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The University of Edinburgh

‘Condition’:  
Energy, Time and Success Amongst  
Ethiopian Runners

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A thesis submitted to the University of Edinburgh for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy, November 2018.

## Declaration

I declare that this thesis, presented to the Univeristy of Edinburgh for the degree of PhD in International Development, has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

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## Abstract

Long distance runners in East Africa are often portrayed in the international media as ‘naturally’ gifted or as running away from poverty. This thesis – that traces the athletic lives of Ethiopian long-distance runners seeking to ‘change their lives’ through the sport – presents a different account, demonstrating how runners operate in an economy of limited energy. Based on fifteen months of fieldwork (September 2015 to December 2016) that followed Ethiopian runners from rural training camps in the Northern highlands to Addis Ababa and further afield to competitions in Europe and China, the thesis makes a major contribution to the anthropology of economic action and to the anthropology of sport and development.

Ethiopian long-distance runners are part of an increasingly competitive running market, which offers both new opportunities to make fantastic amounts of money and higher odds against doing so. The choice to become a runner is characterised by speculation and risk as well as the active rejection of other forms of precarious work, which runners perceive as failing to offer a ‘chance’ of changing your life for the better. As runners train together but compete as individuals, a core tension arises between relational and individual agency. As this thesis explores, this tension is played out across the moral economy of energy expenditure.

The thesis develops this argument by paying particular attention to the bodily and affective dimensions of running, beginning on the level of individual concerns with self-improvement and the careful marshalling and monitoring of energy on a day-to-day basis. It goes on to argue that morally appropriate training regimes in Ethiopia are characterised by working together, and the visibility and synchronicity of running as well as eating and resting. Finally, the thesis shows how global entities – corporations, race organisers, technical devices – affect the economy of energy in Ethiopia and bring new ethical challenges. As attempts to craft responsible and

entrepreneurial subjects coincide with long standing Amhara notions of the individual and 'chance,' different dispositions converge and diverge.

### Lay Summary

This thesis is about the lives of the many young men in Ethiopia seeking to 'change their lives' through the sport of running. It describes how, in an increasingly competitive running market, runners struggle to manage their energy levels and social relationships in a way that will give them the best chance to succeed. The thesis is based upon fifteen months of research for which I lived and ran alongside a group of runners, following them from remote rural training camps in the highlands of Ethiopia to the capital city Addis Ababa, and further afield to races in Europe and China.

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## Prologue: An Economy of Limited Energy

Berhanu is asleep, his head resting on my shoulder and his Adidas-clad feet balancing precariously on the seat in front of us. We are stuck in traffic on the way back into Addis Ababa. It is now ten thirty in the morning, and it has been six hours since we walked the faintly lit streets from our compound in Kotebe to where we were picked up by the *Moyo Sports* team bus at five o'clock. Berhanu has just run thirty kilometres on rolling red-dirt roads in Akaki, an hour's drive south of the city. I ran 25km, before stepping onto the bus when it stopped so that Tadesse could jump out and hand out water to the athletes as they ran past. By the time I got back on, five of our group of around thirty runners had already done the same. Bogale sat with his head in his hands, the sweat pooling on the leather of his seat. '*Selam naw?*' I asked him. 'Is there peace? '*Zare condition yellum*' came the reply. 'Today I have no condition.' The dirt, whipped up into clouds by passing buses, coats my teeth. My legs ache, and I will hobble off the bus with the others when we get back to Kotebe. Those who watch our slow progress up the hill will wonder at our tracksuits; it is hard to imagine that these same legs covered so many kilometres in an hour and fifty minutes earlier in the morning.

We have eaten nothing since last night. Outside the bus, hawkers jostle for position at car windows, desperately trying to sell biscuits and bottles of water. A couple of the runners push five *birr* notes out in exchange for deep fried chick pea sticks or sweetened bread rolls. Beyond the hawkers, a concrete-strewn construction site is partially screened by sheet-metal barriers, and a couple of the informal dwellings that once filled the area are still standing, or partially standing. Car horns blare as people try to cut in front of each other. The tumult outside the bus contrasts with the somnolence inside; most of the athletes, like Berhanu, are dozing. Coach Messeret walks down the bus, gestures to the sleeping runners and addresses the following to me.

‘We are burning ourselves up! Energy is not created or destroyed. This is one of the principles of chemistry, but it does not work for Ethiopians. We are burning ourselves up working to try to double the capacity that we have, but we can’t conserve anything. Through this process we cannot develop the country!’

Here, coach Messeret explicitly links the careful marshalling and monitoring of the runners’ physical energy to the broader economic development of Ethiopia. He hints at one of the main concerns he expressed to me again and again in the course of my fieldwork - that runners were striving to go ‘beyond their capacity,’ that their drive for athletic ‘development’ was too fast. When I asked him to clarify these remarks later in the day, he told me that ‘when we talk about development we are talking about energy expenditure.’ He went on as follows:

‘Life by itself is economics for me. It is a flow of energy. Energy can neither be created nor destroyed but you can shift it from one form to another form. The potential that you have inside yourself should be exploited. But nowadays they are expending so much energy from their physique, the energy which helps them for growth as well as the energy that tomorrow allows them to run faster and faster and faster and to cover a further distance’

When I started fieldwork in Addis I sought to answer questions about the interactions between long-distance running and development, and about how narratives of personal development through running mapped onto broader narratives of macro-economic development in Ethiopia. What I encountered, however, was a hyper-competitive athletic environment that offered both new opportunities to make fantastic amounts of money and higher odds against doing so, and an environment that was principally understood in terms of the skillful deployment of energy. As runners trained together but competed as

individuals, navigating this competitive environment invoked a clear tension between relational and individual agency.

This thesis explores how this tension played out across athletic training programmes and international races over the course of four years. In doing so, I outline the contours of what I call an 'economy of limited energy.' Concerns about energy – its use and misuse, the ways in which it shifts between states, its extraction or enhancement – emerged quite clearly as the central preoccupation of the runners I knew. My argument emerges from a methodological commitment to the same rigorous training regime as the runners I lived with. The puzzles that drive my enquiry emerge from my own immersion in their rhythms of training, eating and recuperation, and in no small part from my own experience of exhaustion and attempts to maintain my own energy levels at a reasonable level. The conclusions I arrive at are conclusions arrived at by running alongside people, 'sharing the pace' and discussing how we felt day in day out; they would have been inaccessible had I relied merely upon sitting on the training bus and talking to people.

I argue that the concerns of Ethiopian runners' about energy map onto economic desires, their aspirations to 'change their lives' through the sport, their social relationships and conceptions of the environment. They also articulate economic desires and aspirations in particular ways. Crucially, I argue that the way in which they spoke about 'condition,' and the economy of limited energy that I describe, was not merely a model or a metaphor that people use to make sense of the economy and the sport of running, but rather that runners inhabit a world in which energetic concerns are concrete and absolute. Through detailed description of the ways in which energetic concerns inflect questions of selfhood, conversion, ethics and relationships, I argue that Amhara runners see energy as subject to give or take with the environment but also with other people, and therefore as deeply embedded in concerns about relational ethics.

The thermodynamic discoveries alluded to by Messeret above provide an influential frame for understanding what Garrido (2012) calls 'living organisation' (12). He goes on to write that 'in assimilating, storing and spending energy on their own initiative, living systems apparently break the second law of thermodynamics,' which states that the entropy of a thermal system will always increase. But human 'moving, thinking, desiring [...] seem to be led in exactly the opposite direction. Life is above all initiative, spontaneity, freedom, whereas the essential physical meaning of increase of entropy is a loss of power of spontaneous action' (13). For Ethiopian runners, to live a life concerned with 'condition, condition, condition' is to be forever acutely aware of the flow of energy from one state to another, between people and across borders.

Relying upon a precarious state of 'condition' developed in Ethiopia but deployed primarily in Europe, America and China in races, is to be acutely aware that economic life is, as Gudeman (2012) puts it, 'biological and ecological.' In writing about the notion of strength in South American agricultural communities he notes that 'strength is rather like force and energy in the natural science sense' in that people have 'a conservation, organisation and entropic notion of force or vital energy' (61). For Gudeman, this concept of 'strength' provides a structure for material life 'and an implicit critique of market economies that presume unlimited growth, calculated risk, and the denial of the laws of thermodynamics.' This is exactly what I am concerned with in this thesis. Ethiopian runners confront very real physical and metabolic limits. As one massage therapist put it to me, he had told many injured athletes that 'you trained harder than you *can* train.' Runners see their physical 'condition' in terms of a cycle that is naturally limited and must be carefully monitored; they are constantly aware of the limits to accumulation, and of the need to balance inputs and outputs. There is much to be learnt from the study of a means of living that demands such close attention to, and monitoring of, energy levels.

A runner's concern with their 'condition' dominated all aspects of their life. Considerable time and mental energy was spent planning the ideal combination of training environment, people to run with, food and rest on a day to day basis. Social life was oriented around the protection of their 'condition' through withdrawal from certain aspects of society, and by 'working together' in training in ways that would 'bring change'. Moral and religious life was oriented by a disposition of patience and submission calculated to best enrich one's chance of success. 'Condition' was physical, social and spiritual, and the relationship between financial success and 'condition' was an ambivalent one. A runner needed enough money to fulfil certain basic requirements, but race winnings often brought problems associated with trying to train with a 'divided mind.'

'Energy' as Leslie White defines it in his 1943 article, means simply 'the capacity for performing work' (335). 'Everything in the universe' he writes, 'may be described in terms of energy.' White described energy in evolutionist terms, suggesting that the increase in per capita energy extracted was an indication of progress. More recently Almeida (1990) has pointed out that what White saw as 'progress' may be seen as, 'on the contrary, degradation' (373). Social and cultural anthropologists have rarely engaged with ideas about bodily energy, although physical anthropologists (Ulijaszek, 1992) have long explored 'human energetics' methods of measuring energy expenditure. These methods included the 'Max Planck respirometer,' the first device to be widely used to measure the inputs and outputs of oxygen and carbon dioxide in breath, and informed and were informed by the nineteenth century 'science of work' described in Rabinbach's 'The Human Motor' (1990). These methods, as I go on to describe in chapter five, are now most prominently used by sports scientists to estimate the capacities of individual bodies. As indicated above however, in the Ethiopian context runners expressed concern that they were attempting to go 'beyond their capacity' in terms of the energy they were able to expend and that their

energy levels were threatened both by forces within Ethiopia and outside the country. Energy was seen not as bounded within individual bodies but rather as transbodily, flowing between people, shared and sometimes stolen. A runner's 'condition' was constructed and maintained through relationships with others.

In a 1965 article, Foster described the patterning of peasant behaviour in general as operating according to the 'image of the limited good' (Foster, 1965; 279). He writes that peasants view their 'social, economic and natural universes - their total environment - as one in which all of the desired things in life such as land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness and honour, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety, exist in finite quantity and are always in short supply' (297). This extends to conceptions about health and the body, especially in terms of how people think about substances like blood and semen as non-regenerative. Importantly, Foster theorises peasant society as a 'closed system' in which 'an individual or family can improve their position only at the expense of others' (297).

Scott (1976) writes in similar vein in *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, claiming that for those living 'close to the margin' of survival, a 'subsistence ethic' arises which patterns behaviours of reciprocity, forced generosity and economic decision making in a way designed to avoid throwing the family below the subsistence level. This 'subsistence ethic' is notably at odds, he writes, with the profit maximisation calculus of traditional economics, as the peasant family – as both unit of consumption and production - must avoid risky behaviour. 'It is perfectly reasonable' he writes, 'that the peasant who each season courts hunger and all its consequences should hold a somewhat different opinion of risk-taking than the investor who is gambling "off the top"' (15). Living within an economy of limited energy patterns aspects of runners' behavior in similar ways, and yet, as I go on to show, runners' attitudes to maintenance and risk are rather more complex than those described by Scott.

Foster and Scott's work on living within limits has important parallels to classic anthropological works on the Amhara - the ethnic group of the majority of the runners with whom I lived and trained - which describe a way of looking at the world as a shifting hierarchy in which if one person is raised to a position of power, another must necessarily fall (Kebede, 1999; Levine, 1965). Kebede writes that according to the Ethiopian concept of 'chance' or *idil*, for one person to ascend to a higher position in life entails that 'the favour removed from one person goes to another person' (204). 'Such place being limited' he writes, 'someone else must be dislodged and degraded' (220). This somewhat Hobbesian view of human nature implies a closed and rigid structure that does not acknowledge how such a system is open to creative interpretation or outside influence.

Interpretations based on the concept of limits remain important in scholarship on Ethiopia. Di Nunzio (2017) writes of a 'politics of limited entitlements' which determined the relationship between the state and the poor under both the *derg* and EPRDF governments, which 'prevented poor people from living with "too little" but also refrained from giving them "too much"' (93). Di Nunzio emphasises, though, that government development narratives around empowerment through entrepreneurship fail to account for the importance and intricacies of social relationships. This thesis is animated by a tension between collaboration and competition - in a sport in which runners train in a group but must compete alone - in an economy in which energy is perceived to be finite, fluid and fleeting. The economy of limited energy in which runners live is not, however, Foster's closed system. Runners compete in races in Europe and America, in Nigeria and India, and increasingly in China. Access to these opportunities 'outside' is tightly controlled by visa regulations, race directors and athletics managers and by the Ethiopian Athletics Federation. Speculation about where one might get a 'chance' to run is rife, and foreigners are often perceived

as potential conduits to race opportunities. Means of monitoring energy expenditure in the form of GPS watches, and influences on the practices and speeds of running from the advertising campaigns of Nike and other major corporations circulate on social media and have distinct effects on the economy of limited energy described here.

## Introduction: Energy, 'Development' and the Search for 'Condition'

*'Eldoret: The Town Trying to "Run Away from Poverty"'* - Title of Guardian article by Jason Burke, 2016.

*'Well, the problem of Ethiopians is lack of money. If there was money, everyone would run'* - Ashenafi, Barber, Kotebe, 2016.

Much of the academic research and media coverage of long-distance running in East Africa has centred on a twofold determinism. The majority of academic work comes from the natural sciences (Larsen, 2003; Noakes et al., 2016; Scott and Pitsiladis, 2006, 2007) and searches for genetic explanations for East African dominance. Pitsiladis is a founding member of the *Athlone Project*, which 'attempts to discover the genetic variants associated with elite athletic performance'. He has written numerous articles based on the premise that 'it is likely there is also some genetic component to elite athletic performance' (abstract, 'Genotypes and Distance Running: Clues from Africa,' 2007) but which invariably fail to find any. The assumption of some sort of genetic or altitude-derived advantage comes down to *nature*. Runners from Ethiopia and Kenya are seen as 'naturally gifted,' and this extends to the way in which people talk about poverty. The implication is that growing up in rural poverty necessitates a more 'natural' way of life. This is characterised in media portrayals by working on the land as a child and running long distances to and from school barefoot, with these activities seen as naturally producing champion runners.

As Denison (2006) points out, 'one imagines young Africans running not purposefully on confined measured spaces like running tracks but instead running for fun or to meet their transport needs. Thus, we come to believe that running for Africans is something they take to easily, without thought or consideration. Their running is done without intention, we think, and certainly without government funding, coaching or the help of scientifically derived

training programs' (54). Bale and Sang (1996) write that the African athlete is characterised as 'naive', 'uninhibited' and portrayed as 'running wild', 'out of Africa,' claiming that the 'existence [of these attributes] works to obliterate material conditions and material change' (43). The tendency to describe runners as 'effortless' or as 'born to run' masks the years of preparation and sacrifice that have inevitably gone into creating this illusion. As Alter (1992) puts it in his study of wrestling, 'when a wrestler wrestles with such consummate skill that his strength and flawless technique appear as though they are a natural gift, this serves to ground the ideological aspects of wrestling in a world outside of culture' (159). Clearly, distance runners do not operate 'outside of culture,' however.

East African runners' performance is often portrayed as stemming from the fact that they are 'running away from poverty' (see, as recently as 2016, Jason Burke's Guardian piece quoted at the beginning of this section). In a sense this further denies individual agency, implying as it does a dichotomy between runners from more 'developed' countries who choose the sport as a form of 'serious leisure' (Stebbins, 1982) and those in Ethiopia and Kenya who must run in order to survive. This is how Wacquant (2006) characterises boxing in the Chicago ghetto, when he writes that 'one of the reasons why boxers are able to bear such wilful Spartanism is found in its affinity with their social condition of origin' (81). Whilst the financial motivation provided by prize money should not be downplayed, this represents another form of determinism which is perhaps best illustrated in the East African context by the myth that runners from the region are so good because they had to run vast distances to and from school as children. These myths do, however, circulate amongst athletes. The idea of rural hardship leading to athletic success was reinforced by those who my informants referred to as the 'previous generation' of recently-retired athletes, usually epitomised by Haile Gebrselassie who is widely considered one of the greatest distance runners of all time. Before Gebrselassie became President of the

Ethiopian Athletics Federation, our coach Messeret criticised him for not investing any of his own money back into athletics. On one occasion, when I sat with Messeret and a runner called Aseffa after training, he said he had pointed out to Gebrselassie that Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt had built an athletics track in his hometown, and asked him why he had not done the same;

Messeret: 'He [Gebrselassie] said, 'because nobody helped me. If you want to be a strong athlete you have to be challenged'. I asked, 'is being poor a criteria?' and he said, 'yes!' He said when he was a child he had to go out with the herd without any lunch. Does that mean every child in Ethiopia has to do that?'

Aseffa: 'He is right, though, athletes must face challenges otherwise they will become dependent'

Here we see quite clearly the internalising of the logic that poverty leads to success. Hard work, suffering, and going without food are all seen as things you must go through in order to be successful. Aseffa's comment mirrors the language of development when he talks about 'dependency'. 'Facing challenges' on your own and passing through barriers to success is seen as part of the process. Often this was connected to upbringing, and expressed in terms of the difference between 'rural' and 'urban' youth. As another runner called Fasil put it, 'Addis Ababa kids can't run like the kids from the countryside. They've been too well looked after, they don't know how to work. The rural kids, though, they're used to ploughing fields, digging ditches, carrying loads. All runners come from rural areas.' The 'natural' key to success to which my informants most often referred was the altitude, and the environmental resources offered by the variety of training locations around the city. Here Tilahun describes the 'air condition':

'OK the air condition is good for athletes, more than any country it is good. The

important thing is just totally economic, otherwise the air condition is nice. If you have good things, and you are following and doing your work, and you have materials it is good OK? But, if you do not have a help person or you do not have proper things, then for your life then being successful it is very heavy. But if you have materials, shoes, clothes and you know food and shelter just if all of this is fulfilled it is very simple. Without this money it is very difficult to defeat others [...] Addis Ababa it is very wide. It is very heavy for the poorest like me for transportation. If someone is helping with a bit of money, it disappears for rent. It is not enough even for rent. I have to go to the rural areas to ask my family for food to live. It is very heavy.'

Clearly, rather than a route to success, Tilahun's economic position is perceived as a significant barrier to his gaining 'condition'. As this thesis will go on to explain, Ethiopian runners place huge importance on 'adapting' to a wide variety of environments, on being able to withdraw from the rest of society, on having a group of runners with whom they can train, and on access to certain foods. As the quotation above makes clear, however, these things are by no means guaranteed, and are determined in large part by a runner's economic and social standing. On another occasion when Tilahun and I had finished running together in the forest and were walking back down the hill, we were joined by a portly man swinging a briefcase on his way to work, who fired a stream of questions at Tilahun about what it took to be a runner. Tilahun ticked them off on his fingers. Firstly, you needed '*gize*'; time. For running, but mostly for *ireft*; rest between training sessions. Secondly, you needed good quality food, in sufficient quantities to sustain training. And thirdly, you needed *ya sport masariya*; this was translated either as 'sports materials' or 'facilities'; running shoes, and running kit but also the bus fare to access preferable training locations around the city.

Far from the media portrayal of East African athletes - of success *because* of a lack of shoes and *because* of hardship, these requirements actually represent a

significant barrier to entry, as the second quotation with which I opened this section makes clear, embodying as it does a viewpoint diametrically opposed to the conventional media narrative. Ashenafi - whose name means 'winner' - owned a barber's shop on a cobbled street near our compound. Underneath the posters of numbered hair cut options, the sofa for those waiting was strewn with literature from the Ethiopian Athletics Federation. The runners I trained with liked to look sharp - Hailye had his hair cut about every ten days - so the barber's was a good place to spend time hanging out with runners outside of the forest. I met top professional athletes there, who earned in excess of \$100,000 a year and came in their new season Adidas or Nike tracksuits, and I met runners who had yet to find a club, and who asked me to help them. I also met retired runners, including a man in his fifties who once won the World Military Games marathon in Barcelona. He lamented having been 'born at the wrong time,' as he made very little money from his running.

Ashenafi spent part of every day chatting to this wide array of Kotebe's runners, and he paints a picture of running in Addis that is quite different from the conventional academic and media narratives. Ashenafi told me that he had tried to work and run for a time but that 'work and running do not go together.' He said he would start again if he had enough money to let someone else take over at the barber's. He was of the belief that anyone could become a runner given the 'chance' to train, telling me that 'if you have all facilities fulfilled anyone can run'. For him, the main determining factor was basically whether you have enough time to dedicate to rest in between training runs. To run in the morning and then stand in the barber's all day would not allow someone to 'bring change.'

Often going hand in hand with the idea of 'running away from poverty' is the idea of group solidarity and mutual aid amongst East African runners. In the Jason Burke piece quoted above, he makes the astonishing claim that 'for

hundreds of thousands of people in and around [Eldoret], a poor region that has suffered recurrent ethnic violence, the money earned by local athletes pays for school fees, clinics or cash support for local farmers' (Burke, 2016). Burke is writing about Eldoret in Kenya, but given the frequency with which Ethiopian and Kenyan runners are spoken of collectively as 'the East Africans' it is interesting to compare this to Ashenafi's views on running and economic solidarity. As he was cutting my hair one day a woman came past selling tea, and he bought us two cups. 'Ethiopian life is all about kindness and love,' he said as he stirred a second teaspoon of sugar into his cup. 'Is running about love?' I asked. He shook his head emphatically. 'Running and love do not go together' was his response. 'You'll see, the runners live in Kotebe for a while because it is cheap, but as soon as they win they go to CMC (an affluent part of Addis) and then you never hear from them again.'

### **Sport and 'Development'**

'National success in sport is not unlike success in the national economy. In both a key word is "development"; another is "growth"' (Bale, 2004, 21)

The idea that sport can be used as a means of fostering development and for the expansion of certain values and perspectives is not a new one. In 1923 Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), said that 'the time has come for sport to advance to the conquest of Africa [...] and to bring to its people ordered and disciplined muscular effort, with all the benefits which flow from it' (quoted Bale, 2010, 46). Over ninety years later, it is the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF), overseen by the IOC, who run the main Sport for Development (S4D) project in Bekoji, where I spent some time during my fieldwork. Whilst this project has a fairly substantial online presence (IAAF, 2015) I was unable to find anyone in Bekoji who had heard of the project, and Ethiopian running does not fit with a conventional narrative of the introduction of sport in a colonial setting.

