so on), a neighborhood group just goes and helps him.” (from the fieldnote of August 9, 2014)

It should be noted that they had in mind a “younger” *galta* when I asked them whether the *galta* would also join in the cooperative work. The elderly man I mentioned just after this could hardly be considered capable of taking active part in mutual/cooperative work.⁽⁶⁾ Thus, the word *galta* itself does not always mean an aged person who does not work and is *langta*, a person who only receives care. With the word *langta*, however, the *galta* image would be connected to the decline in their activities.⁽⁷⁾

3.2. *Shedin: one of the most important roles in caring for aged parents*

The concept that aged parents should be watched over by their children is one of the social norms of the Aari. The Aari word *shedin*, which I used here to mean “watch,” has many meanings: look, see, watch, and meet.⁽⁸⁾ To *shedin* someone does not only mean “to see/meet someone.” For example, when a man receives the news that his relative is sick in bed, he has to go to see the sick person and say “*Abbo* (greetings)” as soon as he can. Otherwise, something bad may happen to the man. The sick person remembers who came and who did not. When the person gets well, he would say, “That man didn’t come for *shedin*. What happened to him? I have to go and show him that I have recovered from my sickness” to rid him of his anxiety.

To go see someone’s face frequently means to grasp his/her situation every time, and importance is

given to this in building and keeping social relationships. Children always have to go see (*shedin*) their parents' faces; otherwise, people often explain, there is a fear that the parents may put a curse (*iligmat*) on the children. Thus, this act of *shedin* is regarded as important in maintaining a good parent-child relationship.

4. SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS OF THE ELDERLY AS A LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT MECHANISM

Table 1 shows actual livelihood situations of the 17 elderly persons of 13 households in 2009. Most of them are involved in agricultural activities. Even if they did not have a workforce in their household, they could get this from persons such as their grown sons or sons-in-law living nearby, or their neighbors. It is quite common for people who are not members of the household to take some part in their agricultural activities in the *wony haami* in this area, where the households frequently support each other's agricultural activities. It seems that the more *langta* a *galta* becomes, the more important do co-workers become in his activities. Regardless of this, people seem to think of this as a part of the general cooperative work between households.

CASE 1: A galta couple who almost abandoned practicing their livelihood activities

Aggiz and Birano (household No. 1 in Table 1) do not have any children. Because their ethnic identity is Amhara, they have fewer relatives compared with the Aari neighbors. Their parents moved to village M in the early 20th century, and both Aggiz and Birano were born there. They were not expelled from the village at the fall of imperial rule, and they have lived there working together with Aari people. Aggiz, who once had several fields and livestock, used to work energetically when he was young. As he grew old, he had been making a living by selling off the fields or livestock little by little. In 2009 he had no livestock, and asked his neighbor to cultivate sorghum in his field. Aggiz did not share the sorghum harvest. He just served some food to the people who worked for him when they finished the work. He said, "What could I share...I have nothing to provide them."

CASE 2: A galta man who engages in livelihood activities using mutual relationships

Tadesse (household No. 2 in Table 1) lived in other villages, but he moved to village M in order to take care of his wife's old parents. Tadesse and his wife do not have *wony haami* in location Z because his wife did not inherit fields from her father. Tadesse cooperates with Kasahun, a man aged about 50, with whom he has been acquainted since he moved to this village. This is called *gara*, which is one of the personally formed mutual relationships for carrying out cultivation in their *wony haami*.⁽⁹⁾ Each member of a *gara* provides some resources such as fields, seed, or oxen for plowing. In this case, Tadesse provides seed, and Kasahun provides the fields.

Generally speaking, all members of a *gara* do the agricultural work. If the members were all young, they would plow with oxen in turn. In Tadesse's case, however, it is Kasahun who always does the ox-plowing, and furthermore, Tadesse sometimes becomes sick in bed. Tadesse himself often complains of being "*galta langta*." The *gara* relationship between Tadesse and Kasahun has been formed despite this situation.

