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## BLACKOUTS AND PROGRESS: Privatization, Infrastructure, and a Developmentalist State in Jimma, Ethiopia

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“What’s new in Addis Ababa?” I asked the cab driver who was delivering me from Bole International Airport to my hotel in the Piazza neighborhood at the center of Ethiopia’s capital. He responded without hesitation: “There is a problem with electricity. We get electricity in turns.” As we moved away from the expensive hotels and restaurants near the airport, I noticed that all the buildings were cloaked in darkness. The only light came from other cars and the occasional lantern in a shop window. My driver explained that electricity was being transmitted in shifts, with different neighborhoods receiving power on alternate days, 24 hours on and 24 hours off. Although power outages are not infrequent in Ethiopian cities, I had never encountered such regular and extended outages before my 2009 trip.

When I traveled to Jimma, the city in southwest Ethiopia where I have intermittently conducted research since 2002, talk of blackouts continued. Friends who have lived in Jimma for more than 60 years told me that they have never experienced anything like this. These scheduled power outages are especially odd given that the Gibe River, which flows near Jimma, was recently dammed and at the time was the largest source of source of hydropower in the country. The Ethiopian government, in conjunction with a private Italian company, Salini, is currently constructing two even larger hydroelectric projects.<sup>1</sup> The cost of these projects is well over \$1 billion, with the money coming largely from loans from the Italian government, the European Investment Bank, and the African Development Bank.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Many critics say that by constructing hydropower dams in Ethiopia, Salini seeks to  
3 maximize profits through its relationship with a weak state and international lenders  
4 (CEE Bankwatch Network 2008:1). In a 2006 report the Ethiopian government  
5 anticipated that by 2009 not only would the power system meet the demands of the  
6 domestic population but also Ethiopia would be able to export power to Djibouti,  
7 Sudan, and Kenya (Hathaway 2008). Yet on this visit, as I moved through the city at  
8 night, I was confronted with either total darkness or the loud hum of gas-powered  
9 generators.

10 Initially, I felt that I was observing what James Ferguson (2006) and others  
11 have described as the thinning of the state in neoliberal Africa. Writing about urban  
12 Nigeria, Brian Larkin explains, "In the disaggregation from networked electricity  
13 to autonomous generators lies the shift in Nigerian society from the developmental  
14 state to new forms of individual, competitive liberalism" (2008:244). Like Nigeria,  
15 in a context of liberalizing economic reforms, the Ethiopian state can no longer  
16 provide its citizens with electricity, a basic public service that urban residents have  
17 come to take for granted.<sup>3</sup> Instead infrastructural development and the provision  
18 of many services are contracted to international companies, which generate signif-  
19 icant profits. At the same time the quality of life in Ethiopia declines further, as  
20 individuals are left to fend for themselves. Businesses and a few wealthy families  
21 own generators, others rely on candles and lanterns, and many cannot afford any  
22 source of light at all.

23 After a few days in Jimma I realized that power outages are not the only  
24 change to have occurred since my last visit in 2008. The air was full of the dust  
25 of construction. Multistory buildings were springing up all over town, roads were  
26 being covered with fresh layers of asphalt, and trenches were being excavated for  
27 new water lines. Amid power outages and a global economic crisis, Jimma was  
28 booming with urban renewal projects. A Korean company was improving a road  
29 connecting Jimma with peripheral areas to the south, and a Chinese company was  
30 expanding Jimma's airport to give it international status.

31 In many ways the hydroelectric and road construction projects are similar. Both  
32 are financed with loans from international organizations, and private contractors  
33 based outside of Ethiopia are carrying out the work. Just as the new dams coincided  
34 with blackouts, rather than increased access to electricity, the unfinished roads  
35 disrupted traffic and in some cases displaced families. Despite these similarities,  
36 in day-to-day discussions the residents of Jimma spoke about the projects quite  
37 differently. Although the hydroelectric projects were viewed with suspicion and  
38 doubt, there was a great deal of faith in the potential for roads to bring economic

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2 development. When I asked people about the value of new roads their responses  
3 were often simple: “Progress.” Roads bring progress, and the Ethiopian government  
4 is bringing roads. In this case there was no perceived rolling back of the state, in  
5 which the state fails to provide expected public services. Rather the state had  
6 the power to create jobs, transform the city, and improve life. Like Charles Piot  
7 (2010), I am interested in perceptions of an increasingly absent African state. In  
8 the Ethiopian case, however, partly because of its partnerships with international  
9 private companies, the state is perceived as reemerging and generating linear  
10 development.

11 In this article, I examine this apparent contradiction in perceptions of develop-  
12 ment projects. Following Donald Moore’s (1999) call to investigate development in  
13 terms of situated and heterogeneous cultural practices, I argue that contrasting con-  
14 ceptions of dams and roads emerge from values concerning relations of power and  
15 exchange. In doing so I engage with Ferguson’s (2006) discussion of the neoliberal  
16 state in Africa. I do not dispute Ferguson’s argument that African states are increas-  
17 ingly more involved in the work of legitimizing resource extraction by international  
18 companies than in governing, but I do argue that faith in progressive narratives  
19 and a developmentalist state continues to be quite powerful. The Ethiopian case  
20 demonstrates how “expectations of modernity” (Ferguson 1999) through state-led  
21 development may emerge at surprising junctures. I examine the relationship among  
22 citizenship, the state, and social welfare that anthropologists have explored in Latin  
23 America and postsocialist states (Caldeira 2001; Holston 2009; Verdery 1996).  
24 The perception that road construction brings progress demonstrates that urban  
25 Ethiopians actively engage with the privatization of infrastructural development  
26 to discursively construct relations with the state, and these representations have  
27 important implications for class relations and the legitimacy of public resource  
28 distribution.<sup>4</sup>

29 This article also seeks to contribute to anthropological discussions of neoliberal-  
30 ism. Aihwa Ong concisely defines the primary elements of neoliberal political  
31 philosophy as both a claim that the market is better than the state at distributing  
32 public resources and the emergence of highly competitive individualism that often  
33 expresses itself in terms of consumption (2006:11). When critical analyses of ne-  
34oliberalism are applied in much of the world, it is often the case that when one  
35 of these elements is identified, then other aspects of a vague but singular “neolib-  
36eralism” are also assumed to exist. Often the presence of neoliberal doctrine is  
37 assumed to overlap with David Harvey’s (2005) notion of neoliberalism as a class  
38 project, in which wealth is increasingly consolidated in the hands of a few. Such

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2 analyses gloss over the various ways in which neoliberal policies interact with local  
3 dynamics, as well as the critiques of anthropologists (Ferguson 2007; Kingfisher  
4 and Maskovsky 2008; Kipnis 2008; Mains 2007; Richland 2009). Partially in re-  
5 action to critiques of conceptions of a singular neoliberalism, anthropologists have  
6 increasingly advocated examinations of locally specific neoliberalisms and how peo-  
7 ple rework neoliberal discourses and processes in new and surprising ways (Ellison  
8 2009; Kanna 2010; Rudnycky 2009; Schwegler 2008). Although there is certainly  
9 value in this move, the notion of multiple neoliberalisms is still rooted in the overly  
10 broad category of “neoliberal.” In these analyses it is often unclear which aspects of  
11 neoliberalism are being retained and which discarded in the formation of localized  
12 neoliberalisms.