As Wolde and Gaudin (2008) point out, the world of organised sport was more or less a *'terra incognita'* until 1960, when Abebe Bikila burst onto the international scene by winning the Olympic marathon in Rome. Even after this time, up until the fall of Haile Selassie in 1974, Wolde and Gaudin write that 'it is important not to overestimate the development of school sport and athletics in this period' (52) pointing out that there were no physical education programs in schools, and no physical education manuals available in Ethiopia at the time. This is not to say that football and athletics do not bear the mark of strong political symbolism in Ethiopia, but it is difficult to characterise the emergence of running as part of the 'active underdevelopment of [the] nation's body cultures' (Bale, 1996, 163) as Bale does, or as a straightforward situation whereby the 'global core has actually exploited peripheral countries like Kenya' (170). The first sports clubs in Ethiopia were formed during the imperial period when Haile Selassie began to change the structure of the army and imperial bodyguard, opening up the ranks of non-commissioned officers and officers beyond the nobility. As Wolde and Gaudin (2008) note, the army thus 'became a way out of the harsh peasant condition' and a good way to secure paid work and the possibility of promotion, bringing with it other advantages including literacy, free medical care and training in athletics.

It was, in fact, a Swedish officer, Onni Niskanen, who was assigned the role of coaching the first of Ethiopia's military runners in the late 1950s, at the personal request of Haile Selassie. Niskanen was in Ethiopia to develop physical education in the Ethiopian public education system. Nevertheless, he arrived at a time when Scandinavia was at the cutting edge of long-distance running expertise, and was close friends with Gosta Olander, one of the designers of the *'fartlek'* or 'speed play' training used by the world's best middle distance runners at the time. As Wolde and Gaudin (2008) point out, this works 'contrary to the myth of the natural African runner' and points to the fact that Bikila had been 'subjected

to rigorous, planned and diversified training' (1). This was, of course, not the focus of the journalists who covered the Games at the time, who were 'content to note that he was black and barefoot' (Gaudin, 2017, 2). This characterisation has hardly changed with time.

Bikila's victory in the Rome Olympics, which took place at the first widely televised games, and saw him striding past the Axum monument which had been taken from Ethiopia by the Italian colonisers in the 1930s, and then through a guard of honour made up of Italian soldiers, came at a remarkable time. No fewer than nine African countries gained their independence during the Games themselves, between August and September 1960. Long-distance running became a way for Ethiopia to make its mark internationally, and therefore a site of intense national pride. Whilst coaching was generally undertaken by ex-athletes from 1960 to 1980, a centralised, pyramidal structure has developed consisting of regional training camps which feed into the 'national team' and professional club system based in Addis. Until very recently this club system was still dominated by athletes representing the army, to the extent that up until the year 2000 all of Ethiopia's Olympic medalists were drawn from one of the military clubs. The other top first-division clubs, which pay a salary large enough to cover living costs and provide some food and accommodation, are primarily sponsored by other government-owned institutions like the Ethiopian Electric Corporation, The Commercial Bank of Ethiopia or the Muger Cement Factory. As Gaudin (2017) points out, the structure of institutions and competitions that characterise Ethiopian athletics, and the pyramidal structure of the sport, 'is rather common in developed countries, but is quite an exception in sub-Saharan Africa.'

Ever since the first runners began to train in the imperial bodyguard in the 1950s, then, running has been implicated in a nationalist project. Wami Beratu was actually selected to run in the 1960 Olympic marathon ahead of Bikila only to

succumb to illness before the Games, and I was able to interview him at his home in Addis. In his nineties, blind and partially deaf, he got his son to shout my questions directly into his ear from close range. When I asked him about money in the sport, he replied, 'why do you ask me that? We sweat, we bleed and the money should be given to the government,' before lamenting that 'these days everything is changed, they [the runners] get millions in prize money. Cars even!' In fact, though, Bikila's victory was not without material reward. He was given a house and car by the government, and each of his athletic victories was rewarded with military promotion. Whilst his own gains were more modest, Wami did recall being the first person in his area to own a radio, and people coming to listen to it at lunchtimes near the French Embassy.

Until the early 1990s, it was rare for Ethiopian athletes to run abroad in search of prize money, and their participation was mostly limited to events where they represented the national team. When this began to change, the EAF brought in new rules stipulating that athletes had to pay 2% of their earnings to the federation. As the number of athletes wanting to compete abroad, and the interest of foreign managers in facilitating this increased, the EAF attempted to regulate the movement of athletes further by increasing this levy to 10% for international events and 5% for events organised by a manager. This met with strong resistance from the athletes, who threatened to boycott international events in 1997. This led to the current system according to which foreign managers mediate between athletes and the Federation (Gaudin, 2017). The managers pay a fee (officially a flat rate but in reality a negotiable amount that varies according to the manager) to the federation, and in turn they organise competitions for the athletes, taking 15% of the runner's prize money and earnings from sponsorship.

Whilst this system has remained stable, the EAF retain tight control over athletes' movement to this day. Any athlete who wishes to run abroad must

secure a 'release letter' from the Federation, ensuring that the competition does not interfere with races in which they would run for Ethiopia or with their duties in domestic competitions for their local club. This makes athletics a site of tension between foreign interests (the managers and race organisers), the local clubs that sustain the sport and are funded by the state, and the runners themselves who seek to navigate productively between the two systems.

Deciding to become an athlete, and to try to 'change their lives' through running means to restructure your life according to a definable set of future goals. For my informants this would usually mean living in a training camp until they got a 'result' good enough for them to progress to a club in Addis, and from there to join the national team or a management group. As Bale and Sang (1996) suggest, 'a project - work or a race - has a beginning and an end. Its logic is characterised by the spatial metaphor, "linear"' (37). A running career, regardless of the context, is ideally conceived of as a process with clearly defined stages of development and objective ways of assessing progress. As such it may allow for the articulation of a narrative of progress, or a way of imagining the future, in contexts where other aspirations have been disappointed. 'Illusio' Desjarlais (2012, 127) writes, is 'forward-looking, as it's tied to a person's ideas of future endeavours and commitments.' Nowhere is this more true than in distance running.

With its tight schedules, the imposition of external time pressure and the 'continuous repetition of temporally, spatially and quantitatively set training tasks' (Rigauer, 1981, 34), athletics training has often been compared to processes of industrialisation, with Rabinbach (1990) even suggesting that athletic performance in the Global North can be explained by 'the declining significance of industrial work as a paradigm of human activity and modernity'. Time-space compression through running has been interpreted as indicative of industrial development by geographers such as John Bale, for whom 'from the western

European and North American perspective [...] the kinds of running that are generally declining in speed are those that require hard, manual labour' (Bale, 2010, 45). In fact, Bale at one point suggests that there is an inverse relationship between running fast and economic development, writing that 'there is no speeding up [in economic terms] without an associated slowing down' (2010, 45). There is thus a sense in which speeding up in athletic terms is characterised at once as 'development' and at the same time as indicative of economic backwardness, suggesting that distance running has a problematic and contradictory relationship with narratives of 'development' and progress.

This has not prevented 'sport for development' NGOs from becoming involved in running, and in fact this is how the sport management company with which I spent the majority of my fieldwork started out. *Running Across Borders* (RAB) was an NGO founded by Malcolm Anderson in 2008 to provide opportunities for hopeful runners to race abroad but also to provide English classes and experience working as running 'guides' in the growing sport tourism sector. This is a model followed more recently by an NGO called 'Run Africa' in Ethiopia, which describes itself as 'being a competitive club [but] also a platform for building skills and experience' (RunAfrica, 2018), and by Project Africa in Kenya (Project Africa, 2018). The academic literature tends to distinguish between 'Sport for Development' (S4D) programmes in terms of the 'relative emphasis given to sport to achieve certain objectives' (Coalter, 2010, 1375), ranging from 'traditional forms of sports provision, which assume an 'implicit assumption or explicit affirmation that sport has inherent development properties' to 'sport plus', which adapts sport using parallel programmes, to 'plus sport', by which the popularity of sport is used 'as a type of "fly paper" to attract young people to programmes of education and training' (Coalter, 2010, 1375). The NGOs that operate around running in East Africa do not fit neatly into any of these categories in the sense that they all rely on the idea of sport being a potential route to significant material wealth for some of their beneficiaries.

One of the major criticisms leveled against NGOs engaging in S4D activities is that they are yet to 'catch up' with other forms of development practice in terms of critical engagement. Black (2009, 121) cautions that the kind of single-minded idealism that sport encourages in champions may be 'ill-suited to the uncertain landscape of development'. A brief look at the online promotional materials of various running-based NGOs in Ethiopia and Kenya suggests a relatively uncritical portrayal of sport as a means of empowerment and (primarily individual) transformation. The promotional video for *Project Africa* in Kenya opens with sombre music and a black and white photograph of someone's battered toes poking through the end of a dilapidated pair of running shoes, which fades to their slogan, 'From Nothing to Something'. The *Yaya Girls* Program, an NGO based just outside Addis Ababa, 'works to create a new class of Ethiopian female role models that will promote equality throughout Ethiopia'. They state their aim as being to 'help redefine the deep-seated societal norms that unfairly burden girls and women' (Yaya Girls Village, 2015). 'Competition' is said to 'provide a sense of empowerment and strength and discipline to face difficult obstacles prevalent throughout the country' and the program to 'provide motivated female athletes with the tools that will make them both better runners and stronger individuals'. The project takes a social entrepreneurship approach similar to that outlined by Manzo (2012), which is seen as being aligned with modernisation theory and neoliberal individualism, encouraging traits of innovation and leadership tailored to the business world.

The idea that S4D programmes reinscribe 'neoliberal' values is frequently raised in the literature. Besnier et al (2017) note that 'because Western understandings of sport tend to showcase the individual's willpower and moral worth, the ideology underling SDP programs often reduces solutions to matters of personal self-reliance, responsibility and "empowerment" in typical neoliberal fashion' (237). Darnell and Hayhurst (2014) criticise interventions which place an

emphasis on ‘the promotion and education of individual capital, and the building of skills necessary to survive within [...] structures of violence,’ whilst Nauright (2011) draws our attention to systems of teaching and learning which are ‘removed from the discourse of democracy and civic culture and defined in often narrow instrumental and methodological terms’, whereby education is ‘removed from any notion of power, critique, or imaginative enquiry’ (68). Levermore (2009) has argued that the focus on improving infrastructure, capacity building, attracting investment and facilitating the involvement of private corporations in development practice have aligned many S4D programmes with a neoliberal, competitive and hierarchical view of global capitalism. The instrumental view of education outlined above by *Yaya Girls Village*, consisting of tailored internships, English lessons and a normative view of female empowerment, would clearly be susceptible to Nauright’s criticisms, as would the involvement of corporations such as *Nestle* in the IAAF’s *Better Futures* programme. The language of partnership with companies also features heavily on the website of the *Girls Gotta Run Foundation*, based in Addis Ababa, with blog posts such as ‘Looking to buy quality coffee that supports Girls Gotta Run?’ and ‘Celebrate International Day of the Girl with GGRF and Oiselle [an American sports apparel company]’ (GGRF, 2015), which suggests a desire to draw marginalised people into the global capitalist system.

The spectre of ‘neoliberalism’, however, is vaguely deployed in discussions of S4D. I would argue along with Weiss (2004) that ‘neoliberalism’ may in fact be an ‘academic chimera [...] that tells us very little about “real” social processes’ (3). Sivaramakrishnan and Aragwal’s (2003) critique of ‘poststructuralist anti-development discourse’ locates the infirmities of such imprecise criticisms in the ‘debilitating disease Sherry Ortner recently called “ethnographic thinness”’ (47). To dismiss all forms of S4D as complicit in a vaguely defined ‘neoliberalism’ without a thorough engagement with the ways in which ‘neoliberalism’ operates in specific contexts and the ways in which variously situated individuals express

their own involvement in sport is to massively oversimplify S4D programmes. More important in this thesis is to explore the complex interactions between distance running and 'development' which occur outwith NGOs working within the sport, and to trace the specific ways in which ideas about entrepreneurialism and individual responsabilisation are adapted and transformed by pre-existing Amhara notions of competition and individualism. Malcolm Anderson made the decision to move his focus from *Running Across Borders* (RAB) towards a business-oriented sports management approach because he came to the conclusion that this model was actually more in line with what the runners he was engaged with actually wanted.

He explained that RAB tried to 'bridge the development of athletes with giving opportunities to race abroad,' with 'development' in this sense meaning the English lessons the athletes were provided with three times a week and the skills training they received in activities like massage therapy. This approach was relatively successful with around half of the athletes, and unsuccessful for the other half, a point he made to me by giving two diverging examples. 'Gudisa for example' he said, referring to a young runner who was heavily involved with helping foreign runners on the RAB 'visit and train' programme, 'never got to race abroad with us, but he was by far the most educated, by far the best at communication and would have been really employable if he'd stuck at it and not focused on this ideal of "I want to be the next top half marathon runner and run abroad."' At the other end of the scale was a runner called Dinkinesh, who 'was an amazing athlete, developed through us, through our coaches, who gradually got better in marathons, from Loch Ness, to Rome, to Riga, to Hamburg, and then got a contract with *Nike* through *Global Sports* and left our group'. Here he describes educational and athletic development in quite similar terms, but he found that the expectation and desire of the athletes was always that they wanted to race abroad.

When I met Malcolm around a year after finishing my fieldwork, I asked him again about 'development'. His initial response was, 'well, the first thing to say is that I've stopped the bus for *Moyo Sports* [his sports management agency] completely now.' He went on to explain that whilst 'development has always been at the core' of what he wanted to do in athletics, it had 'now been put on its head, and was the other way round in a sense,' in that now his focus is 'on working with the top tier of athletes in the world'. Whilst he retained a focus on 'youth and development and the next talent coming through' he was now 'much more ruthless about who that could be,' and much more aware of the fact that 'the grassroots development of athletics in Ethiopia is lightyears from where Jemal [his top Ethiopian athlete] is at'. In a sense then, Malcolm is describing his trajectory from running an NGO to managing a core group of the best athletes in the world as one from a bottom-up, grassroots approach to a top-down one focused on supporting the very top performers in a hugely competitive field. 'It depends on how you define "development"' he said at one point. Whilst *Moyo Sports* no longer have any formal programmes to do with skills training or education, he explained what they do using the example of Timothy Cheruiyot, the top Kenyan runner represented by his management company and the top Kenyan 1500m runner in the world in 2018.

'My intention with Timothy was never to do with him learning English or about development in any NGO sense. It was about building his profile and getting him into the best races. And look where he is now. That is development. He's bought land, he's building rental houses, he's built three or four now. He's cultivating crops he never had before and selling them in the market. So there's a whole development sphere around his little village that revolves around him. So is that development? That's not us doing that at all. That's him using his money in the way that he wants to for himself and others'

The fifteen months I spent in Ethiopia were during the time when *Moyo Sports* were working with a lot of athletes who were neither at the 'very low end' Malcolm describes nor the 'top, top end' of the sport but rather 'in the middle where you could possibly get athletes to develop.' This meant that the operational margins were often very tight. Because race organisers would not pay for the travel expenses of runners of this standard he would have to 'take the risk' of paying for their flights to races himself, losing money if an athlete ran poorly. Many of the runners were competing in what he referred to as 'development races' that is, smaller races with less prize money but which would hopefully allow them to build their profile and gain access to bigger races where their flights and accommodation would be paid for and thus eliminate the financial 'risk'. It is this side of management that he has now abandoned, having 'got completely fed up with athlete demands being totally unrealistic' and with the work that goes into managing the 'middle ranked athletes'. Whilst for the top athletes he can now 'just pick up the phone or write an e-mail and somebody will be interested,' doing that for someone who 'has been with your management for a couple of years but hasn't done that well or hasn't improved on their time is just not going to happen in today's climate internationally.' My fieldwork, then, took place in a highly competitive environment, with runners trying to prove that they had progressed enough to warrant a 'chance' at one of these 'development' races.

Scholars such as David Harvey (1990) and James Ferguson (1999) have argued that spatial strategies are increasingly privileged by young people seeking to change their lives. In the Ethiopian context Mains (2011) writes that 'Ethiopian critiques of culture assume that distinct and unified Ethiopian and Western cultures exist and that economic growth in Ethiopia can be attained through the adoption of Western culture' (147), noting that his informants suggested that progress would come much faster were they in America. In Besnier et al's (2017) collection *The Anthropology of Sport: Bodies, Borders, Biopolitics*, it is argued

that ‘hope for a better life is oriented almost exclusively toward migrating to wealthy labour markets’ and that ‘everything in society is intertwined with migration - the future is elsewhere’ (241). In both my work and my own running I have encountered many Ethiopian (and Eritrean and Kenyan) runners who now live in the UK (Newcastle, Glasgow, Birmingham, London) and in Istanbul, Dublin and Frankfurt, and know of many others now living all over Europe and in America. Yet my conversations with them reveal that this was a consequence of an athletic compromise because it was impossible, in their opinion, to reach the same level of ‘condition’ outside of Ethiopia. Whilst many of them competed in ‘small races’ for ‘small money’ they no longer saw athletics as a potential route to changing their lives. They didn’t have the environmental or social resources to compete at the top level, nor were they able to live ‘without distraction’ outside of Ethiopia. As such I have focused on those runners who saw their running as a way of changing their lives *in Ethiopia* by travelling abroad to races with significant prize money. I have therefore written about a process of sports transhumance rather than one of sports migration. In the next section, I consider how this relates to the literature on neoliberalism, sport and ethics.

### **Sport, Neoliberalism and Ethics of the Self**

Coach Messeret and I sit on a grass bank at Entoto mountain. A wide expanse of lush grass stretches before us, punctuated by the odd *tukul*, the traditional circular dwelling of highland farmers. Beyond the fields, eucalyptus forest covers most of the mountain slope, the trees spaced just widely enough apart to allow a single-file line of runners to thread their way through. As we sit talking, runners emerge from the forest and meander around on the grass in slow arcing switchbacks designed to allow those at the back to catch up. At the edge of the field, five Toyota Hilux pick-ups are parked in formation, like an open air car showroom. The owners of these vehicles, which cost around \$100,000 to import, are amongst those running through the trees. They wear the green and yellow rain jackets of the national team, or new-season Nike and Adidas tracksuits, and

usually run at the front of the group. Trailing in their wake are runners in battered and patched running shoes, and even the occasional farmhand who tries their luck in plastic sandals.

According to Messeret there are thousands of runners in Addis Ababa, but only a tiny fraction ever make it abroad to a race, let alone enjoy enough success to one day drive up the mountain in a Hilux. The fortunes of the runners I got to know well over the course of fifteen months ranged widely. Tilahun, who I have already quoted in this introduction, could barely afford the 200 birr (around £6) he paid each month in rent. First he moved to the very outskirts of Addis to lessen the cost of living slightly, and travelled home periodically to collect grains and honey to sustain his training. Eventually, though, he accepted that he would not be able to 'modify his times' enough, and moved back to the 'side country' as he put it in English for good to live with his parents and work on the farm. Guye Adola on the other hand, who I frequently spent evenings with in *Hirut Cafe* in Kotebe, ran the fastest debut marathon of all time, running 2.03.46, shortly after I left the field. Already under contract with Adidas, he was able to contact the employee responsible for professional contacts at Nike, and push up the value of the retainer and bonuses to be paid in 2018 far higher than he expected. Adidas matched every offer Nike made, and eventually he resigned with them. Other runners followed trajectories between these two extremes. Selamyhun moved from a training camp in Gondar to Addis after performing well in a regional competition, and travelled to his first race 'outside' of Ethiopia in Turkey. Others won enough money to start construction of their own compounds or support brothers' and sisters' schooling. Another runner constructed a six-house compound in Gondar only to travel to Melbourne marathon and 'disappear' after the race.

In the race with the biggest prize purse in the world, the Dubai marathon, twenty-seven Ethiopian men toed the line, as well as Alemu Bekele, an Ethiopian

who had recently switched allegiance to Brunei. Two hours and four minutes later Mosinet Geremew took first place and \$200,000. The three seconds between him and Leul Gebrselassie in second position were worth \$120,000; he took home \$80,000. The fifth placed runner was only eight seconds behind the winner but won only \$13,000. Those who finished outside the top eight went home with nothing, and many of them had paid for their own flights and even hotel rooms, or had them paid for by friends or sub-agents back in Ethiopia. That money would have to be repaid. Only two Kenyans participated, which is highly unusual in a sport that normally features a balance of athletes from the two nations.

Malcolm explained to me that this was because the race organisers very rarely paid appearance fees to athletes, meaning that they only got paid if they performed well on the day. 'The Kenyans won't put up with that' he told me. Because marathon runners only compete twice or three times a year, 'they want to be guaranteed at least something. But it's the only race the Ethiopians want to run.' People talked about Dubai all the time. It seemed that everyone had - at one point or another - trained with someone who had made their fortune there, and knew they were 'just as strong.' As running website Letsrun.com's preview to the 2018 race pointed out, 'the past seven years have seen seven different champions' all of them Ethiopian, and 'Dubai is famous for producing unknown champions'. It is this reputation that is so tantalising for young Ethiopian athletes. This is the 'millennial' (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000) potential of distance running. It can catapult someone who grew up on a highland farm and left school at thirteen to unimaginable wealth in just one race.

Money often enters into this picture in mysterious ways. One of the athletes in our group was given 10,000 birr in cash to sign with a manager when he first arrived in Addis, following a particularly impressive 30km training run in Sendafa. He described going home with the envelope and spreading the money out on his

bed as a rapper might, unable to believe that he could be given this much money 'just for signing a piece of paper.' In a video that went viral on Youtube, retired runner Gete Wami explained to priest Mehemir Girma that when she visited the hotel she had built with her winnings in Debre Birhan she viewed it 'as if it were a picture' (*si'il*), unable to connect it to the performances that earned her the money to build it. It is therefore tempting to see running as characterised by 'neoliberal' tendencies: deeply individualising, wrought with insecurity and personal risk, and underpinned by speculation and casino capitalism. The answer I heard time and again when I asked runners about their motivation for running was, '*hiwoten mekeyer efelegalehu.*' 'Because I want to change my life'. This desire was usually attached to specific and individualised life goals such as marriage, home ownership and starting a business and almost always with building something of their own – a compound or block of kiosks that could be rented out as a means of making a living once their running career came to an end. Running was seen as a privileged way of achieving these things because after investing a period of years in the sport people would win a sum of money which allowed them to do something significant, as I will go on to explain.

Many social scientists who have studied sport (Esson, 2013; Ungruhe & Esson, 2017; Wacquant, 2006) have borrowed from Bourdieu and Foucault to conceptualise those seeking to improve their lives through sport as 'entrepreneurs of self' (Foucault, 2008: 226) who invest in their 'bodily capital' (Wacquant, 2006). Rather than drawing upon scholarship that sees neoliberal policy as creating individualistic behaviour, encouraging people to see themselves as entrepreneurs and understanding social relations in terms of market rationality, I seek to argue instead that these processes are deeply embedded in pre-existing notions of the self, morality, competition and individualism in Ethiopia. Gershon (2011) notes that many scholars (Freeman, 2007; Hoffman, DeHart & Collier, 2006) have called for anthropologists to discuss neoliberalism in 'its local manifestations instead of framing it as an overarching,

unified and coherent global trend' (537). She argues that insisting on the local is an important but insufficient move, as it does not account for the fact that neoliberal perspectives *themselves* also take context to be crucial. Rather, she argues for a focus on 'people's epistemological differences and social organisation,' an approach that has been abandoned by many anthropologists as a result of the rejection of the culture concept. Gershon describes the self proposed by the neoliberal concept of agency as 'a flexible bundle of skills that reflexively manages oneself as though the self was a business' (537) for whom risk is a necessary component of opportunity and achievement (cf Zaloom, 2004) and according to which 'actors are maximally responsible for their own failures' (540).