Tadesse's sons live in the village where Tadesse formerly lived. It takes about six hours on foot to get to his son's house. During the harvesting season, he goes to his son's house and help with the harvesting, after finishing the harvest in the *gara* field cultivated together with Kasahun.

CASE 3: A galta man who has a big harvest, and has a sufficient workforce

Ankshi (household No. 3 in Table 1) plows the field of 4 *timads* (about 0.5 ha) by obtaining a workforce for agricultural activities mainly from his grown sons. He works not only the field he inherited from his father, he also obtains another field through three contracts with a person in the same clan, a neighboring widow, and his cross cousin (she is also a widow). It is not unusual that a father gets a

Table 1. The household composition of the elderly living in location Z and their conditions of livelihood activities (October 2009)

Household No.	Head of household and his spouses		Household composition	Grown children living in the same village	At <i>wony haami</i> (crop fields)				At <i>tika haami</i>
	Male (age ^{*1})	Female (age)			The area ^{*2}	Hoeing	Ox-plowing	Harvest	
1	<u>Aggiz</u> ^{*3} (90)	<u>Birano</u> (90)	only spouses	×	1 <i>timad</i>	neighbors	neighbors	neighbors	A next-door family
2	<u>Tadesse</u> (85)	<u>GR</u> (60)	only spouses	×	n.d.	○ ^{*4}	×	○, neighbors	○
3	<u>Ankshi</u> (75)	LT (55)	with unmarried children	○	4 <i>timads</i>	○	sons/ sons-in-law	○, sons, daughters and their families, mutual-aid association	○
4	<u>GI</u> (75)	<u>DA</u> (70)	only spouses	○	4 <i>timads</i>	○	sons	○, sons, daughters and their families	○
5	<u>GA</u> (70)	YI (55)	with unmarried children	○	n.d.	○	sons	○, sons and their families	○
6	<u>ED</u> (70)	<u>BR</u> (60)	only spouses	×	n.d.	○	n.d.	○	○
7	<u>BT</u> (65)	TR (45)	with unmarried children	○	1 <i>timads</i>	○	son	○, son's family, mutual-aid association	○
8	<u>YJ</u> (60)	IT (45)	with unmarried children	○	n.d.	○	n.d.	○	○
9	<u>AT</u> (60)	HA (50)	only spouses	×	0.5 <i>timads</i>	○	×	○	○
10	<u>Abbaabo</u> (85)	– (divorced)	living alone	○	2 <i>timads</i>	×	sons/ sons-in-law	sons, daughters and their families	Sons/ daughters
11	– (passed away)	<u>BJ</u> (75)	living alone	○	none	×	×	×	A next-door family
12	– (passed away)	<u>BN</u> (75)	living alone	×	none	×	×	×	○
13	– (passed away)	<u>TA</u> (70)	living alone	○	none	○	sons	○, sons	○

*1 estimated age

*2 8~10 *timad* ≅ 1 ha*3 17 people who were enumerated as *galta* (elderly people) are underlined, and the names mentioned in the text are shown.

*4 “○” in the table shows that the member of the household engages in the activity. If they are someone who takes in charge, their relationships are indicated. “×” means that they do not engage in the activity.

[Source: Compiled from field data]

workforce for plowing or harvesting from grown sons or sons-in-law living nearby. The household usually rewards the workforce providers with a meal and a drink on completion of their work. Those who have helped with the agricultural activities, such as their sons and sons' household members, often receive a part of the harvest. During the harvesting season, therefore, everyone comes to help, including, in this case, Ankshi's sons' household members, widows in the neighborhood who are involved in his agricultural activities, and also his relatives living in a distant place. Then, Ankshi divides his crops among them. Moreover, he is careful about selling grain, keeping behind enough stock in his barn during the pre-harvest season,⁽¹⁰⁾ while some others may sell away their harvest easily just to get cash. Ankshi is thus able to distribute food to his sons, relatives, and neighbors when they run out of stock.