13 I adopt an approach similar to Stephen Collier’s (2009) call for a topology of  
14 power that examines the correlation between particular techniques and relations  
15 of power. Collier explains that a topological analysis “brings to light a heteroge-  
16 neous space, constituted through multiple determinations, and not reducible to  
17 a given form of knowledge/power. It is better suited to analyzing the dynamic  
18 process through which existing elements, such as techniques, schemas of analysis,  
19 and material forms, are taken up and redeployed, and through which new com-  
20 binations of elements are shaped” (2009:100). In other words, rather than basing  
21 my analysis in the ambiguous concept of neoliberalism(s), my concern is with the  
22 relationships between specific practices. In this article, I hope to contribute to a  
23 growing body of anthropological analyses that examine infrastructure, privatiza-  
24 tion, and changing relations of power (Ghosh 2006; Larkin 2008; Shever 2008;  
25 Von Schnitzler 2008). In doing so I seek not only to destabilize neoliberalism  
26 as a coherent project but also to question its continuing value as an analytical  
27 category.<sup>5</sup>

28 I begin with a brief description of normative values concerning relations of  
29 power and exchange in urban Ethiopia, particularly as they relate to engagement  
30 with the state and the role of large-scale development projects in legitimizing state  
31 power. I argue that beginning in the 1990s, the introduction of policies intended to  
32 downsize the Ethiopian public sector greatly restricted the state’s ability to provide  
33 public services. This discussion offers context for an analysis of conversations I  
34 had in 2009 with Jimma residents concerning dams, roads, and other development  
35 projects. The contrasting perspectives presented in these discussions indicate that  
36 although the provision of basic services for its population is increasingly contracted  
37 out to private companies, the Ethiopian state is perceived as expanding in new and  
38 surprising ways. In the conclusion I return to my argument concerning the utility

1  
2 of neoliberalism as an analytical category. Rather than interpreting the Ethiopian  
3 case as a particular permutation of neoliberalism, I argue that other more specific  
4 ways of speaking about policy and human experience are necessary.  
5

## 6 **THE STATE, DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATIONS OF POWER** 7 **IN ETHIOPIA**

8 Power relationships in much of Ethiopia have long been legitimized by the  
9 perception that those in power provide protection and support for their subordi-  
10 nates (Hoben 1970, 1973; Poluha 2004). In his work on land tenure among rural  
11 Amhara, Allan Hoben (1970, 1973) explained that relations of power were almost  
12 entirely vertical and were generally structured along the lines of a patron–client  
13 relationship. Put simply, lords provided a degree of protection for peasants and  
14 sometimes assisted them in litigating for land; in turn peasants paid taxes in the  
15 form of grain and labor, and gave their lords social and political support. In this  
16 sense, the continued power of the lord was based partially on his ability to provide  
17 tangible benefits for his subjects. With urbanization, government employment took  
18 the place of nobility as a source of power and a means of distributing favors to  
19 others. As Hoben (1970:222) notes in describing Addis Ababa under the reign  
20 of Haile Sellasie, the authority of the lord had been replaced by the government  
21 administrator, and education had taken the place of military activity as a means for  
22 accessing social mobility.

23 Although Jimma's history is distinct from other cities in Ethiopia (Gemed  
24 1987; Hassen 1990; Lewis 2001), many of the dynamics I describe concerning the  
25 relationship between infrastructural development and relations with the state may  
26 be applied broadly to urban Ethiopia. As Jimma began to develop a permanent  
27 residential urban population during the Haile Sellasie regime, after the brief Italian  
28 occupation ended in 1941, dynamics similar to other Ethiopian cities began to take  
29 hold. Land was expropriated from the local Oromo Muslim population, and an  
30 urban middle class of government administrators emerged that consisted primarily  
31 of Amhara and Oromo Orthodox Christians who had moved to Jimma from the  
32 Shoa region. Among men, access to prestige and income were both closely bound  
33 together with government employment, and the developing occupational and class-  
34 based hierarchy mapped onto religious and ethnic identity. In this article, I analyze  
35 perceptions of infrastructural projects primarily in terms of class and normative  
36 values concerning exchange and power. Ethnicity, gender, nationality, and religion  
37 are also highly relevant for how individuals position themselves in relation to the  
38 state in Ethiopia (James et al. 2002). However, for the sake of analytical focus, I put

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2 these issues aside to better explore the interconnections between infrastructural  
3 development and relations of power with the state.

4 Under the Derg regime that replaced Haile Sellasie in 1974,<sup>6</sup> the language of  
5 development (*limat*) was increasingly employed as the state carried out a number  
6 of large projects aimed at improving quality of life (Donham 1999).<sup>7</sup> This period  
7 represents a movement toward legitimizing power through state-led development,  
8 rather than individual patron–client relationships. Perhaps the most dramatic inter-  
9 vention attempted under the Derg was the major resettlement campaign that took  
10 place during the famine of the 1980s (Pankhurst 1992; Pankhurst and Piguet 2009;  
11 Scott 1998). Under the leadership of Mengistu Haile Mariam, the Derg forced rural  
12 residents to settle in villages to improve access to government services, organize  
13 farmers into cooperatives, and promote mechanization (Scott 1998:248). Between  
14 1984 and 1986 over 600,000 people were resettled (Pankhurst 1992:56). Alula  
15 Pankhurst has explained that in a context of famine and dependence on foreign aid,  
16 “resettlement was seen as a positive and purposive measure initiated by the Gov-  
17 ernment under the leadership of the vanguard party” (1992:53). In other words,  
18 resettlement signified the power of the state to act on behalf of the people. The  
19 fact that such state-led resettlement ultimately resulted in dramatic failure at great  
20 human cost was one of many reasons for the mobilization of massive resistance to  
21 the Derg and its eventual fall in 1991. The resettlement campaigns of the 1980s are  
22 clear examples of how attempts to legitimize state power through development in  
23 Ethiopia have often devolved into repression. When people resisted resettlement  
24 and questioned its benefits, the state found it necessary to employ force.