This conception of the 'responsibilised' citizen (Ferguson, 2009), was one that had some purchase in Ethiopia. As Di Nunzio (2015) and Malara (2017) note, cheaply-printed self-help books are now ubiquitous at roadside stalls in Addis. Our coach, who was educated in America, was constantly telling the athletes that they should 'take responsibility' for their performances, or exclaiming things like 'this is business! You have to be a clever merchant!' Such books were popular because they contained the allure of the outside world and Western success but also because they resonate with a pre-existing Amhara notion of ambition and the self-aggrandising view of one's possibilities described by Levine (1965) and Kebede (1999). Messeret would use them to lean on when he wrote down the athletes' times in training, and often snatched some reading time on our jolting bus journeys back from training. The mindset of books like *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* was one he sought to instill upon the athletes in our post-training meetings. These books rely upon an idea of discipline in line with Foucault's notion of work of the self upon the self, but in the Ethiopian context this discipline is not merely self-focused, and ideas about responsibility and failure are strongly influenced by beliefs about 'chance' or *idil*. Discipline entails dyadic hierarchal relations (runner-coach) as well as a relational

environment in which to work, in the runners' case consisting of the training group in which people 'share' the responsibility to set the pace and there is a strong emphasis on 'improving together'.

Bourdieu's (2000) paper, 'Making the Economic Habitus: Algerian Workers Revisited' suggests that there is such a 'mismatch' between 'the economic dispositions fashioned in a pre-capitalist economy' and the 'rationalised economic cosmos' of (colonised) modernity that we must speak not of 'adaptation' but rather of 'conversion' of the 'whole mindset' to the 'spirit of calculation' (23). This simple dichotomy has been taken up by scholars of global sport like Esson (2013) who has argued that Ghanaian footballers 'seek to become Foucauldian "entrepreneurs of self" by investing in their human capital by becoming a professional footballer' (48). To speak of 'conversion' to a completely new, individualistic mindset, however, is an oversimplification in the Ethiopian context. As numerous scholars (Boylston and Malara, 2016; Kebede, 1999; Levine, 1965) have explored, the idea of individualism is already there at the heart of Amhara culture. The question is how this pre-existing individualism is transformed when it comes into contact with neoliberal impulses. As Gershon (2011) puts it, 'what an anthropological imagination foregrounds is the ways in which engaging with a neoliberal perspective is always a process of translation, translation that often is accompanied by difficult social conundrums' (544).

A central argument is that we need not separate individualism from collectivism, nor should we assume that it is neoliberal or modern impulses that create individualistic behaviour. Rather, the interesting thing is how neoliberal tendencies interact with pre-existing notions about the self, competition and individualism. Elite level professional running, in which athletes train in groups but compete alone, is an especially powerful site for exploring the dynamics of collaboration and competition. Runners were at once acutely aware of the odds stacked against them and convinced that the effort was worth the potential

reward. The wildly uneven distribution of rewards, and the perception noted in the previous section that those who won vast sums of money often ‘disappeared’ to other parts of the city, contrasted with the ethics of collaboration and sharing espoused during training, an ethics that was almost always explained in terms of the equitable sharing of energy. Ideas about ‘hard work’ and pulling yourself up by the bootstraps, could co-exist quite comfortably with an idea of being dependent upon others and reliant upon and team and group environment.

Critiquing Foucault’s focus on the self, Michael Lambek writes that his work may lack sufficient analytical attention to ‘the exigencies of actual practice, which [...] always entails articulation with other persons’ and to ‘those dimensions of virtues [...] that respond in the first instance to the call of the other’ (2010, 25). I seek to argue that even if self-making for Ethiopian runners might be meant to produce autonomy and individual success, this pursuit is only ever made possible through the cultivation of relations of co-operation, dependency and obligation. One of the interesting things about Foster’s (1965) work is that he claims that peasant societies characterised by the ‘limited good’ are low in what McLelland (1961) has termed ‘need for Achievement.’ As I will go on to explain, several of my interlocutors claimed that the individual competitiveness required of a runner was something that athletes were socialised into upon their arrival in Addis Ababa, and which was seen as contrasting to some extent with the attitudes encouraged in rural training camps and at home.

As Long and Moore (2013) point out, whilst McLelland’s work demonstrated an interest in cultural difference, the kind of ‘self-reliant, risk-taking entrepreneurial character’ (8) he envisioned was strikingly Anglo-American and, it is worth noting, very much in line with the ‘neoliberal’ citizen invoked today. Long and Moore (2013) seek rather to explore ‘achievement and its affects in a deep and nuanced understanding of human sociality’ that considers how people are

embedded in relations of ‘interdependence, co-production and co-constitution’ (8). In this thesis I show how the relationships formed through runners’ attempts to ‘change their lives’ are bound in ethical concerns – or in what Moore (2013) calls ‘the ethical imagination’ (2013, 16). With this term Moore brings together the importance of virtuality – of being able to project and imagine possible futures – with ethical and relational endeavours. As such, relationships between self and other are ‘set up in fantasy, based on a series of identifications and their circulations... [and] shot through with social imaginaries and relays of power’ (Moore, 2011: 76 quoted Long and Moore, 2013: 4).

Communitarian logic, and the building of sociality through bodies, has been documented by scholars of Ethiopian religiosity. Boylston (2018) describes how fasting acts as a collective practice which allows for divergent degrees of participation because it is co-operative, acting as a ‘practice of integration’ (53) whilst Malara (2018) explores how the practice of fasting on behalf of others may be better conceptualised in terms of ‘techniques of the others’ than ‘techniques of the self.’ Their ethnographic insights chime with Hayder Al-Mohammad’s (2010) work on the ethics of life and ‘being-with’ (426). Al-Mohammad argues that current anthropological work focuses primarily on ‘an ethics of self or the normative codes of the social world,’ identifying a lack of anthropological attention towards thinking about the ‘ethics of the *relationship* or the *with*’ (437).

Mohammad writes that he finds ‘something compelling in the image of two persons being connected by a line in which life runs from one to the other’ (426). Given how Ethiopian runners train - in a single file line in which energy is conceived as an inter-subjective property, this is a compelling image for me too. In chapter two I describe the strong emphasis placed on working together in training, on ‘sharing the pace,’ bearing the ‘burden’ of others and ‘following each others’ feet.’ A strong moral discourse of sharing surrounds training together,

creating a sense of intersubjective dependence. A runner's pursuit of 'condition' is a precarious one. As our coach put it, they must get 'to the edge' but not go over it. Many train for years only to get injured, and never make it abroad to a race. This is not a precarity that is borne alone, however. Writing against the idea of 'self-containment' and individual survival that she says has come through the 'twin master sciences' of the twentieth century, 'population genetics' and 'neoclassical economics' (both of which inform the world of running), Tsing (2015) claims that we need to recognise that 'precarity is the condition of being vulnerable to others'. Ethiopian runners seek to 'change their lives' and transform their individual situations, but they do so with a keen awareness of their vulnerability to, and dependence on, others. It is this dynamic that this thesis traces.

### Temporalities of Hope and Progress

There is something inherently hopeful about running, that stems from the sport's apparent simplicity described previously but also from the sense that every day offers a chance to improve. As Bale and Sang (1996) point out, the perspective encouraged by running, 'front space' is 'primarily visual; it is perceived as the future. It is sacred space, towards the horizon, yet to be reached' (38). Running is also often seen as embodying a pure and unadorned form of competition, and metaphors drawn from running therefore crop up in numerous texts on movement and social navigation. Tsing (2005) notes in *Friction* that rather than 'self-actualisation without restraint' or 'motion without friction,' in fact 'how we run depends on the shoes we have to run in' (5). Vigh (2009) quotes Bauman in the concluding line of his 'Motion Squared' article to note that 'it is not just individuals who "are on the move but also the finishing lines of the track they run on and the running tracks themselves"' (434). The runners with whom I lived and trained shared many characteristics with other groups of precariously employed young men in Africa and elsewhere, with a lot of seemingly 'dead' time to pass during the day and a disposition characterised

by alternate states of boredom and baseless optimism (Jeffrey, 2010; Mains, 2011; Masquelier, 2013).

Recently the concept of 'waithood' (Honwana, 2014) has gained conceptual currency in the literature on youth in Africa, describing a period in young people's lives when they exercise agency in an improvised yet constructive way. Mains (2011) writes that 'just as maturation from child to adult involves attaining a specific set of biological and social markers, becoming modern requires movement along a linear track' whilst numerous other scholars have written about the dismantling of modernist expectations for employment and education (Ferguson, 1999; Weiss, 2004) or of people becoming 'stuck' (Hansen, 2005). Scholars of African youth have tended to focus attention on the relatively well educated, and to describe their situation as a state of exception or temporary derailment from a linear path. Whilst 'waithood' has been interpreted as a 'dynamic' notion, which 'draws attention to the provisionality and resilience that contextualise everyday life for youth, as well as the blurred spaces and junctures in which improvised agency is performed' (Finn and Oldfield, 2015, 33), I question how useful it is as a means of describing people who are so active. Whilst the analysis seems clear, we have few ethnographic insights into how the precariously employed and unemployed actually pass their days. Rather than casting 'precarity' as exception, I recognise that 'for most of the world precariousness is the standard experience of constant condition of work under capitalism' (Cross, 2014, 361).

In *The Life of Lines*, Tim Ingold (2015) writes that 'the straight line has become an icon of modernity. It offers reason, certainty, authority, a sense of direction' (167). He goes on to argue that this line seems to have 'been broken into fragments' with the fragmented line emerging as 'an equally powerful icon of postmodernity' (167). He chooses to read this positively 'in so far as it opens up passages - albeit unconventional ones - that might previously have been closed

off, allowing inhabitants to find their own “ways through” and thereby to make places for themselves, amidst the rupture of dislocation” (169). A similar argument has been made by Cooper (2014) in the introduction to the collected edition *Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa* which sought to ‘understand the positive and productive potential of uncertainty’ (1). ‘Uncertainty,’ Cooper writes, ‘is a social resource and can be used to negotiate uncertainty, conduct and create relationships and act as a source for imagining the future.’ (2)

In their recent collected edition entitled *Ethnographies of Waiting*, Janeja and Bandak (2018) note that most engagements with waiting focus on the ‘destitute and disadvantaged, whether from lower classes, youth, refugees or otherwise marginalised positions,’ which ‘encapsulates us in a particular way of thinking about waiting’ (2). They advocate working with waiting as a category that ‘allows people’s doubts and uncertainties [...] to coexist with potentials of hope’ (2) invoking the figure of Penelope who in weaving by day and unravelling by night ‘indexes not merely a passive form of surrender to circumstances but an active form of endurance amidst the most mundane of chores’. Waiting can be a kind of ‘future-making strategy’ and ““skillful waiting” can produce “temporal subjects” suited to the speed and contingencies of late capitalism’ (Janeja & Bandak, 2018, 3). As I will go on to argue in this thesis, much of the waiting that runners engaged in is figured as productive and rejuvenative and as an active choice, and running is framed as a hopeful activity.

Hope, then, is often invoked as a corollary of uncertainty and periods of waiting. Articulations of hopes and dreams are ‘what enable people to continue thinking about the future in an uncertain and precarious present’ (Cross, 2014) where the way forward is rarely clear. If Ingold figures the fragmented line in potentially productive and creative terms, ‘allowing inhabitants to make their own “ways through”’ (2015, 167), though, he fails to account for the fact that not everyone can find a way through, nor to theorise how those who fail explain this to

themselves and others. The resurgence of interest in the concept of luck, chance and fortune (Da Col, 2012; Giaibazzi & Gardini, 2015) offers a useful way into thinking about how people negotiate uncertainty and explain the moral issues raised by perceived excesses in fortune.

Da Col's conception of a 'field of fortune' (2012) as a distinctive and alternative economy is particularly interesting. He places the concept of 'fortune' alongside that of 'vitality' in arguing that a 'cosmoeconomics of fortune' is encompassed by 'inter-lapping spheres of exchange, where gods, humans, and even artefacts interchange fortune and vitality yet also are competing in the same arena, using economic strategies that include deception, trickery and destruction and that transform the flow of forces into currents and tides of non-linear behaviour' (11). Fate and fortune are 'often conceptualised' write Gaibazzi and Gardini (2015) as 'embodied or external forces, flows, capabilities or substances that sustain human vitality and relatedness' (205). They are often reliant too on ideas about personal conduct and responsibility and on the notion of work ethics. 'Far from being the opposite of each other' Gardini argues, work ethics and ideas about fortune 'become part of the same moral discourse that people elaborate in order to legitimise (or delegitimise) given forms of accumulation' (2015, 215). As Jackson (1988) has argued, even fatalistic cosmologies recognise that destiny is dependent upon both inborn qualities and acquired through social interaction. Gaining insights into one's own dispositions and potentialities involves, 'not a journey into the self, but a journey into the field of external forces' (Gaibazzi, 2015, 232). I seek to argue here that runners articulate a desire to plan and control their future, which operates in tandem with an awareness of the risks inherent in the sport. Rather than having an antagonistic relationship, runners have a faith in planning and control that operates in parallel with an awareness that many of the determinants of 'condition' and sources of 'chance' are beyond their influence.

In recent years Ethiopia has been the site of some excellent in-depth ethnographic work on youth, hope and social navigation. Both Daniel Mains (2011) and Marco di Nunzio's (2012; 2014; 2017) work focuses on the ways in which Ethiopian young men conceptualise the importance of social relationships and networks of redistribution. Mains (2011) argues that 'the aspirations of young men followed a general narrative that placed individual success secondary to one's relationships to family and community' (69), whereby time and progress are seen 'not so much in terms of production or assessing economic goals' but rather in terms of the repositioning and realignment of social relationships. Specifically, this involved the cultivation of *zemed* relationships, a blurry category denoting kin and close friends animated by the belief that a friend should have some kind of 'use value' (121) in the sense of being in a position to loan money or provide access to work.

Mains focuses on the Amharic proverb '*sew be sew teshome*' ('one person improves by another person') to argue that the fulfilment of hope is inseparable from social relationships. This was a phrase I heard from the runners too, as well as other often-repeated injunctions to 'work together,' 'help each other' and 'bear each others' burden' in training. And yet I seek to argue that the constant reiteration of sentiments like this does not simply reveal the importance of cultivating a social safety net. Rather, the collective training environment, which demands self-sacrifice and the assumption of 'responsibility' towards the team, demands intense intersubjective moral labour which can break down to reveal the stark competition which resides under the surface. Whilst the runners would on occasion refer to each other as *zemed*, our sub-agent Hailye told me 'it would be more accurate to say they are enemies.'

Marco Di Nunzio's work was primarily with young men of a more comparable social background to those in my own work, 'a step down the social ladder' from Mains' group who envisaged a future with public sector employment. Di Nunzio

critiques the literature outlined above about stuckness and crisis to argue that in fact his urban, precariously employed interlocutors were not 'stuck' but were rather 'constantly on the move'. Like Mains, he focuses on the idea that survival for hustlers in the informal economy was dependent on the idea that 'relationships matter,' invoking the proverb, '*zemed ka zemedu, aya ka amdu*' (a relative with a relative, a donkey with ashes') to emphasise the importance of social connections. Di Nunzio refers to the local notion of '*idil*' or 'chance' (2015) writing that for his interlocutors, 'before you get a chance [...] you don't know what your future will look like. When you get one, you start to know where you might be heading' (155). They therefore sought, through the 'transactional and situational dimensions' of the street, to expose themselves to 'the possibility of getting a chance' (155). Both Di Nunzio and Mains rely on ideas about reciprocity and exchange that imply relatively equal partners of similar ages and economic means. In my work, however, the concept of '*idil*' was more often invoked in describing a moral economy of 'deserving' and hard work that was dependent upon submission to the authority of the coach, sub-agent or manager of the group.

In this sense, the work of Malara and Boylston (2016), which draws on a scholarly consensus on Amhara society that 'suggests that most models of social relationships are vertical' (42) is in many ways more relevant for my work. They argue that whilst the classic literature (Messay, 1999; Levine, 1965) 'captures dynamic, competitive elements of hierarchy that have survived the collapse of the Orthodox Ethiopian Empire' to paint a picture of Amhara society as atomised, individualistic and defined by authoritarian forms of control would be misleading. In reality, they write, 'a recognition of human selfishness and realities of power co-exists with a deep-seated ethic of mutual care and neighbourliness' (53). The crucial point is not to oppose a vertical notion of power to one of egalitarian love but that 'the forms of love and care that are emphasised in Orthodox Ethiopia are themselves largely asymmetrical, and that

the local character of coercive power is therefore hard to separate from relations of love and care' (43). I draw upon these insights in this thesis to argue that two notions of '*idil*' or chance actually exist side by side for Ethiopian runners; one is sought through the cultivation of a moral economy of silence and deserving in relationships with sub-agents, managers and coaches, and the other is pursued in more active ways through the direct contacting of race organisers overseas or approaching foreigners who might offer opportunities to travel abroad.

### **Navigation, Competition and Achievement**

Vigh's (2009) notion of 'social navigation' is useful in thinking through how Ethiopian runners experience the sport. 'Navigation' denotes motion within motion, acknowledging the shifting nature of social environments that are always emergent and unfolding. This forces us to consider 'the relation between the environment people move in and how the environment itself moves them' (425). The concept of 'navigation' is also attuned to the future, encompassing both the 'assessment of the dangers and possibilities of one's present position' and the attempt to 'actualise routes into an uncertain and changeable future' (425). Vigh uses the concept of navigation in order to critique Bourdieu's concept of the field as a space of competition and struggle defined by a configuration of relations between different positions. He argues that whilst Bourdieu's model has room for shifting configurations as people compete for capital, the positions themselves, 'the structural grid' is of a rigid and stable nature. This point is no clearer, Vigh writes, than in Bourdieu's tendency to use the analogy of the game, consisting of a field as a demarcated space and a rule bound set of activities within it. This, Vigh (2009) writes, 'corresponds poorly to the reality of changeable and emergent social environments' (427) in which people must concern themselves not only with how they relate to their competitors but also to the changing of the field itself. Whilst my interlocutors made plans and meticulously plotted their training, their imagined trajectories were always contingent and open to realignment and change. As Vigh puts it, they were

caught in a 'constant dialogue between changing plots, possibilities and practice' (429).

Vigh also mentions Ingold's work on wayfaring, which is of conceptual use here. Ingold (2000) describes how people 'feel their way' through the world, continually coming into being through the combined action of human and non-human agencies' (155). This is also useful for my purposes, but perhaps more useful is Ingold's consideration of the air in which we move, which was a constant preoccupation for my interlocutors. In distinguishing between 'traces' left on the ground and 'threads' hanging in the air, Ingold recognises that 'a living, breathing body is at once a body-on-the-ground and a body-in-the-air' (Ingold, 2010, 122). The forests surrounding Addis Ababa and the training camps I visited were crisscrossed by myriad paths, which zigzagged in and out of the trees. These paths were 'as much an aerial phenomenon as a terrestrial one' (130) and in my case, I would argue that they were more aerial than terrestrial, concerned as they were with improving the aerobic 'condition', the very ability to breathe, of those who created them. Runners would travel to particular forests for their different air qualities or to run with particular people, or because of their associations with famous athletes who had trained in them and then run well. Many runners told me that this kind of running was when they felt most able to dream of future success and of emulating their heroes in the sport. Forest running was for 'aerobic condition' - essentially for becoming better at breathing and using oxygen - and was less susceptible to time discipline and competition than other forms of running. Breathing and dreaming went together, as they do in the very definition of 'aspiration' - 'a hope or ambition of achieving something' and 'the action or process of drawing breath'.

### **The Fieldwork**

'This is athlete village' I was told on my first trip to Kotebe to meet Hailye, the sub-agent of the group I trained with for fifteen months. We sat on the first floor of

*Hirut* cafe, overlooking a street still teeming with hawkers in the darkness of seven o'clock in the evening. Cars and buses jostled for position outside, swerving onto the dirt on either side of a strip of asphalt barely wide enough for two small cars and eliciting angry shouts from pedestrians. 'From here for 500m down that way,' the man in the cafe said, gesturing along the road back towards Addis Ababa city centre, 'there are so many athletes. Thousands of athletes.' After a meal of *tibes firfir*, spicy meat and injera, Hailye and I walk slowly to his compound, a ten minute walk up the hill towards the forest. We walk the back way, because the only asphalt road up the steep slope is plied by the twelve-seated Toyota minibus taxis that are ubiquitous in the city. They race up and down the hill, taking at least twenty people per trip and leaving vast clouds of black smoke in their wake. 'They only started this route a year ago,' Hailye tells me. 'Before, everyone used to walk. Now look at the queue at the bottom of the hill.' At rush hour, a long and disorderly line stretches a hundred metres round the corner. 'Now people think it is shameful to walk.'

Kotebe is a relatively comfortable suburb of Addis, about 5km from the city centre on the road that heads north-east towards Sendafa, where most runners travel once or twice a week for training. The settlement is in Yeka sub-city, built on a steep hill that rises several hundred metres to a large area of eucalyptus forest and farmland. As you move up the hill from the asphalt road, shops and restaurants give way to a residential area made up of large, stand-alone houses and compounds of six to ten rooms with a shared kitchen and outdoor toilet, and finally, the closer you get to the forest, to more informal housing of mud walls and corrugated iron roofing. The price of a kilo of bananas rises from fifteen to sixteen and then seventeen birr, testament to the difficulty of carrying them up the hill. Some of the informal areas were the subject of an ongoing dispute with the government over the expansion of Addis Ababa into the neighbouring countryside, and one source of the political tension that led to the protests and state of emergency of late 2016.

The runners I knew lived in a variety of housing according to the money they had

been able to make through their running and the stage of their career. This ranged from a past winner of Dubai marathon (prize money \$200,000), who lived in a sprawling house with a widescreen TV and plush, still shrink-wrapped furniture, to two young men who shared a small hut (and a bed) on the very edge of the forest and who feared hyenas when they set off to walk to training before five o'clock in the morning. I lived in a compound about half-way up the hill, next door to Hailye, the sub-agent of our group, and Fasil, a young runner. They too shared a single bed. From the compound it was a ten-minute walk to Zero Hulet, the crossroads from which our group's training bus would pick us up. To get to the forest to run on 'non-bus days,' when runners trained individually, would take between ten and forty minutes depending on where people decided to train. As we walked to the forest in the mornings Fasil would point out to me the houses of the wealthier athletes, which served as constant visual reminders of the potential riches on offer. On occasional afternoons when people were especially tired we would just walk to a small patch of forest near the main road referred to as '*kerb chakka*' (close forest), but usually we would walk twenty-five minutes to Arat Shi (literally 'Four Thousand,' an estimate of the altitude) or forty minutes to Encorcha, a more remote area of farmland at higher altitude, because of the perceived environmental benefits of going to these places.