From these three cases, we can see that each of the *galta* depends on someone, including their children. In this area, no one does all agriculture work by him/herself. Building mutual relationships is the most basic strategy to make a living, for example, by forming a *gara* with someone, joining a mutual-aid association, and getting a workforce in exchange for some money or a part of the harvest. Even young people normally borrow oxen and exchange labor power. That is why it is not unusual that a *galta* man obtains a workforce not only from his sons or sons-in law, but also from neighbors when he does not have sufficient workforce within his household.

Concerning distribution of the harvest, what matters more is the amount of stocks of food he has, rather than who was involved in the agricultural activities in his fields. Thus, Ankshi distributed crops to the people who helped him with his cultivation, while Aggiz did not have to do so. They all appreciate each other's living situations and needs, and act on their flexible judgment in accordance with circumstances and occasions.

Five years later, in 2014, all the people, except household No. 1 and those who had passed away, continue engaging in their livelihood activities (Table 2). In the case of households that have had no change in their members, there were no major changes in their way of conducting agricultural labor either. In the case of households No. 1 and 3, however, the head of the household had passed away and the lives of the bereaved had changed.

In the case of household No. 1, after Aggiz passed away, Birano started to live with an Aari man who has no relation with her. This case will be discussed in the next section. In the case of household No. 3, after Ankshi passed away, his four sons inherited his lands. In 2014, Ankshi's wife was now working in the field that her son, Ankshi's fourth son, had inherited. Ankshi's fourth son went to school, and so she asked a neighbor to plow her field with oxen. As the total number of fields owned by them had diminished, it was not necessary to procure a workforce for weeding and harvesting. A woman who belonged to household No. 5 got divorced from her husband. In this case, the husband left the house and she could continue her life without many changes. This is because a number of her relatives lived nearby, including her independent sons.

People live in accord with each other's needs relative to each other's living situation such as their health condition, household composition and existence of relatives, and the area of their *wony haami* fields and prospects of harvest. This enables people to compensate one another, not only among household members and relatives, but also with others by entering into mutual exchanges. Changes in household composition and disposition may affect all aspects of their daily lives including their livelihood activities, and their living arrangements seem to be deeply related to their living situation. The following section examines how the living arrangements of the elderly are decided and (re)organized, and consequently how they make a living, with concrete examples.

5. THE LIVING ARRANGEMENTS IN OLD AGE

Choices regarding living arrangements such as where to live and whom to live with may affect the daily living of the elderly, especially in regard to their diet and their daily convenience, and are deeply

Table 2. The household composition of the elderly living in location Z and their conditions of livelihood activities (August 2014)

Household No.	Head of household and his spouses		Household composition	Grown children living in the same village	At <i>wony haami</i> (crop fields)				At <i>tika haami</i>
	Male (age ^{*1})	Female (age)			The area ^{*2}	Hoeing	Ox-plowing	Harvest	
1	– (passed away)	<u>Birano</u> ^{*3} (95)	with a man	×	–	×	×	×	×
2	<u>Tadesse</u> (90)	<u>GR</u> (65)	only spouses	×	n.d.	○ ^{*4}	×	○, neighbors	○
3	– (passed away)	LT (60)	with unmarried children and her grandchild	×	1 <i>timad</i>	○	neighbours	○	○
4	<u>GI</u> (80)	<u>DA</u> (75)	only spouses	○	4 <i>timads</i>	○	sons	○, sons, daughters and their families	○
5	<u>GA</u> (75)	YI (60)	with unmarried children	○	n.d.	○	sons	○, sons and their families	○
6	<u>ED</u> (75)	<u>BR</u> (65)	only spouses	×	n.d.	○	n.d.	○	○
7	<u>BT</u> (70)	TR (50)	with unmarried children	○	1 <i>timad</i>	○	son	○, son's family, mutual-aid association	○
8	<u>YJ</u> (65)	IT (50)	with unmarried children	○	n.d.	○	n.d.	○	○
9	<u>AT</u> (65)	HA (55)	only spouses	×	0.5 <i>timads</i>	○	×	○	○
10	<u>Abbaabo</u> (90)	Haamalga (70)	with her grandchild	○	2 <i>timads</i>	○	sons/ sons-in-law	sons, daughters and their families	sons/ daughters
11	– (passed away)	<u>BJ</u> (80)	moved out	○	–	–	–	–	–
12	– (passed away)	– (passed away)	–	×	–	–	–	–	–
13	– (passed away)	<u>TA</u> (75)	living alone	○	none	○	sons	○, sons	○