25 Although the ideologies and structures of rule have clearly changed, based on  
26 research conducted among children in Addis Ababa, Eva Poluha (2004) has argued  
27 that the patron–client model represents a source of continuity in Ethiopian power  
28 relationships extending from the prerevolutionary period, through the Derg, and to  
29 the current Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime.  
30 Under the revolutionary Derg, the state increasingly sought to legitimize itself  
31 through large-scale development, but the patron–client model has persisted as an  
32 important dynamic for structuring relations of power. Like the power relationships  
33 described by Hoben, in contemporary urban Ethiopia subordinate individuals and  
34 groups accept and support the rule of others as long as they are provided with  
35 social, emotional, and economic safety (Poluha 2004:95). In interviews I conducted  
36 concerning unemployment, young men and women often expressed the idea that it  
37 is the government’s responsibility to provide them with an education and work, and  
38 they blamed the state for the problem of unemployment. Although young people

1  
2 had little faith that the government would solve their problems, on a personal level  
3 they sought to form relationships with government workers to receive increased  
4 access to opportunities for education, work, and housing. Even at the lowest levels,  
5 government workers were able to provide economic and social benefits to friends  
6 and family. These ranged from expediting bureaucratic paperwork to providing  
7 access to valuable opportunities with development NGOs. In return, government  
8 workers received social support that was important for accumulating local power  
9 and prestige.<sup>8</sup>

10 The combination of an increasingly abstract state–citizen contract in which  
11 the power of the state is legitimized through development and the continued  
12 importance of personal patron–client relations provides the basic context for  
13 understanding urban Ethiopian reactions to the privatization of infrastructural  
14 development. Personal relationships continue to be very important for power  
15 dynamics in urban Ethiopia. As I will detail below, however, these relationships  
16 need not be formed with specific patrons. Instead, individuals seek to embed  
17 themselves within social networks by becoming part of the state.  
18  
19

## 20 **ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING AND SHIFTING RELATIONS** 21 **OF POWER**

22 Although Ethiopia's history differs from that of former European colonies in  
23 Africa, the rise of the developmentalist state in Ethiopia during the 1970s mirrors  
24 trends found throughout the global south (McMichael 1996; Rist 2002). Primarily  
25 through international borrowing, postcolonial governments expanded dramatically  
26 by investing in education, health care, infrastructure, and other public services. As  
27 in other countries, in Ethiopia discourse highlighting poverty and need was used  
28 to legitimize the expansion of the state. For example, in justifying the massive  
29 resettlement plan, Mengistu Haile Mariam invoked the rhetoric of need and the  
30 potential for growth, pronouncing, "while we have we lack, and when we could  
31 be lending we are beggars" (Pankurst 1992:52).

32 The coming to power of the EPRDF in 1991 marked a significant economic  
33 and political transition, but state-led development has persisted as a means of  
34 legitimizing political rule. The EPRDF initially espoused a Marxist doctrine, but  
35 soon after taking power the government began to open national markets and  
36 privatize public holdings (Ellison 2009). This shift was at least partially motivated  
37 by a need to access funds through the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As in  
38 other African countries, these policies have created patterns of uneven international

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2 investment and have exacerbated preexisting debts. Fluctuations in the international  
3 price of coffee, Ethiopia's primary export, and regional drought also contributed  
4 to a long period of economic contraction from which the country has only recently  
5 emerged.

6 There is certainly evidence that, similar to other African nations under the  
7 Structural Adjustment Policies of the IMF and World Bank, Ethiopian state pro-  
8 grams have been rolled back. However, any simple claims that the state has  
9 disappeared from people's everyday lives may be quickly dismissed. In 2002,  
10 for example, the state engaged in a major resettlement campaign in response to  
11 famine. Over 600,000 people were relocated between 2003 and 2007 (Pankhurst  
12 and Piguet 2009:138). For better or worse, a state that physically moves so many  
13 people clearly cannot be said to have abandoned the business of governing. The  
14 mobilization of troops to fight a border war with Eritrea from 1998 to 2000 is  
15 further evidence of the ability of the Ethiopian state to take on major projects  
16 without the assistance of private contractors, despite economic restructuring.

17 Although there is some continuity in the role of the state in shaping people's  
18 everyday lives, important changes have emerged during the post-1991 period.  
19 The Derg regime was also limited in the services it could provide, but after 1991  
20 IMF-mandated reforms required a significant downsizing of the public sector that  
21 has impacted citizen-state relations. The percentage of men in the labor force who  
22 were employed in the public sector fell from 65 percent in 1990 (the final year of  
23 the Derg) to about 30 percent in 1997 (Krishnan et al. 1998:10). Furthermore,  
24 under the current EPRDF regime many public services are now provided by private  
25 companies and are paid for by consumers. For example, as in much of the developing  
26 world, mobile phone ownership has exploded in urban Ethiopia and has become the  
27 primary means of communication. Another example is the opening of expensive  
28 and high-quality private schools. In Jimma a private elementary school opened with  
29 fewer than 50 students in 2002, and by 2009 it had more than 1,000 students in  
30 grades one through eight. The state continues to provide low-cost schools that are  
31 utilized by the majority of the population, but especially at the elementary level the  
32 gap in quality between public and private schools is so great that many young men  
33 claimed that one should not have children without the ability to pay for private  
34 education.