Kotebe was referred to as 'athlete village' or 'the athlete's place' by runners who I met in rural training camps who knew that the route to financial success was via Addis Ababa but who had yet to travel there. The community of runners who lived there was perched on the periphery of a global industry. Often hailing from rural areas which were deemed more beneficial as training environments due to the quality of the air and the ease of access to farmland suitable for running, the runners I met described living in Kotebe as a kind of compromise. 'I came here to work hard and succeed with my vision' Andualem, who had recently moved to Addis Ababa from Debre Birhan, told me. 'For training Debre Birhan is better, but here you get opportunities.' These 'opportunities' - like the possibility of being

spotted by the sub-agent of a top manager or performing well in a selection race - were sought to the potential detriment of a runner's 'condition'. Whilst in the camp 'the coaches look after you very well' in Addis 'you have to look after yourself, you have to travel by [minibus] taxi from one place to another place, and these are things that make you tired and don't make you successful.' To live in Kotebe was to attempt to find a balance between separation from the distractions and exhaustions of everyday life and yet to be close enough to them to benefit from any potential 'chance' that they might create. It entailed a compromise that was explained primarily in terms of energy expenditure and deployment.

The methodological puzzle this project posed was to develop a phenomenologically engaged approach without losing sight of the structures governing athletics in East Africa and the larger political economic forces at play in the sport. As Ferguson (1999) notes, performative approaches have primarily been associated with 'so-called microlevel social analysis' and therefore 'the crucial questions of power and structure are glossed over or ignored.' The questions Ferguson claims are normally glossed over by such approaches are ones with which I have sought to engage: 'How was the stage set? By whom? Why? Who are the players, and how did they get to be players?' (98). As Besnier and Brownell (2012, 452) suggest, 'athletes and trainers form an increasingly mobile category of migrant labour facilitated by a transnational network of agents in multiple locations, including teammates, recruiters, managers, trainers and other brokers, as well as relatives, friends, covillagers, religious and secular leaders, state agents, other institutional authorities, and members of the public.' This shift is motivated in large part by the 'increasing corporatisation and commodification of sport' (452), and the changes in the running 'market' – increasing competition, less regulation of races (in China) and the drive for ever faster times – were constantly discussed by the runners, managers and sub-agents I knew.

This thesis responds to the call made by Desjarlais (1997) for work that 'address[es]

the perennial critique that phenomenological approaches tend to neglect broader social and political dynamics in accounting for subjective realities' (25). Jeffrey (2008) writes that attempting to understand the lives of unemployed young men in India depends 'less on the rigorous application of a single theoretical schema and more on the craft of holding in our minds simultaneously a set of meso-level theoretical concepts - cultural production, habitus, youth spatialities - that cast light on different aspects of young people's lives' (754). An attentiveness to various levels of power and influence requires an approach that focuses not only on attentive ethnographic work on a local scale but also on following athletes in their interactions with the various managers, federations, agents and race organisers they encounter in East Africa and beyond.

I arrived in Ethiopia in September 2015 and for the first three months of my fieldwork I lived with French sociologist Benoit Gaudin and his family on the other side of the *Yeka* forest from Kotebe. They looked after me while I was trying to find my feet in the forest and stumbling through the first difficult Amharic lessons. Every morning and afternoon I would walk to the forest, twenty minutes up the hill from the house. There I joined groups of runners weaving in and out of the trees, who would often 'appoint' me to run with them the next morning at six o'clock from Lideta Mariam church. These runners were often not part of the club or professional structure of athletics in Ethiopia, and after I moved to Kotebe I was able to keep in touch with them and meet them for juice or lunch every couple of months. Once I was in Kotebe I spent most of my time with athletes from the *Moyo Sports* team. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays we would join the team bus between 4.45am and 5.15am to travel either east to Sendafa, west to Sebeta, south to Akaki or north to Sululta depending on the kind of training the coach wanted us to do. These were significant excursions, taking an hour or more on the way out and up to three hours on the way home depending on traffic, and many of the most interesting conversations I had took place on the bus on the way home from training.

My position within the training group was a curious one. Athletes knew that I had been selected to run for Great Britain and was therefore a member of the 'national team' where I was from, but found this hard to reconcile with my performances in training, where I was clearly a way off their level. Whilst I was able to run with the main group on all of their 'easy' days, and for most of the long runs on Mondays, I had to modify or curtail most of the Wednesday and Friday sessions because I was unable to run fast enough to keep up. When Malcolm described Gudisa, who I wrote about in the 'Sport for Development' section, he said he 'never really stood a chance of making any money from the sport,' and noted that whenever he went to observe training 'you had the men's group, then you had a gap to the women's group, and he was struggling in the middle.' I spent countless hours on the trails in Sendafa and Akaki 'struggling in the middle' just like this. As I stated earlier in the introduction, I think the countless hours spent running alongside people was vitally important for this project. Whilst running seems to lend itself to a particular kind of self-indulgent auto-ethnography (for example Allen-Collinson, 2008) I was very careful not to conflate my experience with those of my interlocutors. I have been running competitively for over a decade, and continue to do so in spite of making next to no money from the sport. All of the people I interviewed said they would stop running 'tomorrow' if there was no money in athletics.

After training in the mornings Hailye and I would often go to his favourite *chemaki bet*, or juice house, which was always full of other runners at that time of the morning. The middle of the day was often spent sleeping and washing shoes and clothes by hand in the compound, before we walked to the forest for afternoon training. Afternoon sessions were more relaxed, and seen more as part of recovery than training - we jogged extremely slowly then spent time sitting on the grass and stretching. In the evenings we often cooked pasta or rice together. Because Hailye was the sub-agent of the training group, responsible for communicating with *Moyo Sports* manager, athletes regularly dropped by our compound to chat and to discuss

race invitations, visas and prize money. Often I would accompany Hailye on his trips to embassies and to the Ethiopian Athletics Federation to make enquiries, to fill out forms and often just to get the relevant signature we needed from the Federation.

Given the emphasis the runners placed on rest between training sessions and avoiding walking around, which they referred to as 'doing laps' (*zur*), when I arranged semi-structured interviews I usually met people in their house before our afternoon run, or else conducted interviews when they were coming to our compound anyway. Whilst I would try to conduct these conversations in Amharic, Hailye would help me with translating more difficult concepts, and would also help me to clarify and transcribe recorded interviews in the evenings. He quickly figured out the sorts of things I wanted to know and how to explain my project and research to runners who were not familiar with it, and became an invaluable assistant. Fasil, too, picked up on the kinds of things I was interested in knowing, and on the kinds of language Hailye and I tended to use. On one occasion after a race he asked one of the runners, 'regarding to your eating habits (*amegagib*), social life (*maberawi noro*) and your training, what did you learn?' to which Hailye responded with laughter, 'Fasil becomes the interviewer!' Their investment in what I was doing and willingness to help were invaluable. Sundays were rest days with no training, when walking around was actually encouraged (to loosen the legs) so I often spent Sundays visiting people, walking with them to other runners' houses and frequenting the various public places of Kotebe, the *chemaki bet*, the *pool bet* to play pool or the *kwass bet* to watch football. Often people would congregate at the houses of slightly wealthier athletes like Abere or Berhanu who had a bit more space and TVs on which we could watch Ethiopian music videos.

As Besnier et al. (2017) point out, the challenge for ethnography in a globalising world - as the 'most micro-scale of all the social science research methods' - is how to 'scale up' to account for macroscale processes. 'The ethnography of sport' they write, 'has proved to be an excellent method for taking on this challenge, because

at one end it concerns minute bodily actions, while at the other end these actions are linked into a worldwide sports system that operates hand in glove with ambitious government officials, powerful multinational corporations, international media conglomerates, and the global culture industry' (6). An important aspect of my fieldwork was therefore to trace the various journeys runners made. This meant travelling with a group of athletes back to their club in Gondar in highland Ethiopia when they went to benefit from the increased altitude and lack of distractions, and to Bekoji, a small town that has produced numerous world and Olympic champions. It also meant travelling to races in Istanbul, China and Dublin, as well as smaller races in the UK with Ethiopian participants, sharing plane journeys and hotel rooms. And it meant attempting to trace the ways in which corporations like Garmin and Nike influenced the ways in which people ran in Ethiopia.

### **Dramatis Personae**

Throughout the thesis I have used the real names of athletes, coaches and managers except when writing about particularly sensitive issues. Both Malcolm, the manager of *Moyo Sports*, and Hailye have read the thesis to ensure that there is nothing here that they feel could cause any problems for the runners involved. The runners themselves – many of whom are public figures used to being interviewed – expressed a preference for me using their real names. In articles in *The Guardian* newspaper, where I have argued for more nuanced and better informed coverage of East African athletics, I have written with the permission and support of Malcolm and *Moyo Sports* as part of a commitment to changing attitudes towards runners from Ethiopia and, where possible, improving issues of corruption and exploitation which are still widespread in the sport. Below I briefly describe some of the main characters whose stories animate this thesis.

### **Hailye**

Hailye is the sub-agent for *Moyo Sports* in Ethiopia. He was in charge of the day-to-day management of training, visa applications, and release letters from the Ethiopian Athletics Federation. When he started working for Malcolm he had an interest in running but little professional knowledge of the sport. He taught himself English whilst working for VSO in Addis Ababa, and learnt the trade of the sub-agent on the job before I met him.

### **Messeret**

Messeret was the coach for both the Moyo Sports management group and first-division club Mebrat Hayle, who were sponsored by the national electricity company. He had studied sports science at Addis Ababa University as well as a masters at the University of Delaware in the US. He spoke excellent English and was extremely knowledgeable about athletics in Ethiopia, the politics of the Ethiopian Athletics Federation and the nature of both the club and management structures. Shortly after I left Ethiopia he took a job as one of the National team coaches.

### **Fasil**

Fasil grew up in Gondar, in Northern Ethiopia. He had to leave school after completing grade two following the death of his father, when he had to move in with his uncle and was charged with herding cattle. His route into running was an unusual one in that he didn't start until he was twenty years old. Having moved to Addis Ababa in a bid to 'change his life' he was working as a construction worker during the day and a guard at night. He was employed to relay the concrete in Hailye's compound and became curious about running, and started out by simply going to the forest and following others who were training. While I was in Ethiopia he alternated between training 'for himself' and pacemaking for the female athletes for a small salary. He continued to work as a night guard protecting building

materials at a half-built compound, aiming to reach a level where he could join a local athletics club.

### **Tilahun**

I met Tilahun at the beginning of fieldwork whilst training in the forest above Lideta Mariam church near the French Embassy in Addis. He had moved to Addis Ababa in order to study but had decided to try to become a runner instead, against the will of his parents. He shared a compound with another young runner and was living on very little money, which meant he often had to make decisions about whether to travel to particular places to train or whether to buy adequate food. After spending a year trying to progress to the level where he could join a club, Tilahun gave up his running and moved back to his parents' home in the countryside outside the city.

### **Aseffa**

Aseffa started training after running a race organised by his school near Asella, and followed a more standard trajectory from informal running to a rural training camp and finally to a club in Addis Ababa and a management contract with Moyo Sports, secured after he finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Dasani 15km race in 2015. Aseffa was an especially devout Orthodox Christian, and whilst he struggled with his running and with recurrent injuries whilst I was in Addis, he never seemed to lose the conviction that he would one day change his and his girlfriend Teje's lives through the sport.

### **Berhanu, Selamyhun and Abere**

I write about Berhanu, Selamyhun and Abere together because they all made their way to Moyo Sports from *Guna Wuha* athletics club, a running club in Gondar sponsored by the local water company. I was able to visit this club in the middle of a large area of farmland near Debre Tabor, and visit Abere's family farm with him. All

three runners sought to make money from the sport by running in races abroad, and for that they needed to base themselves in Addis Ababa for large portions of the year. They all saw the *Guna Wuha* training camp as the ideal environment for athletic progression however, with its lack of distractions, its geographical location at 2,700m above sea-level and the high quality local food prepared by live-in chefs. They would therefore travel back to the camp (a nineteen hour journey) when they could to work on their 'condition'.

## **Mesgebe**

Mesgebe was another of the runners I met at the beginning of my fieldwork. He spoke excellent English and had decided to seek a career as an athlete rather than going to University. He also pursued numerous ways of making a living besides running, however. He travelled to India to race but also brokered trips for other runners and non-runners who wanted to go there. He worked for an NGO as a guide for tourists who wanted to run. And he worked as a driver for a rich family for a period of time until he realised he didn't have the time or energy to train as he wished.

## **Mekasha**

When Mekasha arrived at training one day I assumed he was a relatively 'fresh' athlete. He had only one pair of battered pink trainers, and opted to do the 'speed training' for that day barefoot rather than in the shoes. As I got to know him, however, a complicated history of comings and goings between Addis and his home near Asella emerged.

## **The Chapters**

In chapter one I describe the main emic concern of the runners with whom I lived: the day-to-day maintenance of, and attempt to augment, their 'condition'. Far from

being a purely physical concern, an athlete's condition was dependent not only on their level of fitness, but on their social standing, their access to environmental resources around and beyond the city, their spiritual condition and financial situation. I describe how runners were constantly weighing up the benefits of the various training environments available to them, and how they sought to find a balance between risk and restraint in their training. I describe how especially dangerous and daring training runs brought the risks inherent in a running career to the surface, elaborating upon their active, bodily engagement with risk and contingency.

In chapter two I describe the importance Ethiopian runners place on the team environment and 'working together,' and the intense intersubjective moral labour that goes into maintaining good running sociality. I explain how a collective training morality is built on a strong attention to hard work and virtuous suffering on behalf of others, and a moral economy of shared energy and duty. For this reason, it is important that both the input of energy (eating) and the output of energy (training) are synchronous and visible. I go on to describe several instances in which this collective morality is broken, and the seriousness with which this was taken, before discussing how immoral ways of gaining and deploying energy were often associated with increasing money and competition in the sport.

In chapter three I explore how runners adopted two different dispositions in their attempts to advance. In doing so I distinguish between the concept of '*idil*,' a version of chance or fate and way of gaining favour with God that is characterised by a disposition of silence and submission to authority, and attempts to create a 'chance,' described in English, for oneself in a more active and agentive way. In doing so I explore how neoliberal ideas about individual responsabilisation interact with ideas about individuality that already exist at the heart of Amhara culture. I argue that two distinct ways of thinking about the future were able to co-exist in Ethiopian runners' thinking, leading to a distinctly ambivalent attitude towards

success and failure.

Chapter four considers young men who have made the decision to become runners in the context of other forms of work and ways of anticipating the future in Ethiopia. I argue that running, which required patient and consistent hard work over a number of years, operated in a different temporal frame to other forms of hustle in Addis Ababa. Whilst runners shared similar material circumstances to other groups of young men, running allowed them to recast seemingly 'dead' time as productive and rejuvenative. Running was conceptualised as operating according to different energetic and temporal criteria than other activities which allowed people only to 'grow, eat, grow eat' or else 'work, eat, work, eat'. It required more energy but offered the potential for delayed gratification and 'changing your life'. I describe opportunities to race abroad as 'vital conjunctures' linked to particular life events which offered tangible means to imagine better futures.

In my fifth chapter I discuss the interventions made into the way in which runners thought about time and energy by two of the main brands involved in the sport. Through reading my data against the logics of Nike and Garmin, companies which depend upon a narrative of acceleration, I argue that instead my informants experienced time as rife with doubt and speed as dependent upon slowness. The existing literature on self-tracking devices treats them primarily as lifestyle or leisure products. In this chapter, however, I argue that for Ethiopian runners these are in fact *livelihood* devices, relied upon as tools to monitor performance and energy expenditure and protect careers. I argue that rather than conceiving of them as 'self-tracking' devices as most of the existing literature does, in the Ethiopian context they are embedded in deeper relationships of collaborative work, submission and authority. Rather than adopting narratives about *self*-control and *self*-responsibilisation, measuring technologies are often used both selectively in particular situations and environmental conditions and collectively in order to protect the integrity of the training group. Runners seek to achieve a synthesis

between external scientific knowledge and pre-existing ideas about energy, risk and collective work.

In chapter six I outline the various ways in which runners, managers, sponsors, clubs and race organisers imagine runners' 'trajectories.' In doing so, I demonstrate that whilst a linear trajectory characterised by consistent improvement is cherished, in practice most runners' careers are characterised by interruptions, disjuncture and a cyclical relationship with ideas about progress. I argue that in spite of this, runners still sought control through planning, and attempts to plan for the future actually co-existed quite comfortably with an awareness that plans may not come to fruition and that risk is inherent in the unfolding of a running career.

## Chapter One: 'Condition'

Michael: 'How much time do you spend thinking about and planning for the future?'

Zelege: 'I think about my future success every hour. I go to training, and I make breakfast and think about it. Then I cook lunch, and have a lie down, and think about it. So you can't limit it in hours or seconds. Generally in every hour you are thinking about your future.'

Aseffa: 'We have a vision, so in order to achieve or become successful, we are thinking all the time. If we do not think about our future why would we worry about the time we eat, the kind of food, the kind of fluids we are taking, and all these things? You have to take everything in order: what should I do? I did this today, what should I take in order to replace that? So we are worried to replace all these things. So we are worried to fulfil all these things because we want to succeed in the future. So the whole time we are thinking about the future and our success.'

In this chapter I describe, in detail, my informants' main *emic* concern; the day-to-day maintenance of, and attempt to augment, their 'condition.' *Condition* was one of the few English words used by my interlocutors (others included 'haemoglobin,' 'training' and 'speed'), but its wide range of meanings was specific to the Ethiopian running context. When I write about 'condition,' then, I do so not as my own analytical term but as a concept my interlocutors themselves deployed in order to analyse their present and reorient their knowledge of the future. As the quotation above suggests, concern with one's 'condition' was all-encompassing. Aseffa's concern with 'replacing' what has been lost through training reveals a profound fear about protecting his energy levels. Far from being a purely physical concern, an athlete's 'condition' was dependent not only on their level of fitness, but on their social standing, their

access to environmental resources around and beyond the city and even their spiritual state and financial situation. As this thesis will go on to argue, the embodied disposition required to 'change one's life' through running hinged on a variety of factors starting with the body and extending to social relationships and commercial forces.

My argument in this chapter is that 'condition' and 'being changed' through running entails a careful balance. Runners must withdraw from those aspects of social life that would decrease their energy levels and prevent them from attaining condition. A constant process of monitoring energy levels, and attempting to balance inputs and outputs is clear from the quotation from Aseffa above. Runners were engaged in a constant process of trying to work out 'why condition came' when it did, and what made it disappear. And yet as I go on to describe, runners also planned training runs that seemed, paradoxically, designed to be as exhausting and risky as possible. These especially extreme training sessions were nevertheless balanced with increased attempts to compensate and replace the energy expended through sleep and food. Training of this kind was defined as specifically Ethiopian and made the risk inherent in a running career visible, bringing the morality of suffering to the surface.

Runners do not merely confront metabolic and physiological limits, but rather their awareness of, and constant scrutiny of these limits, informs their perspective on the world, the economy and development. It shapes what people are prepared to do (or not), the decisions and compromises they make and the social relationships they form. Central to this is the emergence of risk, and the ability to judge, mitigate and occasionally embrace risk, as a core concern for Ethiopian runners. I will start by describing ways in which athletes attempted to monitor and maintain condition. Then I will discuss the delicate balancing act inherent in this, and how other theorists have dealt with this. I will then go on to describe in detail the seemingly paradoxical behaviour of creating especially risky

training sessions, before offering an explanation of the logic of doing so for an Ethiopian runner.

### How does Condition Come?

Many conversations - on the bus to and from training, sitting around killing time in our compound, or walking to and from the forest - centred around the waxing and waning 'condition' of athletes and the challenge of timing one's approach to 'condition' with an opportunity to deploy it at a race. As such, athletes spent long periods of time planning training, resting and eating around the optimal approach to 'condition,' and imagined each race build-up as a sort of trajectory, albeit one often frustrated by lack of 'support,' inadequate nutrition, illness or injury at one stage or another. 'Condition' was spoken of as a fickle entity that 'comes' and 'goes,' and often seems to defy logic, frequently failing to correspond to the training someone was doing or the food they were eating. To be in 'condition' was a mental as much as a physical state, and was seen to rely both on an embodied understanding of your training *and* a sense that your mind is in control of your body. Ideally, 'condition' was reached through a disposition of patience and consistent hard work consistent with Amhara conceptions of knowing one's place (*lik mawek*), patience and submission, as I will go on to describe in chapter three. In this first chapter, however, I focus on the day-to-day calculations that go into augmenting and maintaining a runner's 'condition'.

It is important, before going any further, to discuss another way in which runners think about training; as *lememid*, or 'adaptation.' This is because what follows about how runners think about their 'condition' and how they can best augment it, gain an advantage over others, find the best distribution of training environments and 'bring change' depends upon a belief that *anyone can do it* if they get these things right and can fulfil certain minimum material requirements. I was told by numerous people at all levels of the sport that if I stayed in Ethiopia for two years and - crucially - did not have to do my research, I could run a 2.08

marathon. This would mark an improvement of some eleven minutes and would put me in the top three British runners of all time; to me, this seemed completely absurd. If I were able to run 'without distraction,' in a group of runners of that standard, and use all of the 'best places' though, they were convinced that anyone was capable of this. It was merely a case of 'adapting' to 'follow the feet' of others. This is extremely important given the twofold determinism that characterises most popular and academic discourse on East African running, described in my introduction; that either runners are successful due to genetic advantage, or because they are 'running away from poverty.' Consider Zeleke's answer to my question, 'how does running bring progress?':

'It depends on how you grew up (astededeg yewusunwal). It depends on your training. On the comfort you get from your family. On the time you started. This is all.'

In other words, certain environmental concerns can affect the starting point of an athlete ('how you grew up), but beyond that the main concern is material (having the 'comfort' to train). Finally, it depends on how much 'adaptation' time you have had - on the 'time you started.' As I will elaborate upon in a later chapter on 'trajectories,' where you are in this process of 'adaptation' is usually spoken of in terms of 'training age,' that is, the number of years you have been training uninterrupted.

Teklemariam, who worked as a pace-maker for the female athletes in our group and studied sports science at Kotebe college, put this in scientific terms; 'adaptation is disturbing the homeostasis of the human body' he told me. With enough time and resources, anyone could 'adapt' to the pace of the best athletes in the world. Berhanu, when he transitioned from a period of light training to a full marathon training 'load' told me after morning training once that he had been exhausted every day since he started trying to re-adapt. 'But

it's no problem,' he said as we walked home from the forest. '*Iska lememid durus, enqulf;*' until 'adaptation' I will sleep. Here 'adaptation' is both the word for 'training' - in this case an afternoon run - and the logic behind sleeping all day. Until he 'adapted' he said, he was going to sleep from 10am (after morning training) until 4pm (when he would go for a second run) every day. With the right amount of rest and the right kinds of food, the implication was, one could 'adapt' to almost any volume of training. I return to Berhanu later in this chapter to illustrate the economic aspect of 'condition'.

Throughout my fieldwork, I never heard anyone mention 'talent' or natural ability. Runners were either good at managing the process of adaptation, or they were not. As Messeret frequently put it to the runners, '*malewut tichilalachew*' – 'you can be changed.' The word '*lewt*' means 'change' or 'progress,' and the implication here is a strong belief in the inherent malleability of bodies provided that runners conduct themselves in a certain way. I was often told how bad I was at managing this process of adaptation, insisting as I did on writing during the day, walking around to do interviews (this was often referred to as doing *zur*, or 'laps') and otherwise refusing to allow my body to 'adapt' to the training load. There are several implications of this belief in 'adaptation,' which will emerge in this chapter and throughout this thesis. The first is that an inability to 'adapt' is often seen as the problem of the individual, as a moral failing of some kind or simply a result of not 'working' hard enough. It is never ascribed merely to not having the 'natural talent' to do so, which is how I (and I suspect most sports scientists) would explain my inability to run a marathon in 2.08. The second is that 'adaptation' is seen as requiring a certain minimum amount of resources, as I described in the introduction. Thirdly, a belief in the ability of the mind to 'order' the body emerges; frequently it is a lack of 'control' over the legs that is blamed for an inability to 'adapt'.