*1 estimated age

*2 8–10 *timad* ÷ 1 ha*3 17 people who were enumerated as *galta* (elderly people) are underlined, and the names mentioned in the text are shown.

*4 “○” in the table shows that the member of the household engages in the activity. If they are someone who takes in charge, their relationships are indicated. “×” means that they do not engage in the activity.

[Source: Compiled from field data]

related to social norms and expectations of individuals (Albert & Cattell 1994: 241).

In Aari society, grown children should not live together with their father, while they should take care of their aged parents. In fact, most of the households in this society are nuclear families, and there were no households comprising multiple generations in 2014. Even if someone loses his/her spouse, he/she usually decides against living in his/her son's household and tends to reorganize his/her living situation in a different way.

In this section, the characteristics of social relationships that support the daily living of the elderly will be discussed. The following examples are the cases of two *galta* individuals who are quite limited in their livelihood activities and in need of more domestic care.

5.1. *Abbaabo, an elderly man who is supported by his sons and daughters living nearby*

Abbaabo (household No. 10 in Table 1) was born and brought up in this locality. He has three younger brothers, four sons, and a daughter living within ten minutes' walking distance. Many of his other relatives are also living in the same location. He had been blind and almost house-bound since 2002. During my first visit, he lived alone and had left almost everything concerning his agricultural matters to his children, sons-in-law, and grandchildren (Table 1).⁽¹¹⁾ In 2009, he had an operation at a hospital in a neighboring city and regained his eyesight.

After regaining his eyesight, he started living with Haamalga, a woman aged about 70. He gradually returned to farm-work. Haamalga does not have any kinship relation with Abbaabo. They met each other through their relatives. Haamalga had stayed in her son's house since she got divorced from her ex-husband. Unable to have a good relationship with her son's wife, she left that house and came to Abbaabo's place. They did not answer my question whether they were spouses or not. This is because they belong to the same moiety, and since Aari people do not normally get married to persons belonging to the same moiety, they did not say "we are a couple."

Although his four sons and a daughter lived near his house, none of them lived together with him even prior to his recovery. Food was delivered to him by his daughter. They followed the social norm in which "grown children should not live together with their father, this is the custom (*dambi*).⁽¹²⁾" The daughter said, "There is no problem if we don't live in the same place because our children (grandchildren of Abbaabo) are always playing beside him and they will call us if he needs something or has any trouble." This could be justified as they often visited Abbaabo to see each other's faces (*shedin*), thereby knowing each other's condition and feeling no need to live in the same house. In 2014, Abbaabo lived with Haamalga and one of her grandchildren, and so did not have to ask his children living separately to do the housework (Table 3).

Many Aari men do not do the housework, and neither does Abbaabo. When he lived alone, a daughter who lived near his house used to deliver food to him, but it is doubtful whether she could have provided all the attention he would have wanted. Generally speaking, men tend to seek women who can take care of them, and women tend to choose to live near their son's house. Some people live with a child (especially a girl) aged around 10, putting him/her in charge of some of the housework.⁽¹²⁾

However, people do not always cope with such a situation. Until he recovered his eyesight, Abbaabo had not been with any woman equivalent to a wife since he divorced his ex-wife. Although he had difficulties in living alone with his blindness for some years, he could find a woman like Haamalga, and people thought it good for him. Haamalga also had sought a place to make a living because she had to leave her son's house. Considering this, they live together as a result of a correspondence in their interests and needs.