35 A growing cynicism toward the Ethiopian state was expressed in riots and  
36 outbursts of violence carried out predominantly by young men following the 2005  
37 Ethiopian elections. Prior to the election there was an increasing sentiment among  
38 young people that the Ethiopian state had failed to secure opportunities for work



1  
2 and education for their current generation. Feeling that the ruling party had unjustly  
3 stolen the elections, young people took to the streets to protest. These protests  
4 were violently put down by police, and tens of thousands of young men were  
5 detained for months in camps outside of Addis Ababa.<sup>9</sup>

6 Critiques of the state have not been confined to such protests. In 2008 a text  
7 message began circulating in late May, on the public holiday marking the overthrow  
8 of the Derg and the coming of the EPRDF. The message connected critiques of  
9 the state's failure to provide adequate service for mobile phones and control the  
10 rapidly rising price of staple foods. During my time in Jimma in 2008 it was nearly  
11 impossible to make a call using a mobile phone, and attempts were met with the  
12 automated responses listed on the right in the message quoted below. Texting  
13 generally did work, and the popular text message read as follows:<sup>10</sup>

14 When you make a call to:

15 Teff [the grain used to make injera, the staple food in urban Ethiopia]—Out  
16 of network

17 Kibe [clarified butter; used in many dishes]—Recharge your account

18 Shiro [chickpea paste; often eaten daily with injera]—Failed. Retry

19 Dabo [bread]—Line is busy

20 Meat—Switched off

21 Democracy—Out of service area

22 Water—Press 5 days to refill your *baldi* [bucket]

23 Electricity—Out of the country. Please contact your generator.  
24

25 Particularly given the cynicism and general resistance directed toward the  
26 state, reactions to recent development projects are surprising. Despite the apparent  
27 rolling back of the state in Africa, in the Ethiopian case the government works with  
28 nongovernmental actors to assert itself in people's day-to-day lives.  
29

### 30 **SEEPAGE, SUSPICION, AND HYDROPOWER**

31 As I spent time in Jimma in 2009, I was struck by a strange combination of  
32 growth and economic decline. The value of the Ethiopian birr was falling rapidly in  
33 relation to international currencies, the cost of living was rising, and people seemed  
34 to be struggling more than before. Dramatic increases in the price of food were  
35 a constant topic of conversation.<sup>11</sup> It had become impossible for many families to  
36 eat three meals a day. However, roads were being renewed, high-rises were going  
37 up, the government was creating jobs, and Ethiopia's GDP grew at a rate of more  
38 than eight percent between 2001 and 2010 (Economist 2011). The contradictory

2 narratives surrounding infrastructural development that I encountered emerge out  
3 of this context of simultaneous boom and bust.

4 In the heat and noise of the city, Ahmed's house is an oasis of cool and quiet.<sup>12</sup>  
5 When I visit in the afternoon Ahmed and his friends are usually lounging on floor  
6 mats chewing *khat* (a leaf chewed as a mild stimulant) and talking. My closest friend  
7 at Ahmed's house is a teacher named Getachew. Getachew and I often talked about  
8 the Gibe River Dam that was recently completed near Jimma. When speaking,  
9 Getachew occasionally pauses to light a cigarette or push another wad of leaves  
10 into his mouth, but he never loses his focus. He speaks rapidly in a loud voice that  
11 is better suited for classes of 80 students than for Ahmed's small room. He can talk  
12 for a long time if I let him.

13 Getachew, a lifelong Jimma resident, explained that when he was born around  
14 50 years ago there was no problem with electricity. Jimma was initially powered  
15 by a generator, and then electricity was generated by Finchaa Dam. Only since the  
16 Gibe River Dam became the primary source of power have the outages begun.

17 I told Getachew about a conversation I had with a friend who works for the  
18 state electric power office. My friend's explanations were similar to those that had  
19 appeared in state-run media and claimed that the power cuts are because of supply  
20 and demand. Demand has increased for two reasons: first, there is more industry  
21 in Ethiopia than in the past, and second, the government has committed to provide  
22 electricity to at least 50 percent of the rural population. In terms of supply, Ethiopia  
23 relies entirely on hydroelectric power, and other power sources are needed to meet  
24 the added demand created by bringing electricity to rural areas. When I mentioned  
25 the Gibe River Dam, he explained that the project is not finished. Furthermore,  
26 without more rain the dam cannot adequately supply power.

27 These sounded like reasonable explanations, and yet according to Getachew  
28 they are all in some way flawed. "There is a lot of new industry near Addis Ababa,"  
29 Getachew explained, "but almost none in the rest of the country. These new  
30 factories are not enough to be the cause of the blackouts. Supplying the countryside  
31 with power is difficult, this is true, but why would the government do this without  
32 adequate resources? If this is really the problem, then the government could easily  
33 reverse its decision and cut off electricity to the countryside." "What about the  
34 shortage of water?" I asked. "It's true, there is a shortage of water in Gil Gel Gibe,"  
35 Getachew argued. "But it cannot be because of lack of rain. It has been raining.  
36 There is no denying that it has been raining. We have seen the rain."

37 The state explanation and Getachew's critique demonstrate their contrasting  
38 positions. The official explanation implies both that the state gives too much and

1

2 that any problems are beyond its control. It is because of state-led development,  
3 in the form of growing industry and extending the power grid to rural areas, that  
4 blackouts occurred. However, Getachew's response places blame entirely on the  
5 state. The weather cannot be responsible because the presence of rain is plain for all  
6 to see. Getachew's denial of industrial growth is also a denial of the state's claims  
7 to have generated economic development.

8 In the absence of an acceptable explanation, Getachew claims there is some-  
9 thing else happening, something secret, "seepage." The fact that no one can see  
10 where the water is going makes it all the more mysterious. It is a problem without  
11 a clear explanation, a secret that the government cannot be expected to reveal.

12 The actual technology involved in hydropower is important here, as it is both  
13 visible and hidden. One sees the structure of the dam and the large body of water  
14 that was not previously present, but all else remains hidden. If the water is seeping  
15 into the soil, how would anyone know? The process of generating power is also  
16 murky. How can the generation of electricity be observed, and who knows where  
17 it travels? The state's plan to sell electricity to neighboring nations was well known,  
18 and many suspected that this was the cause of the power shortages. They believed  
19 Ethiopia lacked power because it was being sold to Sudan and Kenya, and the  
20 government was keeping the profits. Although there is no evidence that such sales  
21 had begun, rumors such as this were rampant and impossible to disprove.

22 Getachew and others whom I spoke with shared narratives filled with confusion  
23 and suspicion. There was little faith in the explanations advanced through state-run  
24 media linking the power shortages to broader development projects. Doubts about  
25 the intent of the central government are nothing new in urban Ethiopia, but people  
26 have generally assumed that the state will provide such basic services as education,  
27 electricity, and water.

28 The sense of insecurity expressed in Getachew's comments on "seepage"  
29 fits with anthropologists' critiques of the neoliberal state in Africa (Ellison 2009;  
30 Ferguson 2006; Larkin 2008; Smith 2008). As James Ferguson argues, the core  
31 feature of African states' sovereignty "is the ability to provide contractual legal  
32 authority that can legitimate the extractive work of transnational firms" (2006:207).  
33 In day-to-day discussions, Jimma residents also noted the relationship between a  
34 loss of public services and international corporations. Discussions focused less on  
35 the economic interests of private corporations than on their inability to work  
36 effectively in Ethiopia. For example, in multiple conversations friends noted that  
37 Salini had no experience working in Ethiopia's unique geological environment, and  
38 this may account for the failure of the Gibe River Dam to generate expected levels

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2 of hydropower. These conversations express a firm belief in the end of state-led  
3 progress and that any project the state undertakes is corrupted by the involvement  
4 of international companies interested in extracting profits.