### **C'ana: Calibrating the right training load**

Managing the intensity of training was understood in terms of the careful calibration of *'c'ana'*, or load, and before going any further I want to briefly foreground the dangers associated with training without 'control' or awareness of one's limitations. I asked Jeroen Deen, a Dutch massage therapist who has worked with hundreds of Kenyan and Ethiopian runners and who was based in Addis Ababa for the duration of my fieldwork, about the most common injuries he saw. We met in *Ararat* hotel near Kotebe, where athletes often gather to watch international athletics meetings on satellite TV, and he came accompanied by a young runner called Haju who he was training as a massage therapist at the time. He answered that the majority were lower back and hip injuries resulting from 'overuse,' before addressing the following to Haju in English:

'Do you know what it means, the 'Boulevard of Broken Dreams'? That's Meskel Square, with all the athletes on it who didn't make it. Who trained for three to ten years and never really made it. Maybe got a little money here, a little money there, and had some fun but they didn't make it. Normally when I get someone like that I make sure I see them, because I'm not someone who says 'I only want to treat the top athletes'. Because you can also advise people by saying, 'hey my friend, how long do you train now? Every time you get injured, you know where that comes from? Because you trained too hard, you trained harder than you can train. Your body tells a story, eh?'

'You trained harder than you can train.' Jeroen said that from his viewpoint this was true of 'the majority' of Ethiopian runners. The ability to monitor energy expenditure and avoid training 'harder than you can train' or going 'beyond your capacity' as the runners usually put it was an extremely valuable skill. And yet as I hope to go on to show, Ethiopian runners would be unlikely to share Jeroen's view of 'condition' as being purely about the story told by their body; for them, 'condition' is also determined by the disposition they adopt, their spiritual life,

the environmental conditions they are able to access and the social ties they are in a position to cultivate.

The 'load' adopted in training had to be heavy enough to cause the necessary 'adaptation', but not so heavy as to lead to injury. This was a subjective thing that runners had to monitor; some needed more 'load' than others. Tsedat often told me that he ran on Sundays when most people were resting because '*sawnetey c'ana yiwudal*'; 'my body likes load'. Knowing how much load your body needed, or could take, was hugely important. As Hailye put it to me one day, 'if you load a donkey with three sacks of cement, what's going to happen? It's going to fall down'. A heavy training 'load', combined with adequate rest before a race, led to 'condition'. Often if someone had struggled in training and I asked them how they felt, they would say that their body felt 'loaded' because of a 'lack of adaptation'. Absorbing the heaviness of training, and getting used to it, was the way to cause the body to feel light. Consider the following extract;

Fasil: 'You didn't have any problem when you ran your first marathon, but when you ran Barcelona you were loaded...'

Zelege: 'Very.'

Fasil: (to me) 'He finished second in his first marathon, but in his second he couldn't run well because his thoughts were about his house.'

Here the feeling that his body was 'loaded,' for Zelege, comes from his *lack* of training in the build up to the Barcelona marathon. He had been unable to transfer the load of training into the bodily lightness necessary to run well. The 'load' here also refers to the pressure he was under to oversee the construction of the house in Debre Birhan. Here, in a sense, Zelege was attempting to convert one kind of energy to another – the energy he expended racing into the house that would 'change his life' – and yet at the same time he was diverting scarce energetic resources away from his attempt to prepare for his next race. It

demonstrates clearly the extent to which energy is seen as limited and subject to conversion between different states.

The challenge for the runner was to try to increase the *c'ana* of their training – and thereby their hopes of success – without embracing too much risk to their energy levels and ability to continue training. The ideal was therefore being able to do more running without ‘costing anything’ in terms of energy expended. Thus it was often explained to me that people would get up at 5.30am on ‘easy’ training days in order to run in the forest when it was still very cold. This meant both that they avoided sweating (associated with ‘losing something’) and that they got home early enough to sleep for a significant amount of time before lunch, which was seen as another way of gaining an energetic advantage.

The ‘load’ a runner experienced was intimately connected to the places in which they trained and to the surfaces they ran on. A widespread prohibition against running too much on ‘asphalt’ and thereby ‘loading’ the legs dangerously and risking injury meant that the professional groups in Addis trained only once per week on the road, usually on a Friday. Again, there was some variation in this, and some runners preferred firmer surfaces. For Aseffa, calibrating the ‘load’ of training was primarily about selecting the surfaces on which he ran. He would take the bus to run on *coroconch* (‘rough road’) when the others ran in the forest because it ‘loaded’ his legs more. Other runners would seek the softest ground possible, thereby lessening the risk of injury. Such day-to-day calculations about the various training locations available around the city were not just made according to the surface, however, but also according to the ‘air conditions.’

### **Drawing on Environmental Resources**

The perceived benefits of training in Addis were often less a case of *what* you do as *where* you do it. My interlocutors were constantly weighing the value of various places: the ‘heaviness’ of the air at Entoto mountain against the expanses of grassland in Sendafa where the ‘kilometers come easily’. The chill of

the forest against the heat of Akaki, some eight hundred meters lower. The runner does their best to situate themselves within the pull of these environmental forces in the way that will best enrich their 'condition'.

Conversations on the relative merits of different places could spiral on for hours, and athletes would frequently travel across the city to sleep over with a friend in order to train in a specific place the next day. I woke up one Saturday morning to find Teklemariam - who lived 15km away in *Legetafo* - vigorously washing his face at the outdoor tap in our compound. 'What are you doing here?' I asked him, bleary-eyed at 5.45am. He explaining that he and Hailye had planned a session of hill reps and that he'd arrived last night and shared Hailye's bed. I came for the hill' he said, before adding, reverentially, 'it is Tirunesh's hill,' and explaining that it is where Tirunesh Dibaba (Olympic 5,000m and 10,000m champion) used to train.

Places are often imbued with importance because of the people who train, or trained there. Entoto, for instance, is associated with Haile Gebrselassie, who I was told repeatedly used to run there every morning at 5.30am. Others are significant for particular air qualities. One area of the *Yeka* sub-city forest was referred to as 'Boston', a marathon renowned for being cold, because it felt colder than other parts of the forest, and runners often trained there when they prepared for the Boston marathon. The area of forest we often ran in on 'easy' days was known as 'Arat Shi', which literally means 'four thousand'. I was told that this was the altitude, which was actually closer to 2,500m. The *belief* in altitude, and the mystique of certain places, was very important, and athletes often travelled long distances to train in certain places. Our coach, Messeret, used to get frustrated with athletes who believed that they could draw energy from the trees and the sun in certain places, but these beliefs were clearly an important part of the way in which people worked on their 'condition' The link

between the 'air conditions' and an athlete's physical 'condition' is an intimate one.

When runners ask '*condition yet alle?*' (where is condition?) they are referring at once to the mysterious and fickle nature of 'condition' *and* to its environmental location, or rather the *combination of environments* that will lead to condition. Many of the conversations between coach and athletes on the bus after training centred around the optimum combination of places and surfaces for the week's training depending on the time of the year. If there were no races we sometimes ran at 'high altitude' or 'cold' places three times; in Sendafa, Entoto and Sululta, for instance. This was because race-specific, fast running was less important. I found these weeks exhausting; sometimes we wouldn't drop below 2,700m above sea-level for three consecutive runs. More often a combination was sought. We would usually train at high-altitude on Monday, lower altitude (or a 'hot place') on Wednesday for 'speed' training and then alternate on Fridays between *Sebeta* (at a mere 2,200m) and Sendafa (at 2,600m). Alongside the concerns about place was a consideration of surfaces, and the optimum combination of 'hard' (asphalt and 'rough road') and 'soft' (grass and forest) to make sure legs were used to sustaining the impact required to race but that their energy was not 'killed' by too much running on hard ground. On one occasion while we were discussing the distribution of training sessions, Gelgelo, who was returning from injury, raised his hand and suggested we trained at Akaki (renowned for being 'hot') twice that week. Hailye laughed and turned to me. 'He only wants to go there because he's fat,' he said. 'No-one else needs Akaki twice.' Again, choice of place was emphasised as the most efficient way of losing weight.

Many of the athletes in our training group would also travel further afield in search of 'condition,' returning to the rural training camps at which they started their careers. I travelled with three athletes from our group, Selamyhun, Abere

and Berhanu, to *Guna Wuha* training camp in Gondar for this reason. This is not a short trip; the bus journey takes nineteen hours. All three had run races recently and had just finished a short period of complete rest. They went to Gondar to work on their endurance in the thin air. The track, which was marked out by the athletes themselves on farmland, was at 3,100m above sea-level. Desaleyn, the coach of the Amhara Region Water and Construction Company club, told me that 'according to science, training at this altitude is not advisable.' I asked him what he thought. 'It is advisable,' he said simply, before listing the altitudes of other training camps in the Amhara region and declaring *Guna* the highest. Again, the belief in altitude is the important thing. He kept asking me to 'check' the altitude at different places on my phone, and inflating the figures by a few hundred metres when he relayed them to the athletes. Many sports scientists have studied altitude as the 'secret' of Ethiopian athletes, and this mythology has made its way back to Ethiopia. The way the information is used by the coach, however, is often more about increasing the capacity of the athletes to *believe* than increasing their lung capacity.

'We come here to do our training when our performance is not good' Selamyhun told me. 'We will collect condition and put it in our bags and take it back to Addis.' He then added, grinning, 'will you share yours with Haiyle?' Selamyhun was joking here, but I think this is instructive. 'Condition' is seen as a scarce commodity that requires ingenuity and cunning to acquire, and its access is restricted by barriers on movement. Runners could gain advantage over each other through the careful calibration and combination of different training environments and training partners. It was also, as my next chapter demonstrates, conceived as trans-bodily, as something that could be shared between people. And as the following section demonstrates, the planning of especially challenging and outlandish training sessions was associated with becoming powerful (*haylenna*) and as a fundamentally Ethiopian tactic.

## 'Replacing What You Have Lost'

At the other end of the spectrum from Tilahun, discussed in the introduction, whose access to beneficial parts of the city was limited, we have someone like Berhanu, an established international athlete with plenty of disposable income. After one training session in Sendafa I commented on the intensity of his training to coach Messeret:

*Michael: 'He's running a lot at the moment.'*

*Messeret: 'A lot, yeah. A lot of kilometres.'*

*Michael: 'Is that good?'*

*Messeret: 'If he has a good plan, and good food, there's no problem. He can adapt. Without good food, though... Anyway, he has become rich.'*

Being able to 'keep condition' was often associated with wealth; with being able to live somewhere quiet, and consume foods associated with condition like meat and fresh avocado juice. Again this contrasts sharply to the usual media portrayal of East African athletes and to the way that someone like Haile Gebrselassie (a multiple world record holder and World and Olympic champion) presents himself in the media; as successful *because* he ran barefoot as a child, and *because* he had to skip lunch every day and his family could afford meat only very occasionally.

The link between food and 'condition' is perceived to be very strong. At Ethiopian New Year, we slaughtered a sheep in our compound and many of the runners from the group came round to share a meal. We ate mutton all afternoon, encouraging each other to eat more. Fasil told me, 'rub your belly like this and you'll be able to eat more, this is how the priests do it!' whilst Abere pointed to the chunks of meat frying in the vast frying pan and said, 'this is three months worth of condition'. Good performances in training were met with speculation about what people had been eating and drinking the previous day,

and the ability to access juice was seen to be one of the main factors separating people from 'condition'. At the training camp in Gondar, in fact, they moved all of the athletes to a town, Debre Tabor, for ten days before competitions, which was referred to explicitly as 'condition time,' and the principal reason given for this was so because there was no 'access to juice' in the training camp. Each athlete was given a daily allowance of 200 *birr* so that they could control their own diets. On some days we drank three pints of avocado juice, the equivalent of eating fifteen avocados. On his return from a lucrative race in China the first thing Berhanu did was buy a juicer. 'There's no catching him now,' was Fasil's response. The following is advice on how to recover quickly from a marathon from *Hangzhou* marathon champion Rigassa, delivered from his bed in the race hotel the night after the race:

'For two weeks I will eat mutton, eggs, and milk. I don't bother with juice but I eat raw meat and drink wine. For two weeks I don't run at all, and then I start with a thirty-minute jog every morning for a week before starting proper sessions...'

This diet - he said he could eat two kilos of meat a day - is prohibitively expensive for the vast majority of runners. The average first-division club salary is 1,400 *birr* a month, and two kilos of meat cost around 200 *birr*. Milk, too, is too expensive for many runners. This diet, admittedly, is an extreme example - Rigassa won six consecutive marathons in China in 2016, a feat considered suspicious or borderline impossible by many. A diet this high in protein would be beneficial for recovery but would be good for 'condition' in other ways too; by creating a feeling of superiority and separation from other athletes.

Decisions about selecting the right foods, on sleeping as much as possible, and above all drawing upon the most beneficial combination of environments are all energetic concerns but also economic ones, involving trade-offs between, for

instance, allocating money for transport to Entoto mountain or to the purchase of avocado juice after training. Ethiopian runners compose their 'condition' from the environment in a way similar to that described by Gudeman (2012) when he writes the following.

'The current of strength comes from the earth and other elements that include wind, rain and sun [...] Humans do not create these sources of strength, nor do they create strength itself. Instead, they secure, transform and remake it. They are conveyors but not creators of strength. As the people say, their work "helps compose" strength, that is, they put it together in ways that can be used by themselves and others' (61)

The composition of strength is not merely a straightforward exchange of one 'current' to another, as Gudeman describes, however, but rather one that involves the adoption of particular dispositions, and – as I will go on to explain – the embrace of certain kinds of risk and contingency. For those living on the edge of 'condition' – teetering between extreme fitness and 'burning themselves up' it also involves making difficult decisions about seemingly mundane daily activities.

### To Eat or To Sleep?

Sometimes the constant weighing up of how best to maintain and augment 'condition' came to a head in a situation where two ways of protecting 'condition' came into conflict. One notable example of this came when one of my interlocutors, Mekasha, and I went to training with *Mebrat Hayle* for the first time. He had recently been 'signed' for the club by Messeret, and was expected to train with them for a few weeks leading up to the Addis Ababa half marathon championships. *Mebrat Hayle* is the state-owned power supplier - the name means 'Electric Power' - and the corporation have their headquarters in a part of Addis called *Mexico*. On top of his salary of 1,500 birr a month, the club provide a meal three times a week on training days (Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays).

We went to training on a Saturday morning, a 25km run on asphalt in Sendafa, 30km outside Addis in the opposite direction from *Mexico*. Zeleke, who also runs for *Mebrat Hayle*, was on the bus too, and as we drove back, tired and wedged three to a two-person bench seat, into the city, they had to decide whether to get off in Kotebe or travel onwards to Mexico for lunch. This dominated the conversation on the hour-long drive home, with Zeleke finally persuading Mekasha that it was worth the trip. Below is a short excerpt from the conversation between the two runners, Zeleke and Mekasha, and Messeret, the coach;

Mekasha: 'If the athletes are scattered and can't come to the same area, could they not just increase our salary for food?'

Messeret: 'We learned that if we do that, the athletes do not eat because of a shortage of money for rent. But this is serious, high-energy food, you will see.'

Mekasha: 'I think it would have been better to go home and sleep.'

Messeret: 'That is a problem. Many athletes do not come due to exhaustion.'

Mekasha: 'I would understand if we were given kit as well, like at the Oromiya club.'

Messeret: 'It can't be the same as there, because they live in a camp and they don't require a bus.'

Mekasha: 'Perhaps we can change the agreement so the athletes get more money.'

Messeret: 'No, I am against that. The athletes don't eat properly. What is the intention of this club? It is for development!'

Mekasha: 'But I know what will happen to me if I don't eat. Can't you separate the responsible ones from the irresponsible ones? If the club knows that the salary is not enough, why haven't they raised it to take into account the inflation of rent?'

Messeret: 'It is on the agenda for our meeting next week.'

Both Messeret and Mekasha are concerned with the allocation and protection of scarce resources here, and they are clearly both aware of how close to the margins runners are operating. Mekasha's primary preoccupation is with his energy levels; he cannot decide whether a further hour on the bus is going to be compensated for by the quality of the food on offer. For Messeret, the concern is more institutional; how can *Mebrat Hayle* allocate their budget to develop the best runners possible? Messeret clearly does not trust the 'fresh', inexperienced athletes to manage their 'condition' well without institutional help, hence the structure of training around eating at company headquarters.

When we arrived in Mexico it was already nearly midday. We had been up since before 6am and hadn't eaten anything. We walked into a long courtyard where company officials and engineers milled about or sat talking, and made our weary way to a canteen tucked away at the back. Zeleke peered into the canteen and announced that the women's football team were eating; we would have to wait. We sat on a concrete wall in the sun for another twenty-five minutes whilst the athletes complained about the delay. On other occasions, they told me, they had waited an hour and a half. Eventually we made our way inside and were presented with an extraordinary quantity of food. First an enormous plate of pasta with tomato and *berbere* sauce and two bread rolls, followed by an equally huge plate of meat and potatoes and finally sweet porridge and four bananas each. This food was rapidly dispatched in spite of people complaining of feeling sick - I certainly felt pretty ill, especially as we had not eaten since the night before. When someone faltered and leaned back in their chair they would be entreated to continue eating to 'get the benefit'.

When we finished eating everyone stood up rapidly, said their goodbyes and made a beeline for the door before jogging a few hundred metres down the road

(this did not help with keeping the food down) and across a round-about. 'What's the rush?' I asked Mekasha. 'We've eaten now,' he said, 'we need to get to sleep as quickly as possible.' There followed a thirty-minute bus ride to the bus station at Maganegna, a sprint through the rain onto another bus, and finally a sodden, standing room only journey back to Kotebe on a final overcrowded bus. I got home at 2pm (having been out for almost nine hours) and fell fast asleep for two hours. When I woke I texted Mekasha to see if he was running again in the afternoon. 'I can't' he replied. 'I'm too tired. I won't go for lunch there again.' He complained about this disruption for days afterwards, and it seemed as though it was the frustration of having his plan interrupted, as much as the actual change in his training schedule, that was the problem. 'Condition' is precarious both in terms of the actual physical state of the runner and in terms of their *perception* of that state.

### **'You have to detach yourself'**

'The way you show your commitment is by doing things carefully. If I want to make myself an athlete, I have to work on myself. What kind of work do I need to do? I need to work at my rest. I need to work on my eating habits. I am not going to keep following what the rest of society is doing. Society is a manifestation of poor people, of backwards people, of people who talk a lot, who are ignorant, who do not lead their lives in the right way. If you want to be an athlete, you have to detach yourself from this society. What does it mean to detach yourself? It means being careful of what you eat, what you drink, how you rest. If you are sick for a month, it is your own fault.'

- Coach Messeret.

Here Messeret presents ill-discipline and the inability to manage energy resources as an *Ethiopian* trait, and this is an idea often internalised by athletes

when they talk about separating themselves from the rest of society in their attempts to gain 'condition'. Part of the narrative of progress through running, it seems, depends upon defining the non-running community as 'backward' and as living wayward, unfocused and unplanned lives. This characterisation often extended to the ways in which people spoke about their own families; often I was told by runners that they would not help their families if they won prize money because of their families 'backward' attitudes and inability to understand their commitment to running. This detachment has serious social costs, and puts significant pressure on the individual. As the final line of Messeret's comment above makes clear, the individual runner is responsible for maintaining their own 'condition.' Given the beliefs I elaborated on in previous section regarding anyone being able to 'adapt' given that they 'work hard' and 'self-manage' properly, this is a very real pressure.

On a rare afternoon off training at the training camp in Gondar, we went to watch the 'Cultural Games,' where representatives of different areas of Ethiopia came together to compete at 'traditional sports.' We waited several hours for the Games to start; at the stated start time of 9am we were the only ones there. We sat removed from everyone else on a grassy bank. 'Why is it so late?' I asked. 'Cultural Games is the good life' Selamhyun shrugged. 'And is running the good life?' I asked. 'No, it's not,' he said. 'Condition. Every day, condition, condition, condition.' We had to leave early because of the track session the coach had planned for the following morning; everyone wanted to sleep.

The following conversation took place during rainy season. We sat huddled in Hailye's room listening to the rain hammering off the corrugated iron sheets of the compound, waiting for it to stop so we could go for a run.

Michael: Does running give you a sense of freedom?

Aseffa: 'There is not much freedom in running. If you are a civil servant and there is a party or a wedding, you can participate fully in it, dance and enjoy yourself. But if you are a runner and you go to a party or dancing, the next day you are unable to cover the session.'

Fasil: 'It makes you feel free, but only while you are running.'

Aseffa: 'People who are not athletes do not understand about athletics. So chatting with them and spending time with them is difficult. I need to run. People who do not know about running want you to go to their house and chat with them, then they give you food, for instance injera. If you say, 'injera is not good for running, I don't want to eat it' they see you as a show-off. So running makes you free while you are running only, but for socialising it has many problems.'

Fasil: 'Many problems.'

Zelege: 'When will this rain stop? It's impossible to know when to eat.'

Aseffa: 'You have to eat whenever you get the chance.'

Here we see the level of separation runners consider necessary to achieve success. Spending time socialising with non-runners is seen as extremely detrimental to an athlete's 'condition,' and, as Aseffa makes clear, it becomes easier to avoid it altogether than to attempt to negotiate such interactions in a way that protects 'condition'. Refusing *injera*, the quintessentially Ethiopian staple food, is particularly problematic, and makes people likely to accuse you of being a show-off. That the conversation is interrupted by Zelege's interjection about the rain is instructive too. The rain is something that cannot be controlled, which frustrates runners' abilities to meticulously plan and time their food intake. The separation from the rest of society extends to prohibitions against walking around in between training sessions, which the runners refer to as doing '*zur*,' 'laps'. If unavoidable *zur* - like going to the Ethiopian Athletics Federation or to an embassy to process a visa application - stop someone from sleeping after morning training, afternoon training is usually avoided because 'otherwise you

will not keep your condition.’ More serious *zur*, like the travel associated with going to a race, are discussed at great length as people work out how to negotiate such disturbances with the minimum effect on their ‘condition.’

I travelled with some of the athletes from our group to the Istanbul half marathon. They had run another race the week before, several hundred kilometres away, and had travelled to Istanbul by bus. They spent most of the time in the hotel discussing the effect this had on their ‘condition’ and watching the Kenyan runners. The following is an extract from a conversation we had over dinner:

Michael: ‘Did you rest a lot today?’

Selamyhun: ‘I slept for an hour. But that bus trip has really tired me out. We were going, stopping, going. Our condition ran away on that trip.’

Dembele: ‘These bananas are no good. They are difficult to digest, they will take your condition.’

Bogale: (pointing to the Kenyans sitting at an adjacent table) ‘Look at them, they know how to keep their condition. They’re not talking, talking like we are. They keep silent.’

