ANTHONY P. GLASCOCK

RESOURCE CONTROL AMONG OLDER MALES
IN SOUTHERN SOMALIA

ABSTRACT. Research conducted in 1983 among agro-pastoralists in Somalia indicates that older males violate cultural and religious rules concerning the transfer of land and animals. Although all transfers are to be equal, one or two 'good' sons are rewarded with high quality land and animals while other sons receive inferior property. Conflict over the transfer of property is avoided through the validating role of the village council of older males. The introduction of new resources has not altered the existing pattern as older males have been able to incorporate the new resources into the traditional system of property control and transfer and thus assure themselves of a secure old age.

Key Words: aging, resource transfer, family, Somalia

The timing and means of the transfer of resources to children and other relatives is critical to the maintenance of the elderly in non-industrial societies where governmental social security systems are lacking. Old age can be fraught with insecurity and the elderly can lack even the basic needs of food and shelter if all resources are transferred to children before the parents' death, and if these children choose not to support and provide care for their elderly parents. The control of important societal resources is one means through which individuals as they age can maintain the support of their relatives and avoid being regarded as burdens. These resources vary greatly from society to society but their control allows the elderly "to compel others to support them or provide them goods and services . . . Through control or access to resources, the old though physically dependent on others, can make others legally dependent on them" (Amoss and Harrell 1981: 10). When the elderly no longer control these resources (Foner 1984; Glascock 1982; Guemple 1969) or when the value of the resources change because of modernization (Cowgill 1972; Osako 1982; Goldstein et al. 1983) the elderly are susceptible to neglect. On the other hand, if no resources are transferred to children until after the parents' death, the result is often intergenerational conflict and the lack of support when the aging parents need it most — when they are ill or physically dependent. Thus, there exist in all societies specific official and unofficial (ideal and real) mechanisms which govern the control and the transfer of resources from one generation to the next.

The focus of the following analysis is on the way these mechanisms operate among a population of agro-pastoralists in Southern Somalia. The discussion centers on the violation of cultural and religious rules concerning the transfer of land and animals which results in older males rewarding 'good' sons with high quality land and animals while other sons receive

inferior property. In addition, the role of village councils in validating these transfers and the incorporation of new resources into the system are discussed.

THE BAY REGION AND ITS PEOPLE

The indigenous culture of the Bay Region is an admixture of Sub-Saharan and North African traits. Negroid horticulturalists from Sub-Saharan Africa and Caucasoid pastoralists from North Africa met within the area that is today the Bay Region with the result being a mixture of subsistence patterns, language, racial characteristics and culture. Once again in the 1980s the Region is the intersection of diverse elements as it has become the center of international development efforts within Somalia. The result of these efforts has been the influx of new resources, ideas and people which must be integrated with existing patterns into a new synthetic culture.¹

The Bay Region itself is an area of approximately 40,000 square kilometers located between the Juba and Shebelli Rivers, and 250 kilometers northwest of Somalia's capital, Mogadishu (See Map 1). The topography of the Region is dead flat with only a handful of granite outcroppings. The indigenous vegetation is thorn bushes and widely scattered thorn trees. There is one large city in the Region, Baidoa, with a population of approximately 25,000. In addition, there are three District Capitals which function as local administrative centers and have populations of 3,000 to 5,000 people. The vast majority of the Region's approximately 450,000 inhabitants live in small isolated villages. There are approximately 1,500 of these villages which, although they range in size from 150 to 900 people, usually have around 350 inhabitants.

The climate of the Region is hot and dry. Average rainfall is approximately 500 millimeters a year (20 inches) but is unpredictable and widely scattered throughout the Region. Droughts are a common occurrence with the result that in approximately 25% of the growing seasons no crops can be produced at all. The year is divided into two rainy and two dry seasons. The heaviest rains fall during the months of March, April and May and is termed the Gu'. The light rains, known as the Dayr, fall in October, November and early December. These rainy seasons are separated by two dry seasons: the Hagai, from July through September and the Jilaal from mid-December through mid-March.

The shortage of water for humans, animals and crops is the most important limiting factor within the Region and therefore, it is not surprising that villages are centered around water sources. These sources are usually artificial ponds, war, in which water is stored from one rainy season to the next. There are also hand-dug shallow wells in many parts of