5  
6 **FORCED RELOCATIONS, URBAN PLANNING, AND FAITH**  
7 **IN PROGRESS**

8 Given the documented failure of African states to effectively provide services  
9 to their citizens, it is not particularly surprising that urban Ethiopians express such  
10 skepticism about current hydroelectric projects. Based on this, I was surprised by  
11 the degree of enthusiasm and support I encountered concerning the construction  
12 of roads. There are two asphalt roads that cut through Jimma's densely populated  
13 city center. Just off one of these roads is a one-room house where a young woman  
14 named Frehiwot lived with her parents. In 2004, when I first met Frehiwot, anyone  
15 walking by could see into her family's house, and generally all were welcome in  
16 this neighborhood, where everyone knows everyone. Frehiwot's mother moved  
17 to Jimma from the surrounding countryside in the early 1970s, and she sold locally  
18 distilled liquor out of her home to make a living. Frehiwot's father used to be a  
19 butcher, but he no longer works.

20 In 2008, Frehiwot told me that her family would be forced to move. A large  
21 building for coffee sellers would be constructed where her home was, and the state  
22 would give her family a house in a neighborhood on the edge of town. The new  
23 neighborhood is in a low-lying area, known to be full of mosquitoes. The friends  
24 and neighbors who had always been inseparable from Frehiwot's life would no  
25 longer be present. There were few potential customers in the new neighborhood,  
26 and it was not clear how her mother could make a living.

27 When I walked by Frehiwot's house in 2009, it was shut off from the street  
28 with a corrugated metal fence. Construction had not begun on the new building.  
29 I asked some of the local youth what happened to Frehiwot. They said her family  
30 moved to the new house, and she was gone. Her brother sent her to Dubai to work  
31 as a domestic servant.

32 The destruction of Frehiwot's house is part of a larger process of state-led  
33 urban renewal in Jimma, something people referred to as the five-year plan or the  
34 master plan. The most visible element of the plan is the construction of roads.  
35 Roads throughout the city were scraped away to be replaced with fresh asphalt.  
36 The road near Frehiwot's house was like this. Dirt had been pushed into large piles  
37 at the end of each block, making the roads very difficult to navigate and creating  
38 deep pools of water.

1  
2 Frehiwot's was not the only family forced to make way for commercial  
3 development, and it is easy to imagine suspicion and controversy concerning road  
4 construction, similar to what I encountered concerning hydropower projects. In  
5 this case, however, I heard few critiques of state-led development. Instead there  
6 was a general sense of enthusiasm about the construction of roads and Jimma's  
7 renewal.

8 Frehiwot's old house was just a few blocks from Ahmed's house. In a differ-  
9 ent conversation, Getachew expressed a surprising degree of enthusiasm for the  
10 government's urban renewal projects. He explained that there is only one way for  
11 Third World cities to develop: to push people out of desirable areas.

12 Unless and otherwise, development will never occur! People simply build  
13 houses without having permission from the government. These houses are  
14 crowded together and they don't conform to any plan. . . . The city has a  
15 master plan. The master plan designates certain areas for business, living,  
16 and recreation. To encourage the city to grow according to the plan, the  
17 government will give the residents two options. When the government im-  
18 proves an area by building a new road the residents can improve their homes  
19 and businesses to fit with the new standard or sell their property and move  
20 somewhere else.

21  
22 At this point I was getting a little uncomfortable with Getachew's monologue.  
23 I interrupted, "Won't people be reluctant to move away from homes where they've  
24 lived their entire lives?"

25  
26 No! People are happy to give up their homes. When a new modern building  
27 appears next to their home they won't be comfortable there. They might be  
28 forced to move to a neighborhood on the edge of the city where they don't  
29 know anyone, but chances are that the new house will be larger than the old  
30 one. Most people will welcome this change.

31 Getachew explained that the government had promised to finish the road as  
32 soon as possible. There was a telethon fundraiser scheduled at the Sheraton in  
33 Addis Ababa. A filmmaker who was born and raised in Frehiwot's neighborhood  
34 would host the event, and people from all over the country would call in and donate  
35 money to support development in Jimma. All the teachers had agreed to contribute  
36 one month of their salary for the road project. Getachew claimed they had done  
37 this because they recognized that the roads are something good and necessary for  
38 their community.<sup>13</sup>

2           Getachew's enthusiasm for the project may be understood partially in terms  
3 of his class position. As a teacher he is a government employee. Although Ethiopian  
4 teachers are often highly critical of the ruling party they derive substantial benefits  
5 from their position as members of the state. It is unlikely that Getachew or others  
6 close to him would be relocated, and he had ties to downtown businesses that  
7 would likely see long-term benefits from urban development.

8           That said, enthusiasm for road construction was not isolated to the middle  
9 class. For example, an unemployed young woman told me that she donated five  
10 birr and she would have given ten if she could afford it. She announced happily, "It  
11 makes me feel wonderful to be able to give even a small amount of money to help  
12 my country!"

13           Such sincere support for a state project is rare in Ethiopia, and yet I encoun-  
14 tered people from diverse backgrounds who equated roads with progress. Specific  
15 interpretations of progress were not always clear, but it was certainly something  
16 worthy of sacrifice. Sometimes people offered more complicated explanations of  
17 the importance of roads. Roads promote the movement of goods, and this increases  
18 commerce and economic growth. Better roads will most likely decrease the cost  
19 of Ethiopian goods, sold both locally and internationally. More commerce should  
20 bring more jobs, and with an urban youth unemployment rate of close to 50  
21 percent, Ethiopians are desperately in need of work.

22           In many ways the road construction in Jimma was similar to the hydroelectric  
23 projects. In 2009, few roads had been completed, and for the most part the  
24 effects of construction were negative—torn up roads, large amounts of dust,  
25 relocation of families, and streets that had become piles of dirt and large muddy  
26 puddles. International companies (in this case from China and Korea) carried  
27 out most of the work. Yet, although blackouts and hydroelectric projects are  
28 interpreted as failures of the state, discussions of roads appear to echo something  
29 like classic modernization theory. It was believed that through major investments  
30 in infrastructure that Ethiopia will "progress." The tangible results of this progress  
31 were vague, but such progress was certainly desirable and worthy of whatever  
32 discomfort might be caused.