The athletes who travelled to Istanbul were all ‘fresh’ - they were on either their first or second trips abroad - so part of the constant discussion of ‘condition’ could be put down to nerves. None of us ran very well, and I had the impression that Bogale and Selamyhun were psyched out by the sheer number of competitors in the men’s field (there were twenty-two men from Kenya, Ethiopia and Eritrea competing for prize money for the first five. In this instance, ‘condition’ was more a psychological than a physical state, and it seemed to me that the all-encompassing obsession with ‘condition’ seemingly slipping away was one of the reasons why the athletes failed to run as well as they had hoped.

## ‘What does it mean to control emotion?’

For coach Messeret, the principal way to keep condition is through maintaining the mind’s ‘control’ over the body. In the ideal scenario, your body implements what the mind tells it to, in a classic ‘mind-over-matter’ sense, but it also holds your body back, preventing you from becoming ‘over-condition’; over-confident in your own fitness and therefore likely to squander your energy through running recklessly. Below I quote Messeret on this problem followed by Mekasha.

Messeret: ‘I really liked the studying I did in America. There were three or four doctors teaching us, and we were all from different countries but we were all speaking the same language. If we were asked to talk about training pace, we were all talking about the same thing. You have to learn to see the rain and tell your mind that it’s not raining. As we said earlier, if you feel hungry you have to tell your mind that you’re not hungry: “I won’t accept such ideas, my stomach is full.” The brain can be cheated. Then it burns the fat in my body and turns it to energy and then it is possible to break the record. It is possible to make things easy by controlling emotion. What does it mean to control emotion? Hesitation, feeling of fear, inferiority; you have to replace it with feelings of happiness, determination, confidence, strength, morale. These feelings are created by your decisions, and they help your body to create the right hormones’

Mekasha: ‘Sometimes people say, “athletes are thinking with their legs.” Let’s show them we are thinking with our minds, we are breathing with our lungs as we lead ourselves by our own minds. We have to show them and make them understand that.’

In both of these instances the ‘emotional’ body led by the legs is portrayed as backward, lacking in discipline, or naive; by a group of international sports

science students in Messeret's case, and by an unspecified but patronising mass in Mekasha's. In a sense both encourage a distinctly un-embodied approach to training; they advocate not listening to the body but rather ignoring it, or even actively telling your legs that they are wrong. Often a lack of 'control' is presented as being specifically Ethiopian, especially in the context of mid-run toilet breaks. These were a common occurrence, and the athletes were often castigated for them. 'Why can't we be disciplined about going to the toilet?!' Messeret shouted one day after training. 'The toilet is an issue of mind, it is an issue of adaptation!' Berhanu, our bus driver who spoke some English, laughed and turned to me. 'Sometimes they have to go three times!' he said, running his hands down his torso to mime expulsion. 'It is a problem of Ethiopia I think, we have a problem with the digestive system and also respiration system. In Europe they just go once in a day'. In the context of Messeret's valorisation of international sports science, his constant attacks on athletes for lack of 'discipline' and 'control' and for being overly 'emotional' can be seen as trying to bring them in line with international athletic standards; making them conform. This 'control' represents a kind of *learned* mind-body duality, a movement from 'thinking with the legs' to 'ordering with the mind'.

An alternative viewpoint is presented in the following quotation from Rata, a young runner I often spoke to in a Kotebe cafe:

'Runners should be in the positions in the Federation. A doctor does not know the science, a doctor does not know time, a doctor does not run. If mind and legs are not integrated, it is impossible to run.'

When I transcribed this conversation with Hailye, his response conformed to the opinions held by Mekasha, a more experienced athlete, and Messeret, quoted above. 'As nearly all of the runners are ignorant, it is impossible to do that,' he said. 'They are emotional, they say "the Federation should be led by legs."' From

Rata's perspective, a fully embodied understanding of what running means is vital for those in charge at the Athletics Federation. For Hailye, Messeret and Mekasha, the 'emotional' nature of the legs and the runner's body have to be controlled and harnessed if an athlete is to be successful.

Whilst 'control' of mind over body would seem to imply a rejection of this embodied understanding, the ability to control the emotional, impulsive side of running is often what defines being a successful runner in Ethiopia. Not only must the mind be in control of the body, but the mind must be unified in order for a state of 'condition' to be reached. I was often told that a runner had to have 'one thought and one mind' (*and hasabenna and chinkilat*), and that having a 'divided mind' led to distraction and a waning of 'condition.' The mind, as Aseffa put it to me, should be focused on 'one thing, and one thing only; work.' The relationship of mind and body was presented as constantly negotiated and contested, and running with a 'free mind' was equally challenging. Given the precarious nature of many of the runners' lifestyles and incomes, being able to worry exclusively about running was a luxury most of them could not afford.

### A Delicate Balance

'People come up with all kinds of reasons [...] "I got injured because someone put a curse on me" or "I am not running well because I drank bad water" or - the worst one: "I'm not running well because I drank cold water." I had that with Mulu (a marathon runner ranked in the top 10 in the world) and I said, "look, you don't get allergies from cold water, that may be the trigger but it is a small part, the problem is that your resistance is already (he holds his palm a few centimetres from the floor) like this." You could see in her eyes that she wasn't healthy. I said, "don't blame the water, blame the fact that your energy levels are so low. If you continue pushing, pushing, pushing, you'll fall off the edge.'"

- Jeroen Deen, massage therapist, interview.

‘Ethiopian athletes will come to the medium level, but only a few can reach the edge (wada makakalenya dereja yimetal, tikitoch bicha chaff lay yidursalu). If you ask why, it is not because you are unable to run. Rather it is a lack of “self-management”’ (in English)

- Coach Messeret, speaking at a post-training meeting.

Here we see the essential challenge of distance running. There are thousands of runners in Addis Ababa at the ‘medium level’ Messeret references, trying desperately to reach the ‘edge.’ Often he describes them as a ‘flock’ that eventually ‘melts away’ to reveal the one or two runners who eventually ‘make it’. And yet the closer you get to the ‘edge,’ the more vulnerable you are, the more likely you are to ‘fall over the edge’ as Jeroen puts it and become ill or injured. As Messeret says, without ‘self-management’ - that is, being extremely careful - you cannot get to the edge in the first place. And when you reach it, you are even more vulnerable. In fact, there was often a paradoxical situation whereby what I would see as a sign of illness was sometimes interpreted as signalling ‘condition’ by the Ethiopian runners. On the eve of the Istanbul half marathon I had a streaming cold and texted Hailie back in Addis telling him I was not hopeful about my performance the following day. His response was just three words, ‘*gunfan condition naw.*’ Literally ‘a cold is condition’. The vulnerability shown through having caught a cold is here interpreted as a sign that I must be ‘on the edge’ – I had trained hard enough to suppress my immune system and catch a cold, and thereby proved that I was in ‘condition’.

The athlete Jeroen is talking about is an established marathon runner. She lives in a big house and is able to command tens of thousands of dollars in appearance fees, but this only partially insulates her to the risks of training; if she

pushes too hard, she too will go over the edge. This reality explains the constant discussion of 'condition'; how to get it; where to get it and crucially how to hold onto it, which accompanies day-to-day training and life for runners in Addis.

Stephen Lyng's (1990) concept of 'edgework' is useful here. He views high-risk behaviour, including distance-running, as involving 'most fundamentally, the problem of negotiating the boundary between chaos and order.' Rather than seeing sport as an escape from a predictable work life, he sees 'edgework' activities as embodying a different form of risk and the negotiation of such activities as a way of gaining control. He suggests that 'increasing numbers of people in modern postindustrial society feel threatened, both physically and mentally, by forces entirely beyond their control, for example, threats posed by toxic chemicals in the environment [...] financial instability, the general instability of personal relationships and so forth' (Lyng, 1990, 874).

According to Lyng, people involved in 'edgework' activities see themselves as possessing 'survival capacities' specific to the activities, rather than merely being powerless in the face of 'mysterious, capricious forces over which they have no control.' Lyng returns to Turner's (1976) polarity between 'institution' and 'impulse' anchorages, which vary across 'the rural-urban continuum, class structure, and national cultures' (1990, 864). The increasing popularity of 'edgework' activities suggests, to Lyng, a shift towards an 'impulse' emphasis in postindustrial society. The relationships between 'institution' and 'impulse,' and between spontaneity and constraint, are hugely important ones when considering long-distance running, as well as a source of considerable tension. Many of the arguments that broke out at training, which I discuss in detail in the following chapter, were a result of the tension between 'impulse' and 'institution,' with Messeret's highly specific, time-restricted training schedules representing the 'institutional' anchorage and the runners' tendency to run with 'emotion' representing 'impulse'. It is important to emphasise the extent to

which the risks, and the stakes, are higher in the East African context, however, where 'edgework' is not an escape from work but work itself and where failure to negotiate the boundary between fitness and injury can have far greater consequences.

Appadurai (2013) identifies the 'broadening of risk-taking and risk-bearing' as a deep trend of the last twenty years, linking disparate societies together. Few human activities, according to Shipway et al. (2013) 'have the magnitude of potential costs of distance running, with such uncertain outcomes' (270). As Wacquant writes of boxing, 'one must make use of one's body without using it up [...] navigating "by eye" between two equally dangerous reefs [...] on the one hand, an excess of preparation that squanders resources in vain and needlessly shortens a career; on the other, a lack of discipline and training that increases the risk of serious injury and compromises the chances of success' (Wacquant, 2006: 130). Distance runners operate on a fine line between fitness and illness and injury, to the extent that to be in peak physical condition competitively is also, ironically, to be closest to breaking down and unable to train or compete, as the above quotation from Jeroen Deen makes clear.

Messeret's discussion of reaching the 'edge' makes this paradox perfectly clear. This is not a case of merely trying harder or training in a more extreme way. Rather, it is often the opposite. Through 'self-management' (which, interestingly, he says in English), athletes must come gradually, tentatively to the edge and no further. Here he is again:

'Without "self-management," one day condition comes by surprise and if I ask you how it came, you will not have an answer. Suddenly it goes away again. If I ask you why, and you have no answer, you will not change your life. When condition comes, you need to know how it came. When it disappears, you need to know how it disappeared. You need to answer quickly. Your body is damaged when you are unable to manage those

small things. For instance, if I say Zeleke is great today, can I get him for the coming two months in the same shape? Up, down, up, down, up, down, down, down, down (*kef, zig, kef, zig, kef, zig, ju, ju, ju*). We are happy that someone is in shape, then suddenly they go down. This is the biggest disease (*bashita*).'

On a day-to-day basis, getting - and crucially, maintaining - condition is of paramount concern. Trying to isolate the effects of food, place, training 'load' and the myriad other variables that contributed to 'condition' was a constant monitoring challenge. For Messeret, this was a problem of control and restraint, and yet for the athletes some of the things that they did in the name of 'condition' would not make sense according to this paradigm. I now go on to discuss occasions on which risk and exhaustion were *voluntarily* embraced as routes to condition, and the logic behind such activities.

### **What is Ethiopian About Running Up and Down a Hill at 3 o'clock in the morning?**

It is 3.15am, and I have just woken from a fitful four-hour sleep. I am already wearing running shorts, and I quickly pull on a T-shirt and tracksuit and step outside. It is pitch black, and my breath turns to mist in the cold air as our dog barks at me. Fasil is washing his face at the outdoor tap. He has a night off his job guarding a half-constructed building, and shared Hailye's bed last night. He beams, and is clearly surprised that I kept my word about joining them for this particular session. 'Ante farenj aydellum,' he says. 'Jegenna neh'; you're no foreigner, you're a hero. We jog slowly to Kidane Mehret church and four hundred metres down the asphalt hill in silence, before Hailye turns, crosses himself, and leads our first run up the hill. The only light comes from the occasional bare bulb hanging outside a kiosk, and by the seventh or eighth run I have learned that, like a watched pot, the hilltop comes faster if you watch your feet rather than the summit. After an hour Hailye stops. 'Buka' he says. Enough.

As we jog home he tells me, 'now you should have a cold shower outside, and then you should sleep. That's going to be the most wonderful sleep.'

This training session marked the start of the time - six months or so after starting fieldwork - when Fasil started telling me I was becoming '*habesha*,' a term denoting unified, proud Ethiopia. He joked that when I came back to the UK I would be able to run races and say, '*ciao farenj*' at the beginning - 'bye-bye foreigners' - and win easily. '*Ciao farenj*' became something of a catch-phrase every time we did a good training session. So what is specifically Ethiopian about running up and down a hill at three o'clock in the morning?

Hailye decided that he needed to run up and down the hill in the night because he was dissatisfied with his 'condition'; he had gained a bit of weight recently and his job as sub-agent meant that he did not have quite the same drive to train as he once had. He was *too comfortable*, basically, and he saw this as having spoiled his 'condition'. He told me that he was running better when he lived on a mere 200 *birr* a month (around £7). Back then, he had no access to the team 'service' bus that takes us out of Addis Ababa three mornings a week to access the environments deemed by our coach to be the most beneficial for training. He did not have the money for public transport to these places, so he had to wake up in the night - when there were fewer cars and people on the streets - and train in the city. There is a morality here that is tied to a memory of poverty, of doing justice to a past self. When Hailye emphasises the *subjective quality* of the sleep we would have after this session, he ties work and rest into a moral system that rewards particular kinds of work and sacrifice.

On another occasion when he was suffering from typhoid, Hailye still insisted on running in the forest. He put on two tracksuits in spite of the temperature being in the twenties, to 'encourage sweat' and we walked slowly up the hill. 'Are you sure this is a good idea?' I asked him. 'It is always better to run than to sleep,' he

said. '[Christiano] Ronaldo will not play if he has a cold. [Gareth] Bale will not play. They will rest. *Farenj* will all rest, but *habesha* will work.' Several times he came to a stop, crouching and holding his forehead and complaining of dizziness. In spite of repeated entreaties to go home, he kept running, saying, 'I have to struggle, I have to face it.' Running through an illness - usually with a clove of garlic up each nostril - was often portrayed as making you stronger, an attitude very much at odds with the medical viewpoint. Demonstrating a willingness to suffer and to continue without complaint was part of building 'condition'.

The dominant discourse in sports science for elite endurance athletes at the moment - made famous by *Team Sky* cycling team - is of 'marginal gains'. The logic behind it is to make enough tiny changes - 'one percenters' - to the way in which you train and rest that they will add up to a significant improvement. Examples include *Team Sky* taking their own mattresses to races to ensure a good night's sleep, or the team nutritionist delivering meals to athletes' houses. Ethiopian runners, too, place emphasis on rest. I was frequently told not to 'do laps,' which is how people referred to walking around between training sessions, and to ensure that I slept after morning training. On the way back from the training session described above, I unzipped my jacket, hot from the running in spite of the pre-dawn chill. '*Tao, tao, bird,*' Hailye said. 'Careful, careful, it's cold.' When I questioned the logic of this in light of his just having told me we should take a cold, outdoor shower when we returned home, he merely shrugged. I seek to argue that whilst Ethiopian runners will try to do little things to improve performance (zipping up a jacket to avoid a chill, placing an emphasis on rest), the dominant discourse in Ethiopia is in fact rather one of 'maximal gains' like the middle of the night hill repetitions described above, and of cultivating a sense of power and 'dangerousness'.

### **Danger and Risk**

The most common adjective to describe a strong runner in Ethiopia was '*adagenna*'; 'dangerous.' Cultivating a sense of 'dangerousness' was therefore an important part of being in 'condition'. Often this 'danger' was connected to training environments, especially to high-altitude, 'cold' places. Before I went to either place, I was told that Bekoji and Debre Tabor - both at over 3,000m above sea-level - were 'very dangerous' for their altitude. Below is an extract from my fieldnotes from the training camp in Gondar in Northern Ethiopia:

'This morning coach Desaleyn led our training run himself, in the forest at the base of Guna mountain. The runners ended up strung out in a long line, and we were led up slopes so steep that we had to use tree roots to scramble up with our hands. On a couple of occasions we had to scale five-foot tall stone walls, which meant the train of runners came to a complete standstill, while at others we sped up and the stragglers were in danger of getting lost in the mist; you could barely see a metre in front of you. At one point when we had come to a halt whilst waiting for people to climb a wall, one of the athletes turned to me, a grin on his face and said 'coach is crazy sometimes.' When we returned, Berhanu stripped down to his running shorts and took a cold shower outside. 'Aren't you cold?' I asked him. Shivering violently, he shouted, in English, 'no! I'm not cold, I am a very dangerous man!'

To consciously seek out places such as this was to recognise the risks inherent in a running career, in a sense to tempt fate. As Zaloom (2004) notes, 'explorations of active, intentional engagements with risk are particularly underdeveloped [...] and represent an area where anthropology can intervene productively' (366). Engagements with risk have typically been made in the realm of economics in the North (Guyer, 2007, Tsing, 2000), whilst Strange (1997) has coined the term 'casino capitalism' to denote the positive light in which contingency and risk are viewed by futures markets and speculative finance. A growing literature,

Gaibazzi and Gardini (2015) note, also concerns the growth of lotteries and gambling. They write that 'people excluded from the mechanisms of accumulation are nevertheless exposed to this elusive logic' (Gaibazzi and Gardini, 2015). The runners' active, bodily engagement with risk and contingency therefore offers an ethnographically grounded look at both the 'productive life of risk' (Zaloom, 2004) and its more detrimental and damaging side.

My attention on especially difficult forest runs would be completely focused on the constantly changing metre of ground at my feet, on avoiding rocks and tree roots and - simply - on staying upright. Training runs were often discussed for hours at a time, the places and environments plotted the night before as though we were going on a dawn raid. Training was made to feel like an event, a sense of adventure created from what could otherwise become a boring and mundane activity. On occasions running with my friend Fasil in the forest near Kotebe, where we lived, he would deliberately take us through the areas most densely populated by hyenas, grinning and picking up a stone if we saw one. In Hailye's case too he seemed to be to consciously trying to seek out, rather than minimise, discomfort; a reminder to himself of what he is able to endure. On several occasions I took a *GoPro* camera with me to record our runs in the forest, and to facilitate discussion of routes and training practices. After a particularly hilly run in the forest, Fasil explained our route thus:

'Well, you know, it's the forest. It has ups and downs (watawred). You can't always find a comfortable place in the forest (hull gizey chukka wist yetemechachey bota atagenim). You may face hills unexpectedly. Training is like that. Running is like that, you cannot run and achieve everything at the first attempt, there will be ups and downs before you are successful. Like in the forest. Look here, first we ran in the ploughed field, then over lots of stones, then the field, then again forest. If we keep

training like this, our hard times will be over. If we train like this, up and down.'

Here the 'ups and downs' of training in the forest, the unexpected obstacles, the hills and the stones, are explicitly used as a metaphor for the running career. Contingency and risk are presented as not only inherent parts of training but as a necessary barrier through which to pass on your way to success, to be negotiated actively and with skill. Through making explicit the risks inherent in running in the forest, runners like Fasil actively draw on the sense of indeterminacy and precarity that the running career entails. As Miyazaki (2006) found in the context of Japanese derivatives and venture capitalist markets, the higher the risks associated with a particular activity, the greater the relationships of trust underpinning them needed to be. Running in the middle of the night was an activity Hailye and Fasil had done without my knowledge in the first six months of fieldwork; only when they trusted me was I invited to join them.

In this chapter I have shown how quotidian concerns with monitoring and controlling energy expenditure dominate the lives of runners in Ethiopia. I have demonstrated the ways in which 'condition' is associated with withdrawal from the everyday activities of the majority of young people in Addis, patience and the acceptance of suffering. Decisions about accessing particular environmental resources – or benefitting from the 'air conditions' in certain places – or about obtaining particular foods, are decisions about the allocation of scarce economic resources as well as decisions about the protection of limited energy levels. Their knowledge and awareness of metabolic and energetic limits are inflected with their perspective on the economy and development.

Whilst runners were acutely aware of the risks inherent in a career as an athlete, of their vulnerability, and of the precarious nature of 'condition,' I have also demonstrated how on occasion runners voluntarily embrace especially risky and

exhausting forms of training, explaining how this brings to the surface and makes visible concerns about the 'ups and downs' of a career as a runner. In the following chapter I describe how concerns about energy levels and 'condition' operate not only at the level of individual bodies but are rather trans-bodily, meaning that training together is characterised by intense intersubjective moral labour. I explain how a collective training morality is built on a strong attention to hard work and virtuous suffering on behalf of others, and a moral economy of shared energy and duty, and elaborate upon the connection between risk and trust in the context of group training which I have begun to develop here.

## Chapter Two: 'Training Alone is Just for Health': Energy, Efficiency and Trust.

'Training alone is just for health. To be changed you have to run with others.'

– Mesgebe, young runner.

'We are in the days when athletes cannot eat together, cannot enjoy together, cannot relax together. They do not trust each other.'

– Hailye, sub-agent, *Moyo Sports*.

In a context of intense aspiration, where every young runner knows - at least vaguely - someone who went abroad and made tens of thousands of dollars in their first race 'outside' of Ethiopia, but in which ever-increasing competition and dwindling prize money narrow the odds against doing so, in this chapter I ask what morally good and virtuous sociality looks like for an Amhara Orthodox Christian runner. Running is seen as a unique way to 'change your life' in Ethiopia, capable of generating enough money in one race to sustain someone for the rest of their lives. And yet, in a sport in which people compete alone, distance runners see training with others as absolutely vital for their success, as the quotation above from Mesgebe demonstrates. Ethnographic work on the Amhara (Levine, 1965; Messay, 1999; Malara 2017) has emphasised a view of man (*sew*) as essentially selfish, humanity being raw material that without the moral and collective constraints of religion, kinship duties, laws and punishment will seek self-satisfaction. As such, the collective training environment, demanding self-sacrifice and the assumption of 'responsibility' towards the team, demands intense intersubjective moral labour.

As Boylston (2012) notes, the Ethiopianist literature has identified a tension between hierarchy and commensality, and yet has tended to emphasise the former. He phrases the tension like this.

‘Ethiopian Orthodox Christians understand people to be basically individualistic and perhaps fundamentally selfish, but they do not consider this to be a good thing. Rather, individualistic urges must be tempered at all times by social and moral constraints, principal among which are ethics of visiting and commensality. Eating and drinking together counteracts the centrifugal motion of individual people pursuing their own ends.’ (207)

For Ethiopian runners, I argue that a collective training morality is built through a strong attention to hard work and virtuous suffering on behalf of the self *which is also* on behalf of others. Runners must work to control themselves and their energy levels in order to protect their own careers but also the careers of their friends and teammates. In this chapter I begin by describing correct running sociality through a discussion of the sharing of energy and food between runners. The discourse surrounding morally good training is predicated on the notion that good results can be achieved only within a moral economy of sharing energy and duties, and a responsibility to something bigger than yourself - the group of athletes and the coach, but ultimately something more and higher, the God who has the power to reward such morally good behaviour and punish selfishness (Levine, 1965). For this reason it is important that training is synchronous and that it is visible. In the second half of the chapter I go on to describe in ethnographic detail several instances in which a fair and equal sociality of energy sharing is transgressed through three principal examples; pacemaking problems, doping and *matat* (witchcraft), explaining how these are framed as immoral. Finally, I explore how these ‘short-cuts’ or immoral ways of

gaining energy are associated with urbanity and modernity, and how such 'selfish' attitudes are presented as being perpetuated by the sport itself.