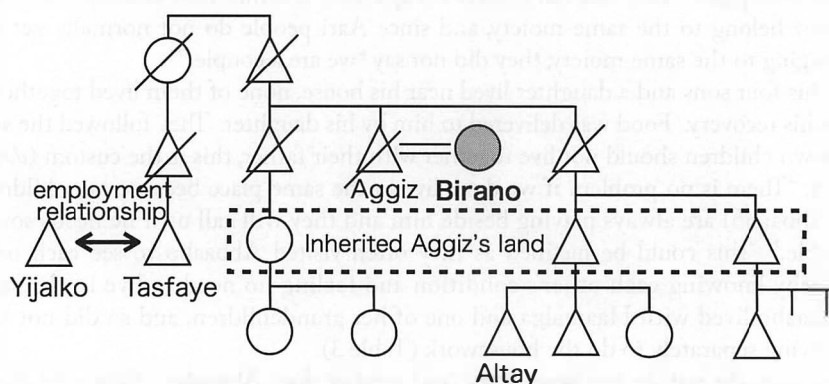
5.2. *Birano, an aged widow with no children*

Birano (household No. 1 in Table 1) is not Aari, but an Amhara woman, and speaks Amharic. She was born on Aari land and speaks the Aari language too. As mentioned above, her husband Aggiz passed away, and in 2014 she started to live with an Aari man named Yijalko. She has no relatives: her parents were immigrants, and she has lost contact with her sisters who she says are in Addis Ababa. Therefore, the relatives of Aggiz (Figure 2) are involved in her daily living. She rarely goes

Table 3. The operation of livelihood and housework in the household of Abbaabo (August 2014)

Action		Abbaabo	Haamalga	Grandchild of Haamalga	Others
Agriculture	1. ox-plowing	×	×	×	son-in-law, the third son
	2. taking care of stocks	×	×	×	son-in-law
	3. maintenance of <i>tika haami</i>	○	○	○	the eldest daughter, daughters-in-law
	4. cultivation and weeding of <i>wony haami</i> (hoeing)	○	○	○	
	5. harvesting	×	○	○	all relatives living nearby
	6. picking up coffee cherry	×	○	○	all relatives, mutual-aid associations
Housework	7. wood chopping	×	×	○	
	8. drawing water	×	○	○	
	9. food preparation	×	○	×	
	10. making <i>washi</i> (ensete)	×	○	×	the eldest daughter, daughters-in-law

[Source: Compiled from field data]

**Figure 2.** The relationship between Birano and people who are involved in her daily living

out, and has abandoned cultivation.

During my first visit in 2009, she lived in location Z with her husband Aggiz. They had two children but lost them later. They were making a living by selling their land and livestock, or asking neighbors for money or food. The family living next to them afforded them such conveniences as drawing water or removing chigoe fleas from between their toes. Both Aggiz and Birano often went to the twice-weekly market held in the center of village M. Birano would go to the market with a little money given by her neighbors and some herbs that grew around their house, and return home with only a handful of broad beans. They had already ceased to participate in the village meetings, but attended funerals or festivals. In 2011, Tesfaye, the son of Aggiz's cross cousin, constructed a new house for them at the center of village M because of Aggiz's illness. Tesfaye ran a butcher shop in the center of the village, so he would give meat to Aggiz, who just drank alcohol and hardly ate. After Aggiz passed away, his land was inherited by three of Aggiz's children (Aggiz's brothers' children).⁽¹³⁾ This means that the family that inherited Aggiz's land are the persons who should take care of Birano.

They all live within 10 minutes' walking distance from Birano's house. They do not live with Birano, and neither did Birano want to do so. Other widows (households No. 11 and 13 in Table 1) also live separately from their children. Birano and these widows continue to live in their husband's house. If a son wants to inherit his deceased father's house, he is supposed to give another house to his father's wife. It is not natural for the Aari people that a deceased father's wife and his grown son live together. That is why aged women also continue to live separately from their children (in Birano's case, Aggiz's children) as long as they possibly can.