33           A key distinction between the hydropower and road construction projects is  
34 that the state asked people from all walks of life to support the roads financially.  
35 Whether it was giving five birr or a month's salary, a major investment was taking  
36 place, both financially and emotionally. The gift of financial support created a  
37 relationship among the people, the state, and the proposed infrastructure. Among  
38 those I spoke with, it was assumed that this relationship would be reciprocal. One

1  
2 gives and the state gives back in the form of roads. Roads would bring benefits for  
3 all. It is important that ideally the financial support for roads was voluntary and not  
4 given on a per use basis (this may be contrasted with the metering of water in South  
5 Africa described by Von Schnitzler 2008). In this sense the relationship between  
6 people and the state was qualitative, rather quantitative. It was based on a mutual  
7 willingness to fulfill a need possessed by another.

8 Significantly, road construction was consistently spoken of as a state project.  
9 In contrast to the dams constructed by Salini, the *mengist* (state or government)  
10 was building the roads. The role of international contractors in work being done  
11 in Jimma was rarely discussed. The Ethiopian government actively promoted the  
12 image of road construction as a state-led project that would bring development  
13 to the people. On one occasion I observed a parade of new dump trucks and  
14 steamrollers moving through town. Loud music was blaring from the vehicles, and  
15 local officials shouted slogans from a megaphone. The trucks were decorated with  
16 banners proclaiming in Amharic and Oromo that roads are bringing progress and  
17 development to Jimma. Similar parades and events are frequently broadcast on  
18 the state-controlled television station that is the only source of televised news for  
19 most Ethiopians. Events such as these were a promise of change from the Ethiopian  
20 government. Such attempts to replace state led development with “performance  
21 and conjury” have been identified elsewhere in Africa (Piot 2010:38). In the case  
22 of road construction in Jimma, despite an overwhelming sense of cynicism about  
23 state promises, people felt that they were part of the project.  
24

### 25 **CREATING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STATE THROUGH ROCKS** 26 **AND WORK**

27 A sense of personal investment in road construction was particularly strong  
28 among the many young men who had found work on these projects. Building roads  
29 puts people to work. In addition to the many asphalt roads being constructed around  
30 Jimma there are also smaller roads in neighborhoods that are built from rocks and  
31 resemble cobblestone streets. Only a couple small roads, the equivalent of one or  
32 two city blocks, were close to being finished in 2009, but there was a great deal of  
33 excitement among young men about these projects. Beginning in the mid-1990s the  
34 unemployment rate in Jimma has hovered at around 50 percent among urban youth  
35 between the ages of 18 and 30, and lengths of unemployment average three to four  
36 years (Serneels 2007). In recent years the streets and corners of Jimma have been  
37 crowded with unemployed young men, hanging about, chewing *khat*, and talking  
38 (Mains 2007). There are still a lot of idle young men hanging around, but not as

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2 many as in years past. Instead, many of them are doing “rock work”—breaking  
3 the stones and using the smaller pieces to construct roads. The construction of  
4 asphalt roads by international companies certainly does create jobs, but it does not  
5 compare to the amount of work necessary to build roads by hand.

6 Holyfield was one of the young men I could always find on a corner near the  
7 house I rented when I lived in Jimma between 2003 and 2005. He is very well  
8 built, with a broad muscular back, and he takes his nickname from the American  
9 boxer whom his friends think he resembles. Although he was unemployed and his  
10 family was certainly not wealthy, he always managed to be dressed in fashionable  
11 soccer jerseys and jeans, and others occasionally teased him about the efforts he  
12 took to keep himself clean. When I returned to Jimma in 2008, Holyfield was  
13 not around. After a few years of unemployment he had left Jimma to find work  
14 with Salini, on the second phase of the Gibe River hydroelectric project (Gibe II).  
15 Eventually the project slowed down and Holyfield returned to Jimma, hoping to  
16 find work with a Korean road construction project. When this failed, he began doing  
17 rockwork.

18 When we met again in 2009, Holyfield was wearing a brilliant yellow tracksuit  
19 with “Brazil” printed across the front and dark wrap-around shades that take on a  
20 rainbow sheen when they reflect the sun. He took great pride in telling me about  
21 his involvement in the government-sponsored rockwork and encouraged me to  
22 visit the work site. He was paid 1.5 birr for every stone he set. He could easily  
23 make at least 45 birr per day (around \$4 at the time), and he often earned more  
24 than this.

25 After I arrived in Jimma in 2009 the rockwork slowed down. As I made my  
26 way through the city, I often passed by large piles of rocks covered by tents for  
27 shade, but I rarely saw anyone working. I still did not see Holyfield as much as I  
28 did in years past, but I began to run into him hanging out with other young men on  
29 the corner. He told me that there was a shortage of materials, but the work would  
30 begin again soon. However, days passed and the work did not begin.

31 Despite the lack of work, Holyfield expressed little cynicism regarding the  
32 government’s efforts at development. He explained that as the neighborhood  
33 changes, businesses are constructed, and wealthier families move in, it is likely  
34 that his family may be forced to go elsewhere, but this will not be a bad thing. His  
35 family will be given land somewhere else. It may be far from the city center but it  
36 will not be any great trouble to commute into the city. I mentioned the mosquitoes  
37 and swampy conditions in new neighborhoods, and Holyfield responded that the  
38 government will certainly do something about that. From his perspective it seems



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2 that everyone wins when businesses and wealthy families displace others. He  
3 explained that roads are very important; without roads progress is impossible.

4 It is important that Holyfield speaks of himself as a government employee.  
5 It is the state that has given him this work, and the exchange of his labor for  
6 income implies a qualitative shift in his relationship to the government. To some  
7 extent Holyfield has now become part of the state. Much of the actual funding  
8 for the construction of these cobblestone roads comes from a German NGO, but  
9 Holyfield and other young men consistently spoke of the roads as a government  
10 project. I have described elsewhere the qualitative differences between govern-  
11 ment employment and work in the urban informal economy in Ethiopia (Mains  
12 2012b). Government work implies a relationship between individuals who are  
13 differently positioned within a hierarchy of power that extends beyond the work-  
14 place, but relations of power in the informal economy are generally isolated to the  
15 moment of exchange. This distinction is an important factor behind the relatively  
16 high status of government employment and low status of work in the informal  
17 economy.