### **Pacemaking and Sharing the Burden**

Ethiopian athletes believe strongly that training in a group is the only way to improve. I was told frequently that training alone was just 'for health', and that 'if you want to be changed' you have to train with others. Runners trained in a single-file line of athletes, following a 'leader' who decided upon the route and was seen as expending the most energy. Following was seen as much easier than leading, and runners sought to synchronise their steps by 'following each other's feet' and staying extremely close together. The principal way in which concerns about relational energy played out was in the allocation and performance of obligations to 'share the pace' in training. As it was put in one post-training meeting by a runner concerned to time his 'condition' with an upcoming race, 'a person who pushes, especially in the build-up to a race, is killing himself and he is killing others' (*katesato pace balay yemihedow saw batalay wudeder yalow kahuna erasun erasonim lelonim yegudelay naw*). Pacing each other responsibly, and sharing energy in this way, was vitally important. Coach Messeret's response to the comment above was to say, 'let me tell you one thing: if you don't lead, you won't win. And if you don't follow you can't win either.' That is to say, you need to lead in order to invest in the group, and you need to follow because if you always run alone you will 'burn yourself up' by exerting too much energy. As I will go on to explain later in the chapter, attempts to gain an advantage over the group by following more than you lead, or by deliberately 'disturbing the pace,' was seen as extremely morally reprehensible behaviour.

It was very rare to see someone running on their own, even on the 'easy' training days in the forest, and on 'bus' days when we travelled to train in a group, pacemaking responsibilities were carefully divided up before the start of training. The ideal situation was that everyone did their 'fair' share of setting the pace,

which was understood to involve expending more energy than running in the group, although the stronger runners were by necessity given more 'responsibility' than others; Messeret 'gave' the first five kilometres to the weakest runners and the final 5km to the strongest to ensure that everyone had the 'responsibility' for the pace at some point. Given the precision required of those in charge of setting the pace - they were expected to be no more than a couple of seconds off Messeret's required speed per kilometre - the concentration required by the leaders was significant. Splitting up the pacemaking duties was therefore also intended to decrease the likelihood of fluctuations in pace that were seen as unnecessarily costly in energy terms, with the overall aim being to 'cover' the training session without 'losing anything', that is, without using too much energy and, importantly, *without using more than other people*. According to this division of running labour, one could gain in value only when installed within a collective, which resonates with other aesthetic, religious and social celebrations of togetherness in Ethiopia (Malara, 2017). There was therefore a strong moral discourse attached to pacemaking responsibilities, and discussions of pacemaking and whether or not certain people 'did their turn' often dominated post-training discussions. The following is a short extract from my fieldnotes.

'Gojjam, Atalay and I stopped after 15km in Sebeta this morning. They had both been dropped by the main group, and decided to wait for the bus by the roadside instead of finishing the full 20km. We sat on a pile of concrete slabs outside a cafe to avoid the stream of jerrycan-laden donkeys moving down the road. Gojjam coughed and spat some mucus at his feet. 'I did your turn at the front today,' he said to Atalay, 'and my soul almost came out.' He coughed some more before adding, 'leading is hard, it's like carrying someone else's burden.'

Clearly there is a very strong link between morality and pacemaking here. Gojjam expresses his effort in terms not of his body - which was clearly hurting, he was sick moments before this - but in terms of his soul. The implication is that the pacemaking here was harder because it was not his turn; because he was doing Atalay's 'duty'. Things are potentially rewarding because they are hard, and they are harder when they involve ethical work performed for others. Athletes 'sacrificed' their energy for others knowing - as in other sacrificial contexts - that the gift of their energy would have a return for them, but one that cannot quite be foreseen or calculated at the moment of giving. After training, the first question Messeret usually asked was, 'how was the pace? Did everyone do their duty?' He often berated the athletes for their silence in these post-training discussions, as he would often ask five or six questions and receive only a two word answer ('*konjo naw*' - it was beautiful / fine). If someone failed to 'do their duty' at the front, or else 'disturbed the pace' and ran too fast, however, this would usually elicit a lengthy and heated exchange of views. In a context of general secrecy - in one particular outburst Messeret shouted that, 'you will remain silent now, athletes only want to talk behind each other's backs in the forest!' - the willingness to accuse each other directly in the situation describe below implies that it is seen as too important to remain silent about. When I asked Messeret about the purpose of splitting up pacemaking responsibilities and the advantages for energy conservation privately, however, he made it clear that for him the most important thing about pacemaking was its symbolic value;

Messeret: 'They think that they burn more energy as the leader! But almost they cover the same distance, in the same time, with the same sort of calorific intake, but they feel like they've burnt too much energy. Why? It is a psychological fear!'

Michael: 'But it must be important to have pace-makers, though? Otherwise you wouldn't bother?'

Messeret: 'They don't want to be in front to confront the pressure inside themselves, but air pressure is naturally over there. They have to face! The effect of air pressure is almost nil to cost energy. Almost nil. But they think that they are carrying someone behind them and their energy is pulled back and they are costing more energy. So they don't want to lead, because they don't want to be pacemaking. Ahh, ahh, ahh! It takes time to change such kind of attitude. It is a kind of ignorance for me.'

Messeret is clearly sceptical about the physical importance of shared pacemaking here, putting the athletes' belief that energy expenditure at the front and back of the group is vastly different down to 'ignorance'. And yet in his post-training discussions and the way in which he structures training sessions he constantly reiterates the importance of pacemaking in terms of shared responsibility and collective effort. This discourse of bodily-ethical labour of the runner for other runners was vital to ensuring the unity of the team and to preventing tensions from arising between the runners.

Between men and women, the pacemaking relationship was slightly different. Often a training group would pay a male pacemaker to lead the entirety of each run, so the responsibility of 'sharing' the pace and dividing energetic resources was less of an issue. On non-bus training days though, it was common for men to pace women in less formal arrangements, often resulting from personal relationships. Hailye would do this for his girlfriend Kumeshi, who was a strong marathon runner who trained in the group of an Italian manager. He spoke about their relationship, and the importance of pacemaking, as follows:

'When I am pacing her I am thinking about changing our lives. If we want to change our lives, we have to deserve and we have to do things properly. There are challenges, like she might not like the pace, or she will give instructions like, 'go this way!' and there are times when I think,

'I can do training on my own, running is rubbish' kind of thing. Negative thoughts come to your mind. But she is understanding and thoughtful and before we run she tells me, 'I want to work on this today.' So I am helping from the bottom of my heart, I am not simply jogging with her. Our aim is to be successful, so I am helping her to be successful. But on the other hand you are thinking, it is human beings, human beings can change their mind, if I keep training her, training her and then she becomes a famous athlete and at some point she changes her mind, then I was spending all this time when I could have been doing something for myself. But when I see her I know that she is morally good. I see that she is so kind.'

Again, the theme of virtuous suffering on behalf of others comes out of the above. It is notable that Hailye is helping 'from the bottom of [his] heart' – the motivation and feeling with which he runs are an important determinant of success. In this relationship more than in more symmetrical relationships between male runners, however, concerns about the inherent untrustworthiness of human beings come to the fore. Hailye invests his own energy in building Kumeshi's 'condition' for the Warsaw marathon, running with her daily or twice daily for months, a process which resulted in her winning \$18,000 and being able to buy land on which to build a house.

### **When Pacemaking Goes Wrong**

The best training sessions, according to coach Messeret, are those where the transitions between pacemakers all go smoothly and everyone does their 'duty' in a 'responsible' way, where the pace never fluctuates by more than a couple of seconds per kilometre. It is a rare day, though, when all of the athletes are feeling good, and sometimes other runners have to step in to 'bear the burden' of pacing on their behalf. When there is a problem with the pacemaking, it is expected to be solved without discussion; if someone who is supposed to be

pacemaking drops back, it is seen as his responsibility to get back to the front without being cajoled into it by his teammates. Likewise, if a runner misjudges the pace, as in the example below, they are expected to correct it without being told. If someone else has to step in to replace a runner who cannot keep up the pace, this too is expected to be done without comment. There is a strong moral discourse attached to this, as the following quote from Hailye demonstrates:

‘If you are morally good, there is no hesitation, and no doubt, between friends. If I need to lead, I will lead. If my friend is leading, I will take over from him. He is not asking me to help him, but because I am morally good I know that if I do that I will get a reward from God. There is no argument, there is no blaming others. If people are morally good they know what is right and what is wrong; they have already differentiated.’

Through sharing responsibility, ‘good’ and ‘moral’ behaviour are mutually reinforced. An equal and fair sociality of pacemaking should be spontaneous, and heartfelt. It should stem from ‘love’ and respect for one’s team mates and also for something higher - the God who is responsible for dispensing punishment and reward. Given the strong rhetoric of collaboration and togetherness surrounding group training, when this ideal form of pacemaking breaks down it brings the tension between the individual and the collective into sharp focus.

The argument I will now go on to discuss began on the road at the end of a training session and continued after Messeret made the athletes get back into the bus to avoid making a scene in front of other training groups and the curious farmers who had gathered to observe. The two athletes, Tsedat and Atalay, were supposed to lead the 3rd 5km segment of a 20km run together. The dispute hinges on the fact that Tsedat thought that Atalay was running too fast (going ‘beyond the given pace’) and therefore dropped to the back of the group rather than running side-by-side with him at the front. When he felt that people were

criticising him unfairly for this, he lost the control the athletes are expected to have in training. He told the group he would stop after 15km and get in the bus and sprinted ahead of everyone. They let him go, but when he reached 15km he did not stop, instead running the final 5km in an absurdly fast (we were 2,700m above sea-level) 14.23, and finishing alone. The following is a long transcript, so I have broken it up with some annotations.

Atalay: 'Ah, you're so clever, you finished the session first. What a hero!'

Tsedat: 'Yeah, I'm a hero for myself (*inney lerasen gorbez nann*). On the hill you were going at a pace that felt easy and comfortable for you, not at the pace we were told to go...'

Atalay: 'Oh, well. You came first anyway, what a hero.'

Tsedat: 'Yeah, I'm a hero for myself.'

Here the narrative of teamwork, sharing and collective effort abruptly breaks down. When Tsedat repeats 'I am a hero for myself' he brings to the surface a reality that is scrupulously avoided in discussions of training; that the athletes *do* need to compete against each other and distinguish themselves in order to be selected to go to a race. It is important to emphasise how unusual this was - it only happened a couple of times in the course of fifteen months of fieldwork - and how significant. Tsedat did not come back to training for ten days after the incident. Outbursts of this kind confirmed the Amhara suspicion that man (*sew*) is essentially selfish, and will seek self-satisfaction if not restricted by the kind of collective moral discourse described in the previous section. It is the display of arrogance (*tigab*) that is especially objectionable here, *tigab* being seen as the chief sin in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, negating as it does dependency on God but also your mutual duties and responsibilities to others (Levine, 1965, Malara, 2017). This kind of self-serving arrogance was also connected to material desire and the acquisition of material goods, which I go on to describe later in this piece.

Messeret: 'What's the problem here, please be quiet and get in the bus...  
[...] OK, we're going to talk about this calmly and not interrupt each other.  
Firstly, Tsedat.'

Tsedat: 'The pace he was setting was too fast. We were going uphill, and the  
pace was under 3.00/km, so I decided to drop back and follow him. We were  
supposed to be running at an even pace, but it became like interval training.'

Messeret: 'OK, Atalay.'

Atalay: 'I was checking the time when we were running, and we were going  
3.07 pace. If he'd told me it was too fast, I would have slowed down, but he  
didn't say anything...'

Hunegnaw: 'Tsedat wasn't tired, he was just being mean...'

Tsedat: 'I don't understand why everyone is making out that it's my fault.  
My watch said 2.58, which was too fast, that's why I dropped back. I looked  
behind and there were only two or three people able to keep up, but when I  
tried to slow down Atalay kept nagging me to keep the pace high. Eventually  
I got annoyed, so I told them I would finish at 15km and kicked away from  
everyone and ran alone.'

Messeret: 'If you realised it was too fast, you should have said, "Atalay, it's  
too fast, the others are lagging behind. Please slow down a bit..."'

Hunegnaw: 'As you were given the responsibility, if the pace was too fast or  
too slow, you should have taken the initiative to say 'this is not the right  
pace.' The big mistake you made was this: if you really want us to believe  
that you were struggling, you should have dropped further back, not just  
behind Atalay. You really should have just told him that the pace was too  
fast...'

Tsedat: 'Why didn't you tell him?!'

Hunegnaw: 'I was too far behind!'

When Hunegnaw says that the 'real mistake' Tsedat made was in not dropping further back, he hints that what Tsedat was doing was *deliberately deceptive*; that he was consciously trying to gain an advantage by acting the way he did. The fact that these criticisms only come to the surface at the end of the session - that whilst they were running this all played out in silence - is also interesting. It was only because Tsedat 'kicked away' at the front, which was seen as a deliberate provocation, that this rupture of the discourse of 'sharing' came to the surface.

Tsedat: 'People are always shouting at me...'

Hunegnaw: 'No they're not, only Atalay is shouting at you.'

Tsedat: 'OK, next time I'll lead the whole session then, and you'll see who Tsedat really is...'

Messeret: 'Please don't talk to each other like this. We've been through this before. If you can do speed sessions at 3.00 pace, and endurance between 3.12 and 3.20, then if you don't win I'll have some explaining to do. The problem is not one of ability, it is a mentality problem, a lack of positivity. When someone is emotional, the others must be patient. When someone is angry, the others should mediate. We have to grow together. What I want Tsedat to take away from this is that he has to be responsible for doing his duty. He and Atalay had the capacity to lead the 3<sup>rd</sup> 5km. They can run 16.00 easily. That is why they weren't on the 2<sup>nd</sup> 5km, I knew that they had the capacity and strength for it because I know their potential.'

Here coach Messeret returns to the moral dimension of sharing pacemaking responsibilities. When he says that the athletes' must 'grow together' he is referring to more than sporting performance, but rather to a kind of character development or moral self-realisation. When he says that Tsedat's inability to help with pacing is 'not an ability problem,' but rather one of 'mentality' or 'lack of positivity' he clearly sides with the other athletes in seeing Tsedat's actions as a kind of moral failing, or unwillingness to take part in correct training sociality.

The 'mentality problem' is also something Messeret talks about with regard to athletes missing training sessions, which is also seen as an unwillingness to equalise energy expenditure; it is assumed that people miss training in order to save energy and gain an advantage in a subsequent training session. This was often a source of conflict as the runners claimed that they missed training in order to protect themselves from injury. I will return to the issue of failure to 'share' the pacemaking later on in this chapter, but for now I want to briefly discuss two other ways in which energy is shared or withheld by athletes; food and *matat*.

## Food

Energy is not seen by the athletes as 'bounded' and the property of one individual body. As with pacemaking responsibilities, the sociality of sharing and withholding food is extremely important amongst runners as it is in Amhara culture more generally (Boylston, 2013; Howard, 2018; Malara 2018). As Boylston (2013) puts it, 'eating together is the first sign of community belonging, and a regular prophylaxis against centrifugal, individualistic forces present in all humanity'. Much like with sharing the energetic 'burden' of pacemaking, the sharing of food and energy were seen as being most virtuous when unspoken, when somebody recognised the needs of another without being asked. This is how Messeret put it in his discussion of teamwork.

Messeret: 'Being human is more important than anything, so you have to respect each other. A person who respects others can communicate, can discuss, can learn. Someone who really helps someone else will be able to tell what they lack before they have to ask. Before I say I am hungry he will know I am. Before I say I am tired he will know. Then who will Berhanu's gold medal belong to?'

Teklemariam: 'Berhanu?'

Messeret: 'No, it will belong to the group.'

Here it is clear not only that athletes should ideally be extremely sensitive to the monitoring of their own bodies and energy levels but also to those of others. They should be constantly working on the distribution of energy between the group. It is also clear from the above the work that goes into creating a sense of the group as the unit of success as opposed to the individual, as Messeret has to remind Teklemariam of this. In fact, Messeret emphasised that there were 'strategies to accept teamwork,' with the example of inviting someone for food. In doing so he also drew the athletes' attention to the perceived difference between the 'previous generation' of athletes who worked together for success and the 'current generation,' seen as more individualistic. Here he refers to Haile Gebrselassie, the most famous Ethiopian runner, who was often helped to victory by other Ethiopian runners pacing him.

Messeret: 'There are strategies to accept teamwork! "Hailye, have you eaten lunch? No? OK, come to Werku Bikila's butcher" We have to develop this first. Honestly, he used to order and take it for him. What about now?'

Abere: 'If a friend calls when I am sleeping, I tell him I am sleeping'  
[everyone laughs]

Messeret: 'We have become selfish.'

Much of the joking that went on during the bus trips to and from training had to do with the sharing or withholding of food. Each Friday, when we went to training on asphalt, considered to be the most energy-intensive, all of the athletes contributed 5 or 10 *birr* each to buy around 15 kilos of bananas on the way back from training, and these were meticulously shared out to ensure that they were divided fairly. If someone did not have the money for this, someone would normally chip in double, but this would be done ostentatiously and often contributing more than one's fair share earned a round of applause from the other runners. For minor misdemeanours like missed training sessions, the coach

often announced publicly that the offending party had to 'sponsor' bread for everyone at the upcoming session, which met with cheering from the other athletes but was rarely actually observed. A particularly illuminating example of this came when Zeleke failed to 'do his duty' as a pacemaker, dropping off the pace before it was his 'turn.' This Messeret blamed on his being distracted by trying to build a house in his hometown of Debre Birhan; he had travelled there a couple of times recently, and, because he was waiting to receive prize money from China, had run out of money to feed *himself* well. Their conversation after training was as follows;

Messeret: 'Because money comes and goes you need to sleep and eat well in order to do your training properly.'

Zeleke: 'I'm so tired I have no response.'

Messeret: 'I didn't ask you to respond...'

Zeleke: 'Let's go home.'

Messeret: 'No. You will sponsor the team on Friday by buying bread and bananas.'

Zeleke: 'I can't.'

Teklemariam: 'No one is allowed to be absent.'

Zeleke: 'Please, Teklemariam, I thought you were a nice guy.'

Messeret: 'I will bring your salary and feed them.'

Zeleke: 'My salary comes into my bank account so you can't.'

Messeret: 'I'll show you, I'm the one who sends it.'

Aseffa: 'I promise to sponsor alongside Zeleke.'

Zenebu: 'Everyone clap!' (clapping)

Messeret: 'How much money will he need Tadesse?'

Tadesse: '150.'

Messeret: 'And bananas?'

Tadesse: '250 altogether.'

Messeret: 'I'm telling you seriously, Zeleke.'

Zelege: 'What did I do wrong?

Messeret: Nothing, but you should sponsor the team.'

Zelege: 'You'd better all come.'

Fasil: [to me] 'Zelege will prepare a feast of bread and bananas on Friday so everybody must come!'

Michael: 'OK, why?'

Fasil: 'Because Zelege doesn't like to invite people.' (laughs)

Here Zelege's failure to take care of *his own* 'condition' by feeding himself adequately is seen as being detrimental *to the team as a whole*. Personal responsibility and responsibility to the team are thus made inseparable, as a failure of self-care is also a failure to care for others. When Messeret threatens to take Zelege's salary it is because he is also the coach of his club team, *Mebrat Hayle* (Ethiopian Electric Corporation), who pay Zelege 1,500 birr a month. Asking him to sponsor 250 *birr* worth of food therefore represents a significant expense - one sixth of his monthly salary. The importance of reciprocity in the giving and receiving of food is emphasised both by Zelege's 'you'd better all come' and by the reason Fasil gives for the punishment in the first place; that it is 'because Zelege doesn't like to invite people'. Usually the monitoring of reciprocity like this is presented jokingly. On the same bus ride Tsedat joked that 'I can't afford to invite everyone for lunch when they are hungry, so I'll invite people when they have already eaten, then I'll make a really thin *beso* (roasted barley drink) so they all have to pee, and then when they go out to pee I'll lock the door behind them'. This was met with laughter from the other runners. As with scheming to think of ways of gaining a training advantage (by going to higher altitude for example), the implication here is that it's acceptable to aim to receive more than one gives in these exchanges of food.

On another occasion an athlete who had recently moved to Addis came to our compound to sign a contract with the management group. I asked him about

where he was living, and he said he had moved to Sendafa, 15km away from where most of the athletes live in Kotebe, because the rent was cheaper (he said he paid around \$12 a month in Sendafa). He told me that he lived with another runner and that whichever of them returned from training first would prepare breakfast. I was surprised by this relationship and said so to Hailye, who responded thus:

‘That’s because they only just come, they are new to Addis, or to Sendafa anyway and came from a rural area. You will see after two months, they will not cook for each other. One will become selfish and come late, and one will be cooking and cooking. For instance, if we went to training together and we come back, and you sleep, and I cook and feed you, I am not getting any rest. You are resting and eating as well. You’re going to be much stronger than me.’

The implication here is that the individualistic behaviour of trying to seek an advantage over others by saving more energy is seen to be a characteristic of the city and the competitive nature of the sport itself. When we were all invited to one athlete’s house because his wife had recently had a baby, we all chipped in and bought a sheep from a local market, which was served an hour or so later on large communal plates outside. Several of the athletes filmed everyone eating, and for an hour or so afterwards this footage was reviewed along with comments like, ‘look! She is eating and never talking!’ or, ‘look at him! He’s like a hyena.’ In spite of these comments, the filming made eating quite a self-conscious experience, as people tried to ensure that no-one thought they were taking more than their fair share and trying to take advantage of the situation. Eating together in a large group was in fact quite rare, and it tended to be only a certain core group who turned up to such social occasions. This group was largely Amhara and Orthodox Christian; the Oromo athletes rarely came, and nor did the Protestants, or newly arrived athletes who did not know others in the group very well. I now go on to describe the importance of visibility and

synchrony of training before discussing *metat*, the principal form of witchcraft of concern to runners, which explains the suspicion and dislike for proximity described above.

### Visibility, Synchronicity and Stolen Energy

Boylston (2013) has described the importance of eating together in creating a sense of belonging and avoiding ‘centrifugal, individualistic forces.’ As I have described above, this was of paramount concern for the runners with whom I trained as well, and it was important that eating was both visible and equitable. But it was important not only to take in but also to *expend* energy together. It was the synchronicity of training that rendered it moral. Before going on to discuss *metat*, then, it is important to emphasise that practices like running alone, especially at night, in darkness (*‘ba chelema’*) were seen as not that different to performing *metat*. When I injured my knee and was unable to train for a few weeks, the runners joked that it was because I had been running *‘ba lelit’* (in the night) with Fasil. This would have necessitated running on the roads and therefore explained why I had a problem with my knee. It was often Fasil who was accused of this kind of anti-social training practice, a characterisation that went along with him having a reputation for being a *jibb* (hyena) around food. Both over-eating and training without the bounds of the visible group environment were seen as reprehensible behaviour.

For a few days towards the end of my fieldwork, we were unable to travel in the team bus to our usual training locations because of the anti-government protests. When we returned to training after a week we went to the dirt track at Legetafo to do ‘speed’ training. I observed the session with coach Messeret as I was still suffering from a problem in my knee. Rather than the usual group, the runners were unusually dispersed on the track, running their repetitions in smaller groups. Messeret kept shaking his head as he looked at the watch, and explained the runners’ diminished ‘condition’ thus.

‘Most of the time if you give them a few days of personal training they push the stress and intensity up, and then they feel too exhausted. They don’t recover when you call them back to the normal sessions. If you give them one or two days, they push ahead of their capacity because they think they can improve when they increase the intensity alone.’