In 2014, Birano lived with the Aari man, Yijalko. He was a day laborer and often worked for Tesfaye. He did not have his own house, used to move around from one person's house to another, and finally got divorced. When Aggiz was alive, he also worked for Aggiz. Recently, his land was requisitioned for a road construction project. Tesfaye approached him with a proposal and he accepted, because he was at a loss as to what to do. Thus, they are now living together.

5.2.1. *Daily life of Birano and the persons around her*

Tesfaye had gone away to Addis Ababa for the medical treatment of his illness. Therefore, Yijalko and the children of those who inherited Aggiz's land are the main actors involved in Birano's daily life.

Yijalko grew a little maize in his *wony haami* located at some distance, and worked during the day. His wages were put aside for their expenses of food or alcohol. He would do the water drawing, wood chopping, simple cooking, and washing of clothes, but he was apt to be absent in the daytime. The children of those who inherited the land usually took care of Birano in the daytime. When they visited her, Birano told them what she wanted such as food, water, or firewood. If they could, they would bring whatever she wanted immediately; otherwise, they told their parents and bring it the next time.

Altay, an 11-year-old boy who was one of the children of those who inherited Aggiz's land, visited Birano's house almost every day, confirmed what she wanted, and responded to her requests. Birano has difficulty in hearing, so Altay talked to her loudly and clearly. Because Birano's house was located near the school, Altay did not have any problem with visiting her every day. Birano sometimes left him a message to be given to others, in which she begged for food.

I joined Altay, and we visited Birano's house together. She was looking outward sitting on a small stool placed in front of her house. Altay took a container out and went to draw the water. When he came back, she said to him, "Good boy." She asked Altay some question about the fields, which had belonged to them. It seemed that she was worried about firewood. She told Altay to bring more firewood and smoke up the house in order to warm it up. Altay responded and sat down next to me. Birano said to Altay, "We have nothing to serve her (the author). Dehusk the corn in the basket, roast them, and serve her." Altay took out some ears of maize and started shucking them. During this, Birano reminded him again to repair a floor that was damaged, the next time he came. He said yes again. When he was about to roast the maize grains, a daughter of another inheritor came. She saw the maize that Altay was about to roast and said, "The softer corn is better. I will bring some from my house." Then she went to her home and brought the maize. We ate them with a cup of tea that had been prepared in the morning and had gotten cold already. After that, Birano said to Altay, "Go and tell that person (a daughter of Tesfaye who runs the restaurant in the town center) that I have been sleeping 'with dryness' (*wocha getsdee*: it means that she spent a time with an empty stomach) every day since Tesfaye had gone to Addis Ababa. I am so hungry." Altay went to tell this and brought some food: a stew of kale and teff *injera*.⁽¹⁴⁾ While eating this, Birano said, "People give me a lot of things, saying 'eat this, eat this.' Isn't it sufficient for me?" (from the fieldnote on August 29, 2014)

On market days, Birano would sit in front of her house saying hello to the people passing by, and

sometimes beg for money or food from them. Of course, some would oblige, and others do not.⁽¹⁵⁾ Nonetheless, her narration showed the fact that she was content at somehow managing to stay alive even by accepting some charity and help from others.

5.2.2. *How is Birano's situation seen?*

Both the Aari and Amhara believe that people should respect their elders. The elderly men, in particular, often receive a visit from people of the younger generation who need their wisdom that is based on rich experience. An elderly man who has brought up many children, and lost friends from his own generation, earns everyone's respect as a *pecha baab*,⁽¹⁶⁾ which means "the father of the land." However, the motivation for their compliance with Birano's requests seemed to be one of a pity, rather than respect, for her. This could be related to her having neither children nor relatives, and the severity of her living situation.

An Aari woman who is about 50 years old says about Birano, "It is so hard to live without any person who can care (*shedin*) for me. She (Birano) does not have any children. There is no person who can care (*shedin*) for her. This makes me very sad for her. It is really difficult to get old like her without any person (who can care for her)." Actually, those who inherited the land also ought to assume the duty of caring for her. However, as the woman said, people showed a pity for her from the fact that she had no children who would be expected to inherit her lands naturally. This alone is enough for people to acknowledge the severity of her living situation.