18 For rock workers like Holyfield and teachers like Getachew, road construction  
19 creates desirable relations of exchange with the state. These are not the personal  
20 patron–client relations that individuals often seek to cultivate with state represen-  
21 tatives. Here the relationship is with a much more abstract and impersonal state. In  
22 exchange for one’s allegiance the state provides infrastructure or, more important  
23 for Holyfield, paid work. It is not simply that the state is offering a desirable good  
24 that is significant. Like many young men, Holyfield had worked for a private com-  
25 pany, but in discussing this work there was no assumption that the relationship with  
26 the company shifted his identity. State employment signifies the presence of a qual-  
27 itative relationship between the worker and an abstractly conceived “government.”  
28 This relationship is assumed to extend far beyond the workplace to encompass  
29 more personal social interactions. The young male rock worker is becoming part  
30 of the state, and many young men are willing to put aside their cynicism about  
31 the ruling party in exchange for such a relationship. In Getachew’s case, at the  
32 same time as he critiques the state he expresses a desire to maintain a relationship  
33 with it. The abstract relationship with the state is concretized through Getachew’s  
34 day-to-day interactions with others that are structured by his role as a government  
35 employee. It is the perceived potential of road construction for (re)creating this  
36 relationship with the state that has led Jimma residents to invest emotionally in  
37 an infrastructural development project that at first glance differs little from the  
38 apparent failure of the local hydropower dam.

1 CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY 27:1

2 For Getachew and young men like Holyfield, the sense of membership as-  
3 sociated with state employment is linked to class. Getachew's support for road  
4 construction and urban renewal is indicative of his desire to maintain his position  
5 within a middle class. Holyfield's position, however, is based in aspiration. Unem-  
6 ployed young men consistently voiced a desire to attain government employment.  
7 Such employment not only brings a steady income but also immediately inserts one  
8 into a complex and qualitatively desirable web of relationships. In the absence of  
9 traditional government jobs, rockwork offers an acceptable alternative. The rock  
10 worker is paid by the piece, rather than a monthly salary, benefits are nonexistent,  
11 and there is no evidence that the work will extend beyond the duration of the  
12 current project. For underemployed young men, however, there is still hope to  
13 be found in this work. For the moment it is possible for them to assert a relation-  
14 ship with the state that despite its dubious economic value has historically been  
15 associated with the urban middle class in Ethiopia.

16  
17 **CONCLUSIONS: THE PROBLEMS OF NEOLIBERALISM(S) AS AN**  
18 **ANALYTICAL CATEGORY**

19 Participating in the construction of roads—through donating money, selling  
20 one's labor, or simply providing moral support—creates a sense that one is with the  
21 state. Given the generally high level of cynicism regarding the state, such a desire  
22 for a relationship is surprising, and its prevalence is an indication of the historical  
23 importance in urban Ethiopia of maintaining a personal relationship with the state, as  
24 a source of both status and economic mobility. To be a government worker provides  
25 a sense of membership within a desirable community. One is part of a wide network  
26 of state employees that is associated with social activities that extend far beyond  
27 the workplace and include weddings, funerals, and religious feasts. At the same  
28 time, despite recent changes, the state has historically been the primary source of  
29 economic opportunity within urban Ethiopia. Government work provides security  
30 as well as opportunities for further advancement both professionally and otherwise  
31 (e.g., access to low-cost government housing). Road construction reasserts a  
32 relationship with the state. The state is perceived as reemerging as a provider and  
33 the basis for community.

34 I have demonstrated that the privatization of infrastructural development  
35 in Ethiopia does not fit easily with conceptions of neoliberalism. At the same  
36 time, to argue that the Ethiopian case represents a particularly localized version  
37 of neoliberalism has limited analytical utility. My intent is not to dismiss recent  
38 scholarship that analyzes local neoliberalisms. These studies offer ethnographically

1

2 rich and theoretically nuanced analyses of issues such as the creation of subjectivities,  
3 restructuring of the state, and the rationalization of economies. I do, however,  
4 believe that at this point the continued value of using neoliberalism as a category of  
5 analysis is diminishing, and anthropologists would be well served by moving toward  
6 analyses of correlations and patterns among specific practices. The problem of using  
7 neoliberalisms is that although they avoid a singular and unified neoliberalism, they  
8 are still based in the assumption that certain policies, practices, and values may be  
9 categorized usefully as neoliberal. Given the broad range of things that *neoliberal*  
10 refers to, its utility as a category is limited.

11 Ferguson offers a clear description of the multiple ways that *neoliberalism* is  
12 used, considers the possibility of abandoning the term altogether, and then con-  
13 cludes that a word that bring together multiple meanings “can be an occasion for  
14 reflecting on how the rather different things to which it refers may be related”  
15 (2010:172). Ferguson certainly does make a compelling case for using this “con-  
16 fusing, conflating word” (2010:172) in his analysis of Basic Income Grants in South  
17 Africa. What makes Ferguson’s analysis so valuable, however, is not his use of  
18 *neoliberalism* but the manner in which he breaks the term down into distinct mech-  
19 anisms of governance at play in South Africa. Ferguson analytically decouples the  
20 political agenda generally associated with neoliberalism from specific techniques of  
21 governance that are often categorized as neoliberal. In other words, neoliberalism  
22 as a class project does not necessarily correlate with individualizing techniques of  
23 governance. A much more straightforward means of making his argument would  
24 be simply to avoid the use of *neoliberalism* and to examine correlations between  
25 specific practices. By disassociating particular political techniques, subjectivities,  
26 and desires from the overly broad category of neoliberalism, opportunities are  
27 created for a fresh perspective and new insights.<sup>14</sup> My critique of Ferguson’s  
28 essay may be applied to many recent discussions of neoliberalisms. Invoking ne-  
29 oliberalisms only confuses and muddles important insights regarding relationships  
30 between specific issues such as privatization, affective relationships, and resource  
31 distribution.

32 Building on Collier’s (2009) discussion of “topologies of power” I believe it is  
33 necessary to move beyond using neoliberalism as a primary category of analysis and  
34 instead examine correlations between different practices. As Collier explains: “We  
35 can trace certain techniques and technical mechanisms from one context to the  
36 other. . . . But there is no reason to assume that the resulting governmental ensem-  
37 bles can be read as playing out some internal logic of neoliberalism” (2009:100). In  
38 this article, I have described how economic and political processes common to much

1 CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY 27:1

2 of the developing world have been applied in the Ethiopian case. Hydropower and  
3 road construction projects demonstrate that Jimma residents perceive the Ethiopian  
4 state as simultaneously contracting and expanding. Individuals and communities  
5 engage with infrastructural development and cultural and historical norms sur-  
6 rounding power and exchange to reposition themselves in relation to the state. To  
7 frame this analysis in terms of neoliberalism would obscure more than it reveals.  
8 By breaking my analysis down into correlations between specific policy changes  
9 and types of power relations I hope that I have generated insights into how power  
10 may function in similar cases and provided the grounds for developing the sort of  
11 midlevel theories that anthropological research often supports (Knauff 2006).