In this society, where everyone believes that children are supposed to care for their aged parents, people pitied Birano, who neither had any children who could care for her nor was able to make a living through work. This could justify her acts of begging.⁽¹⁷⁾ Actually, she went to the *kebele* (the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia) and complained about her miserable condition. The head of the *kebele* appealed to the people to help her and bring her food, firewood, or money. Without hesitation, Birano expresses her hardship and appeals for support face to face. This compels people to be responsive to her needs and try to help her. Thus, she is also supported in responsive relationships, which can be quite distant relations in kinship terms, not only by those who are supposed to look after her.

5.3. *Living arrangements and the caregiving network*

Abbaabo and Birano, both recognized as *galta lanqta*, were quite limited in what they could do to make their livelihood. They were not afraid to live separately without anyone who would care for them, such as their own children or those who had inherited their lands. Besides this, there was a case where a *galta* chose to live with a partner who was neither relative nor spouse. It should not be overlooked that this arrangement also met the needs of those who lived with these two *galtas*, Haamalga and Yijalko, respectively.

Abbaabo had many children, and he seemed to be able to depend on them for his daily needs. However, he lived separately from his children, and they all shared the burden of caring for him; it was not concentrated on one child. Moreover, his living with his new partner Haamalga had the approval of not only the people around him but also of his sons, daughters, and neighbors. Those who should see (*shedin*) supported the elderly in the way that they respected their own decisions.

In contrast, Birano had neither children nor relatives. However, she received support from responsive relationships. Those that supported her daily life were not only those who inherited her husband's lands and were supposed to take care of her. Through acts of begging, she involved her husband's distant kin and neighbors who had no relation to her and drew support from them. The severity of her situation, the fact that she hardly engaged in agricultural activities and was without children, impressed people, although the families of her husband's brothers were looking after her. She did not hesitate to appeal for their support to their faces, and anyone who was appealed to tried to be responsive to her needs. Even the neighbors who usually had nothing to do with her complied with her requests when they met her face to face. She had also found others who would care for her, such as Yijalko, in addition to her husband's relatives. Without any children of her own, nevertheless,

she was supported by responsive relationships that involved many people. To sum up, by depending on various kinds of support from various people, both Abbaabo and Birano managed to make their lives in such a way as to have their needs met in a manner.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the social relationships of the elderly in rural southwest Ethiopia, where a large number of Aari people live, with a focus on their management of their daily livelihoods and living arrangements. Not only the old and incompetent *galta*, but other, able-bodied, persons too usually get their agricultural work done by using mutual exchange relationships with members of other households. It may be recalled that even elderly people try to keep engaged with their agricultural activities as long as possible. Although they usually retire from ox-plowing when their grown children take charge, they manage to make their livelihoods by drawing on various types of support from their children, relatives, and neighbors, while they themselves also actually do some work. This caregiving system seems to have emerged on the basis of their way of conducting agricultural work within the cooperative relationships.

With regard to domestic work, the proximity of the relatives' residence is considered to be important. They basically make decisions about their living conditions following social norms. There were cases where some people have chosen a more flexible way different from the existing framework of social norms. They help each other and meet their daily needs while considering individual circumstances such as the degree of their activities, household composition, the area of their own fields, expectations of harvest, existence of relatives, and their residential arrangements. Achieving consensus on each other's living situation, and *shedin*, that is, seeing face to face to make people to try to solve someone's difficulties responsively, are some of the mechanisms of strengthening the support system.

Living together with one's grown children is rarely an option. If anything, they regard maintaining separate households and seeing each other's faces (*shedin*) as more important. They want to maintain their households even though their physical abilities are declining. This might prevent a person from depending excessively on only a few persons. Besides, an accumulation of acts of *shedin* contributes greatly to the understanding of each other's situations and helps lay the groundwork for a responsive caregiving network. The elderly are able to fulfill their daily lives without a negative attitude toward requests for help in meeting each other's daily needs.

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NOTES

- (1) According to my research, location Z contained 72 households (292 people) in 2009.
- (2) All land in Ethiopia has officially been declared as a state property and peasants are able to enjoy only land use rights.

- (3) According to the local chief of the chiefdom to which village M belongs, it is regarded as a sinister symptom that a grown son has wet dream near his father. If the father is sick and needs an attendant, the son does not sleep. If it is necessary for him to sleep, he should do so outside of his father's house.
- (4) There are other expressions: *lefi lanqta* (being tired with bones), *lefinda* (bony), *zapta* (hardened).
- (5) The "groups of five" system (*And lä amst*: Amharic) is the mutual labor exchange system in which people from five households that reside near one another do their farm work together. The groups are separated by sex, and they do the cooperative work following the will of each person. People usually use this system for short-term work such as the cultivation or harvest in *wony haami*, or the construction of a house. The members of these groups, which do not always have kinship relations, are organized by *kebele* (the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia).
- (6) In addition to this example, I also had a similar experience in the interview about the activities of a funeral associations and other mutual-aid associations.
- (7) It is natural that people say just "*galta*," and it may mean "a person who is not active because of his/her age." Once, I asked a young woman whether the *galta* also make *injera*, a typical staple food in Ethiopia usually made from *teff* flour, a cereal of Ethiopian origin, or *washi*, which is made from ensete. She laughed her head off and said, "*Galta* can't do that!"
- (8) Usually, it is not mentioned who among the children should care for their parents. The act of *shedin* is regarded as necessary regardless of sex or the residential location. Daughters, however, often get married to a person who lives in a distant place; therefore, they do not have to do *shedin* for their parents as much as their brothers.
- (9) The agricultural activities in this area stand not only for various communal associations but also for mutual relationships such as *kontrat* (Amharic), *qānajä* (Amharic) and *timad-gabre*. The *gara* is also the same kind of mutual relationship. *Kontrat* is a contract for *wony haami*. In *qānajä*, each person brings one ox to plow the fields. The collaboration between a person who has fields but no workforce and one who has labor but no fields called *timad-gabre*. They can combine these mutual relationships. For example, A could rent a field with *kontrat*, form *gara* with B for the cultivation of the field, and put B in charge of the ox-plow. B has only one ox that can plow the field, and so B forms a *qānajä* with C, and B can use C's ox to plow A's field. These mutual relationships tend to form out of kinship relations.
- (10) The pre-harvest months are from April to June, and also October and November.
- (11) Although visually impaired, Abbaabo usually did not ask for help to go outside to defecate because he understood the layout of his house, the spatial position of his house and plants which grew in his compound.
- (12) However, if the child wants to go to school, he/she has to go to a city. Therefore, children also make decisions for their own living arrangements. Living together with a child is rather temporary expedient.
- (13) The mediators indicated that Tesfaye himself also had the right of inheritance, but he refused it.
- (14) Although *injera* is generally made from teff, in the research site, people usually eat *injera* made from maize or sorghum because teff is much more expensive. In this case, Birano left a message for the person who runs the restaurant in the center of the village M, so that she could receive the teff *injera*.
- (15) She begs mainly from people living in the same village, and most of them know her.
- (16) The word *pecha* means the ground or the land, and *baab* means a particular person or a father. The word *pecha baab*, equivalent of "the father of the land" indicates a person who has brought up many children and has become the father of all those living on this land. *Pecha baab* is often one of the oldest men in the village. Although it is said that people should visit and greet him with some gift regularly, only a few people practice this.
- (17) The act of begging neighbors for food or money is uncommon and performed only by poor people during the pre-harvest season. It is quite rare that someone begs very frequently from a number of people like Aggiz and Birano. If someone has children, he/she rarely begs from other people except from his/her children, and his/her children do not consider this a good thing. This is because people generally believe that children should care for their parents, and the children would be afraid that people would think that they are not fulfilling their own role and duty toward their parents.

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