#### 14 ABSTRACT

15 *The recent completion of a hydropower dam near Jimma, Ethiopia coincided with*  
16 *rolling blackouts throughout the country and accusations of corruption and misman-*  
17 *agement being directed toward the Ethiopian government and the Italian company*  
18 *that constructed the dam. The case appears to be one more example of an African*  
19 *state failing to provide its citizens with basic public services in a context of neoliberal*  
20 *economic restructuring. Recent road construction and urban renewal projects in Jimma*  
21 *have also been contracted out to private companies and have led to displaced families*  
22 *and disruptions of day-to-day life. Jimma residents, however, have generally met these*  
23 *projects with statements of approval and appreciation for the power of the Ethiopian*  
24 *state to bring progress. In this article, I examine contrasting narratives concerning*  
25 *privatized infrastructural development projects. I argue that although the provision of*  
26 *basic services is increasingly contracted out to private companies, the perceived presence*  
27 *of the Ethiopian state has expanded in new and surprising ways. Contrasting percep-*  
28 *tions of dams and road construction are based in values concerning relations of power*  
29 *and exchange. In this case, the particular relationship between the privatization of*  
30 *infrastructure and perceptions of the state demonstrates the limits of neoliberalism as*  
31 *an analytical category. I argue that in recent anthropological scholarship a reliance*  
32 *on neoliberalism as a category of analysis obscures more than it reveals, and I call for*  
33 *more attention to correlations between specific techniques of governance and relations of*  
34 *power. [development, infrastructure, neoliberalism, patron–client relations,*  
35 *progress]*

#### 34 NOTES

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- 2 1. One of these projects, Gibe II, an underground tunnel designed for generating hydropower,  
3 was finished in 2010 but then suffered a collapse shortly after its inauguration. This led to  
4 further cutbacks in the availability of power throughout Ethiopia. In early 2011, Gibe II was  
5 repaired and started to generate power.
- 6 2. The Gibe River projects have received a great deal of international scrutiny. Salini received  
7 no-bid contracts for the second and third stages of the Gibe River projects, violating Ethiopia's  
8 policies for international bidding. Proper geological surveys were not conducted prior to  
9 beginning construction on the projects, and claims of power generation are likely exaggerated.  
10 It is likely that most of the power generated will be used by private industry, as power lines  
11 do not exist to transmit electricity to Ethiopia's predominantly rural population. The third  
12 stage of the Gibe project will have major impacts on the Omo River Valley and devastating  
13 effects on the lives of more than 500,000 people who depend on the river for fishing,  
14 farming, and water for livestock. Because of growing critiques of Gibe III, which would  
15 be the world's tallest dam, many international lenders, including the World Bank, backed  
16 away from the project. The Industrial and Commercial Bank of China announced in 2010  
17 that it will support the project with a \$500 million loan, with the stipulation that a Chinese  
18 state-owned company will provide equipment for the project (Hathaway 2008; International  
19 Rivers 2009; CEE Bankwatch Network 2008).
- 20 3. Nearly 80 percent of housing units in Jimma had at least one electric light in 1994. Numbers  
21 are higher for larger cities like Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, where around 95 percent of  
22 housing units had electric lights, and these numbers represent a slight increase from 1984  
23 (Abelti et al. 2001). At the time of the 1994 census, less than 15 percent of Ethiopia's  
24 population lived in urban areas, and there continues to be very little access to electricity in  
25 rural areas.
- 26 4. By "privatization of infrastructural development" I refer to the use of public money to  
27 hire private contractors to construct infrastructure, like hydroelectric dams, mobile phone  
28 towers, and roads.
- 29 5. John Clarke explores the utility of neoliberalism as an analytical category and concludes  
30 that we need "terms that would allow us to think better" (2008:145). I agree with Clarke's  
31 critique of *neoliberalism* as an overly promiscuous, omnipresent, and omnipotent concept and  
32 I suggest that this problem can be solved by focusing on specific correlations between sets of  
33 practices.
- 34 6. *Derg* is the Amharic word for "committee."
- 35 7. In Amharic, the language most commonly used in Jimma and much of urban Ethiopia, both  
36 "state" and "government" are referred to with the word *mengist*, and little distinction is  
37 made between the two. Local government administrators are generally associated with the  
38 authority of the state and the ruling party (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003).
8. Extremely high attendance at the funeral of any government worker was one indication of  
his or her high status. See Mains 2012b for an extended discussion of status and government  
employment.
9. For a more detailed discussion of youth and relations of power in the context of the 2005  
elections see Mains 2012a.
10. By 2008, mobile phones had begun to spread to urban working-class men. Texting was  
common primarily among those with at least a secondary education. Although many urban  
residents would not directly send and receive a message like this, it was common for mobile  
phone owners to read such humorous messages together with their friends.
11. See Ulimwengu et al. 2009 for a quantitative analysis of rising food prices in Ethiopia.
12. I use pseudonyms for all individuals discussed in this article.
13. In 2011, representatives of the Ethiopian federal government visited the United States to  
meet with Ethiopian Americans in different major cities in hopes of soliciting donations in  
support of infrastructural development. In many cases large protests were held outside of  
the meetings. Popular Ethiopian musicians like Fiker Addis have released songs promoting  
infrastructural development. Videos accompanying the songs, posted on YouTube, include  
images of rivers, dams, and Ethiopians signing off on government issued bonds.

- 2 14. One might argue that the techniques of governance described by Ferguson are usefully cate-  
3 gorized as “neoliberal.” Although developing categories to group particular sets of techniques  
4 is certainly useful, the numerous ways that *neoliberal* has been used undermine its utility in  
5 such an analysis. Because *neoliberal* is embedded in so many different language games, it is  
6 not possible to simply use it to speak about something as specific as a set of techniques of  
7 governance.

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*Editors' Notes:* *Cultural Anthropology* has published a number of essays on state and development, including Karen Strassler's "The Face of Money: Currency, Crisis, and Remediation in Post-Suharto Indonesia" (2009), Paul W. Hanson's



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6 *Cultural Anthropology* has also published a number of essays on citizenship. See, for  
7 example, Jessica Cattellino’s “The Double Bind of American Indian Need-Based  
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