From the above it seems clear that part of the logic of training as a group is to avoid this kind of damaging centrifugal drive; to push ‘beyond your capacity’ in pursuit of individual advancement is seen as damaging as well as morally suspect. This extended to the general attitude towards being alone, even when ‘resting’ after training. For the most part this was explained in terms of staving off ‘negative thoughts,’ but it also worked as a way of ensuring that after people had trained together, they also took the same amount of rest and recuperated in the same manner before the next training run.

Concerns about individuals giving in to purely individual desire at the expense of others were often expressed through explanations of *metat*, the principal form of witchcraft available to runners. I was told that it worked by allowing the perpetrator to ‘steal’ some of the effected runner, or runners’ energy. In many cases where a runner mysteriously felt a lack of energy, or picked up an injury that they could not explain, they put it down to *metat*, which was performed through materially mediated contact - handshaking, obtaining sweaty items of clothing, or through food. Here coach Messeret discusses the issue. When I asked him about it, we were standing on a hillside in Sendafa, overlooking the city from around 25km away, at an altitude of 2,800m:

‘Maybe, you will not be forever fit. Sometimes, your fitness will go, sometimes come, sometimes condition comes and condition goes. So when their condition is gone, they think, ‘oh it is metat’ and they leave

training and go to holy water and get baptised and come back. Psychologically, since education is poor, psychologically they are victims. That is why they don't want to touch each other, they don't want to mix their clothes, even they don't trust each other to eat together, to live together and so on and so on. For me the best thing would be to have the athletes live here; the temperature is nice, it's clean and natural. There's no pollution. But to live around here there must be a camp. Most athletes are not interested to stay in a camp. Put it under a question mark what the meaning of *menfas* [spirits] is. If they live together, the spirit of somebody else can catch somebody else's energy, they believe that. The other thing is, who invites you to their home as a guest to invite you to eat? No-one is free from that thinking. It can destroy the trust they have.'

In this instance Messeret seems sceptical. This is him speaking from the point of view of the Masters-level educated coach. He makes it very clear that he sees a strain underlying the outward unity of the team, and he puts it down to backwardness on the athletes' part, to 'psychological weakness.' On another occasion, however, one of the female athletes collapsed on the side of the road during a long run. She wailed and hit her head off the ground, speaking in a language that neither the coach nor the bus driver could understand before reverting to Amharic and shouting 'lightning, lightning, help me!' Messeret leapt out of the bus clutching a bible and a plastic bottle of Holy Water which he proceeded to empty over her head. He held the bible over her, straddled her body with his legs and slapped her roughly on the face and chest, before squeezing her throat with both of his hands. He seemed more angry with her than concerned, and when she came round he hustled her back into the bus away from the small crowd that had gathered.

When I asked him to talk about what had happened and why the runner had collapsed, he told me that the *menfas* (spirits) do not like hard work, and that

was why they afflicted athletes when they were trying to train. The holy water, he said, was a temporary measure that allowed the athlete to finish the session. We drove to catch up to the group again, where she was forced off the bus. It is interesting here that Messeret, whilst sceptical about *matat*, obviously respects its effects enough to take these kinds of precautions. The idea that the spirit dislikes hard work is also interesting, as it lends a clear moral dimension to the idea of 'stealing' someone's energy that resonates with other scholars' work on witchcraft in Africa regarding the suspicious nature of 'tak[ing] without sweat' (Geschiere, 2013, 82))

In Geschiere's 'Witchcraft, Intimacy and Trust,' (2013) he writes that 'in modern contexts as well, everyday life is still haunted by the tensions between, on the one hand, the fear of an intimacy that can give the ones who are close a dangerous hold over you and, on the other, the need to establish at least some form of trust with one's intimates in order to collaborate' (101). This statement sums up the paradox the runners face quite neatly. As I have elaborated upon previously, running entails a constant and careful monitoring both of one's own 'condition' and that of the other runners in your training group. They recognise that they must operate as a tight-knit group during training in order to benefit from sharing each other's energy, and yet there is always at least some underlying suspicion and wariness that accompanies this. Often, runners will deny being in condition, as the extract below demonstrates;

Tsedat: 'Mike! Aseffa is in condition'

Aseffa: 'He's lying, he's lying, it's him who is in "condition"'

The ideal situation for the training group would be equal and synchronous training, where everyone 'shares the pace' equally, and everyone takes care of themselves in order to care for the group. Whilst Hailye would constantly reiterate that 'there are no medals in training, there are no dollars here!' if he felt that the group was becoming too competitive, the truth was, however, that

those who performed best in training would be selected to run abroad. In a sense then, training sessions could present a more competitive environment than a 'low level' race in Turkey or the Czech Republic for instance, where they might 'only' have to run against two or three other East African athletes.

### Running and Individualism

When I asked coach Messeret about the breakdown of collaboration over pacemaking he had the following to say:

'The misuse of the pacing system is created if one of them is not interested in the other, so my job as a coach is to create trust first, and then to develop confidence based on the trust they have in each other [...] but the problem is that nowadays most people are becoming selfish, so they don't want to lose energy for you. They just want to be benefitted upon your shoulders. They don't want to cost energy but they want to gain. So it is not cleverness but a kind of selfishness.'

Here Messeret draws attention to the conflicts that can arise as a result of unbalanced, or asymmetrical sharing of energy resources. The job of the coach thus becomes creating mutuality and mutual responsibility within the group, and Messeret accepts that this is not a given but rather a project of specific work of surveillance and discipline. Hailye discusses this too, but rather than merely putting selfishness down to a problem of modernity ('nowadays') he thinks it is specifically a problem related to *athletics itself*:

'You know, the environment itself changes your behaviour. Athletics itself. Like they were famers before, they helped each other with farming, harvesting, collecting grains and making a house and stuff like that, but athletics by itself is a competition. You train for competition, you compete. Life itself is a competition for them when they come to athletics. By hook or by crook they want to achieve something better

than their friends. They become selfish, they become egotistical. Rather than help each other, they think, 'if I help him, he's going to be better than me, he's going to be stronger than me, so I shouldn't help him.'

The process of 'adaptation' through training was seen by my informants as one that was available to everyone equally. Rather than being down to chance or genetic circumstance, 'condition' was always seen as directly related to the way in which one acted, and was judged relative to those runners who are closest to you. The precarious, hard-won nature of this 'condition' can make for fraught relationships and can be a real cause of stress for the runners. That the winner-takes-all structure of the sport itself creates these conditions was not in doubt for Hailye. The intensity of individual aspiration surrounding running meant that intense moral effort was demanded to retain a sense of mutuality and submission to the coach. The sudden improvement of an individual - especially if it made them extremely wealthy - was seen as suspicious, because Ethiopian Orthodox thought postulates that the comforts and advancements of modern life cannot be ultimately beneficial to humanity, as human destiny is to be sought through submission to the will of God. The two athletes I have described in detail in this chapter had both recently won a large amount of money in China, and this sudden wealth was a major source of the tensions that arose. The connection between sudden success, perceived as inappropriate or unfair, and suspicions about witchcraft and doping, are clear in the following quotation from Hailye, our sub-agent. Here he is discussing two famous athletes, so I will not use their names.

'Regarding metat, people talk and talk. You can ask, is it really true that xxx used to run with metat? They say that now that everyone is going to Holy Water he is unable to even qualify from the heats. But was that really metat or did he use an injection? And to take another example, there is xxx. He was beaten by Aseffa [an athlete in our group] in the club

only two years ago. So how, in only two years, can he come to represent the country in the Olympics? In just two years' time? Why does he not do well in the World Championships and Olympics, but only run well with money?'

Here Hailie makes a clear comparison between doping (injections) and *metat*, both of which are seen as immoral 'shortcuts' to success that bypass the morally virtuous route of collective sacrifice and patience. And crucially, these short-cuts are associated with money as the main motivating factor rather than more acceptable motivations such as representing your country in the Olympics or World Championships.

In this chapter I have described the intense intersubjective moral labour that goes into maintaining the group training environment. Through describing the various ways in which this collective sense of work and virtuous suffering on behalf of others can break down I have indicated the tensions between the individual and the group, and the intense competition that lies beneath the discourse about morally good training. In the following chapter I explore the tension between communal work and individual responsabilisation in more detail, examining how a disposition characterised by silence and submission to authority (as described in this chapter) can exist alongside more active and agentive attempts to create a 'chance' to race 'outside' of Ethiopia.

## Chapter Three: 'This is Business': Ethiopian Runners in a Global Marketplace.

'This is business! Think carefully, business has bankruptcy and profit. If the owner is a clever merchant, he can be profitable. If he is not a clever merchant, he will lose the gamble. Because the flow of water depends on the ground.'

– Coach Messeret

'People do many different things to generate income, and the way they earn money is very different. When you get your income from running you are proving what you have and what you have done in front of people. For instance, merchants are cheating someone and earning something that way, but in running you enjoy running, and you get what you deserve.'

- Aseffa, marathon runner.

The ultimate aim of all Ethiopian runners is to create a 'chance' to run in a race 'outside' of Ethiopia where they could potentially make a life-changing amount of money. Professional long-distance running is both 'neoliberal' and 'millennial': deeply individualising, wrought with insecurity and personal risk, underpinned by speculation and casino capitalism. Elite level professional running, in which athletes train in groups but compete alone, is an especially powerful site for exploring the dynamics of communal work and individual responsabilisation. As the quotations above make clear, the disposition required of a runner was a subject of dispute, and the tension between an approach characterised by patience and silence and one defined by striving and attempting to create a 'chance' for oneself is the central concern of this chapter. Through making an

analytical distinction between two Ethiopian notions of ‘chance’ I describe two theories of agency – both of them individual, but which diverge in the ways in which they enlist people (or do not), the temporality of their deployment and their results. Existing as a runner was to teeter between two systems of belief, to have faith in yourself but also to place yourself in the pull of social and environmental forces in such a way as to increase the likelihood of ‘changing your life.’ What we often think of as ‘neoliberal’ transformations represent, in the Ethiopian context at least, a partial continuation of pre-existing values and culture.

Anna Tsing (2005) writes that according to popular stories of global motion, ‘motion itself [...] would be experienced as self-actualisation, and self-actualisation without restraint would oil the machinery of the economy, science and society [...] In fact, motion does not proceed this way at all. How we run depends on what shoes we have to run in’ (38). Mindful of this appropriate metaphor, throughout this chapter I ask which kinds of skills a runner needs beyond the skill of running. How is the running self cultivated in relation to others? What kinds of capitals are learnt and how? And above all, how do runners experience and mediate ‘chance’ in various ways?

### **From Conversion to Adaptation**

In a published conversation with Alex De Waal, Meles Zenawi, the former Prime Minister of Ethiopia and architect of the Ethiopian developmental state, articulated his aims as follows. The class base of the state was to be ‘an atomized and satisfied peasantry: atomized in the sense that the peasantry are becoming capitalist and have abandoned their allegiances to intermediate social entities’ (De Waal, 2018, 2). To actively seek atomisation of social relations would seem to be in line with a ‘neoliberal’ agenda rather than that of a developmental state, and here I seek to explore how individualisation emerges in the interrelation of various factors and forces as opposed to merely as a result of broad brush

'neoliberal tendencies'.

Marco Di Nunzio (2015) has argued that to see Ethiopia's developmental, authoritarian state as operating in opposition to neoliberal practices is to simplify neoliberalism by assuming that it is necessarily opposed to the activism and interventionism of the state. Neoliberalism is, he argues, 'first of all, a political project about the state and its functions and roles in society' (1185). Di Nunzio examines state-run entrepreneurship schemes in Addis Ababa to argue that the state is thus able to cast sections of unemployed youth as personally responsible for their poverty and exclusion, arguing that according to this perspective, 'social inequalities are understood as an inevitable consequence of economic growth, while the position that individuals occupy in society is an effect of their actions.' (1192) He quotes the statute adopted by the EPRDF's 4<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, which states that the government's system of entrepreneurship schemes was intended to work in such a way that 'those who show productive results obtain progress, and those who do not, will receive nothing' (EPRDF, 2006: 39, quoted Di Nunzio, 2015: 1194).

This way of thinking, involving as it does the creation of an individualised, 'responsibilised' citizen, who, as Ferguson (2009) puts it, 'comes to operate as a miniature firm, responding to incentives, rationally assessing risks, and prudently choosing from among different courses of action' (172) was one that was encouraged by our coach, Messeret, who repeatedly told athletes that they needed to take 'responsibility' for their own performances. In Ferguson's (2009) discussions of the 'uses' of the term 'neoliberal,' however, he explicitly claims that this particular 'understanding of the neoliberal' in terms of individualised, internalised traits does not apply 'in the African sense.' In Africa, he claims, neoliberalism has meant the 'policy measures that were forced on African states in the 1980s - policies that have more in common with older, liberal, laissez faire economic policies'. In short, for Ferguson neoliberalism is something that is done

to African countries, the 'crude battering open of third world markets' (172) as he puts it. The way in which Messeret wanted runners to plan their careers and 'take responsibility,' however, actually fits remarkably well with the 'Anglo-Foucauldian' rationality Ferguson claims is absent in Africa. But it is certainly not the whole picture, and it was not the only way in which runners thought about their running. As I will go on to argue, two distinct ways of thinking about the future were able to co-exist in Ethiopian runners' thinking, leading to a distinctly ambivalent attitude towards success and failure.

A simple version of the way in which 'neoliberal' practices transform sporting subjectivities has been described by Esson (2013; 2015), and assumes a shift from an understanding of the self as collectively produced towards the Foucauldian 'entrepreneur of the self, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings' (Foucault, 2008 [1978]: 224). Dolan and Rajak (2016) have focused ethnographic attention on youth entrepreneurs to trace the individual 'transformations' that youth entrepreneurship schemes seek to bring about. They note a shift in the development literature from an assumption that entrepreneurial spirit was somehow innate or indigenous to Africa, needing only to be 'unleashed' towards an approach that seeks to train and produce entrepreneurs through specific interventions. Seeking to look beyond the 'lure of entrepreneurial possibility' they argue that such 'bottom of the pyramid' schemes can be 'risk-ridden and precarious, spinning survivalism into resilience, and "getting by" into resourcefulness, leaving individuals responsible' for finding solutions to socially produced problems.

Dolan and Rajak argue that individualising exhortations to 'help oneself' rely on explicit 'acculturation' to the 'entrepreneurial habitus,' involving new ways of calculating and a major temporal shift from 'here-and-now' survival towards a 'goal-oriented, future thinking [...] personal teleology that embodies the

modernist preoccupations of classic developmentalist thinking' (523). Their analysis relies in large part on Bourdieu's (2000) paper, *Making the Economic Habitus: Algerian Workers Revisited* which suggests that there is such a 'mismatch' between 'the economic dispositions fashioned in a pre-capitalist economy' and the 'rationalised economic cosmos' of (colonised) modernity that we must speak not of 'adaptation' but rather of 'conversion' of the 'whole mindset' to the 'spirit of calculation' (23). It is this simple dichotomy that has been taken up by scholars of global sport like Esson (2013; 2015) who has argued that Ghanaian footballers 'seek to become Foucauldian "entrepreneurs of self" by investing in their human capital by becoming a professional footballer' (48).

To speak of 'conversion' to a completely new, individualistic mindset, however, is an oversimplification in the Ethiopian context. As numerous scholars (Boylston and Malara, 2016; Levine, 1965; Messay, 1999;) have explored, the idea of individualism is already there at the heart of Amhara culture. The question is how this pre-existing individualism is transformed when it comes into contact with neoliberal impulses. It is this new object that I seek to uncover and describe here. Whilst Bourdieu rejects the term 'adaptation' I actually think it is useful, not least because the word Ethiopian runners most often used to describe training in Amharic was *lememid*, which translates as 'adaptation'. The ways in which 'neoliberalism' asserts itself as a partial continuation of pre-existing values and culture is far better described as one of 'adaptation' – and selective 'adaptation' at that – than one of 'transformation'.

### **New Models of Individualism**

In the Ethiopian context Di Nunzio (2015) and Malara (2017) have described the ubiquitous nature of the cheaply printed self-help books on sale at roadside stalls in Addis, with Malara showing that this has been interpreted by some as a problematic occurrence and even, by exorcists, as a demonic threat. Our coach Messeret was almost always in possession of one of these books, cheaply printed

in either Amharic or English. Here he speaks about the difference he sees between the psychology outlined in such books and that of the runners.

‘Do you know the difference between Americans and people from other countries? There is a huge difference in terms of psychology. Most Americans think: I am the only person who can do this (he points to himself). I, I, I. I know, I have read many of their books. Psychologically they convince themselves: I, I, I am the person who can do this. I am first, I am first, I am first. They grow up like this. Go away Selamyhun, you can’t do this, Mekasha you can’t, Berhanu is ill, you can’t. you can’t you can’t. We have to try to come to this kind of thinking.’

Such books were popular because they contained the allure of the outside world and Western success but also because they resonate with a pre-existing notion of ambition and the self-aggrandising view of one’s possibilities described by Levine (1965) and Messay (1999). In a sense, then, it is not so much the beliefs themselves than the open way in which such books allow them to be articulated that is new and different. Messeret would use them to lean on when he wrote down the athletes’ times in training, and often snatched some reading time on our jolting bus journeys back from training. The mindset of books like ‘The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People’ was one he sought to instill upon the athletes in our post-training meetings. These books rely upon an idea of discipline in line with Foucault’s notion of work of the self upon the self, but in the Ethiopian context this discipline is not merely self-focused. Rather, it entails dyadic hierarchal relations (runner-coach) as well as a relational environment in which to work, in the runners’ case consisting of the training group in which people ‘share’ the responsibility to set the pace and there is a strong emphasis on ‘improving together.’

A tension sometimes arose between an idea of entrepreneurial spirit and

individual responsabilisation associated with modernity on the one hand, and a faith in chance, associated with passivity, on the other. Di Nunzio (2015) quotes an inscription on the gate of the 'Genius College' in Addis Ababa which read, 'Development is not by chance (*idil*), it is a matter of choice (*mirca*)' (1193). This particular view of *idil* as passive, however, would have been unfamiliar to my informants, for whom a chance was something that happened to someone but also something for which you had to work in order to be ready to seize the opportunity when it was presented. Whilst choosing to become a runner, and planning and 'adapting' as best as one could was clearly important to my informants, this would also have been a troubling and arrogant statement for many of them, as I will go on to explain.

The concept of *idil* was central to the way in which my informants thought about running. To associate it with passivity or fatalism, as the inscription on the college quoted above does, would not make sense for my informants, however, for whom the concept both helped to rationalise failure and also remained essentially speculative and hopeful. Writing of marginalised urban youth, Di Nunzio (2014) writes that young men described the 'existential balancing between opportunities and possibilities in the future by referring to the local notion of *idil*, a "chance" or better, a stroke of luck' arguing that they were 'not concerned so much with figuring out what the future will look like, but with exposing themselves to the possibility of getting a chance' (155). My informants too spoke of '*idil*,' in Amharic and also used the English word 'chance' to describe a specific opportunity, usually conveyed from 'outside' when speaking Amharic. Rather than conflate these two concepts, however, I think it is important to make an analytic distinction between an overall concern with cultivating a moral economy of 'deservingness' and devout submission that is likely to improve your *idil* (Malara and Boylston, 2016), and attempts to capitalise on a fleeting 'chance' when doing so might, in fact, be detrimental to your *idil*.

Messay (1999) has written at length on the concept of *idil*. The notion is, he writes, dependent upon the belief that everything that happens reflects the active will of God and that this will is above all mysterious. This means that ‘the grace which distributes different and unequal destinies to individuals is extremely unstable and shifting,’ a belief that is ‘imbued less with the idea of fatalism than with the idea of changing destinies’ (204). In this way, endurance and patience (*tigist*) rank among the highest virtues whilst arrogance (*tigab*) or not knowing one’s place becomes the most serious vice. *Idil* is thus strongly inflected with moral values, more in line with a concept of ‘destiny’ as outlined by Guinness (2018) than one of hope, representing a ‘moral position as well as a desire’ (325). This orientation leads less to ‘thinking in terms of continuity and progression’ but rather to ‘sensitivity to reversals [...] of ups and downs in a cyclical fashion’ (216). Messay goes on to argue that because talent or capacity is ‘primarily grace (*tsega*) the social system must be open’.

The notion of *idil* as knowledge of one’s place within a hierarchy that is constantly shifting and in flux, in which nothing is final and all is reversible according to the will of God, and in which arrogance can lead to the reversal of one’s fortunes, is fundamentally at odds with Weber’s (1905) analysis of the Protestant work ethic for instance, where signs of election are sought in works and the accumulation of wealth. It is also, therefore, at odds with much of the work on sport and Christianity (Guinness, 2018; Rial, 2012; Kovac, 2016), and the anthropology of Christianity more generally (Bialeki, 2008) which tends to focus on Pentecostal conversion and a disposition of individual purpose. Election, for an Amhara runner, is never decided once and for all. The physical ‘condition’ on which success depends can ‘disappear’ abruptly and may never return. Likewise, it can ‘suddenly come’ to an athlete who has been struggling for months. The notion of *idil*, Messay writes, is not ‘propitious for a positive interpretation of the self-made person. People who improved themselves through work or through the accumulation of money were neither admired nor accepted in the political

hierarchy' (221).

For runners, the concern with cultivating *idil* through a moral economy of patient hard work and submission is inextricably tied up with the notion of 'condition,' the fickle state of health and fitness that leads to athletic performance and which was also defined by patience and acceptance. 'Condition' was reliant upon training hard but also a lifestyle characterised by seclusion and a prohibition against 'warming up cafe seats' as one of my informants put it, and the careful monitoring and saving of energy levels. As opposed to any belief in innate talent, runners believed that patient and consistent work and adequate rest could lead to anyone becoming 'changed' and succeeding. In parallel to this way of being and acting, however, was a more active disposition that does share characteristics with the notion of entrepreneurship of the self, in which opportunity or 'chance' was actively sought out through the creation of networks with managers, race organisers and other foreigners who may have access to races 'outside'. Rather than thinking in terms of transformation from one disposition to another, we must consider these in tandem, and focus ethnographic attention on how people move between shifting ways of thinking about themselves and their futures.

### **Cultivating a Moral Economy of 'Deserving'**

Aseffa was one of the more experienced runners in the group of athletes with whom I trained in Addis Ababa. He had travelled to races in the UK, Europe and China, and had won a few thousand dollars on several occasions. In spite of this relative success, most of his earnings had thus far been reinvested in his running career. He had moved to a more comfortable house with his girlfriend, and was spending money on the kinds of foods linked to good running 'condition,' including around 600 birr (\$24) on 'milk rent' per month, giving him access to a litre of milk per day from a local farmer. His relationship to our sub-agent Hailye was one of friendly deference, and he was philosophical about his access to races

'outside' of Ethiopia. As the quotation with which I started this essay suggests, he saw running as a fairly transparent process that was in a privileged position of allowing one to make their *idil* visible. In contrast to the scheming and dissembling that he sees as characteristic of other professions (with merchants as the archetype), running allowed an individual to 'prove what [they] have [...] in front of people.' In this sense, 'proving' yourself happens at the race itself, when the competing runners are sorted into winners and losers, but it also happens far more frequently in and around Addis Ababa itself at the training sessions attended by the sub-agent who then informs the manager of athletes' relative 'performance'. The visibility of 'proving' yourself was an important part of the conditions you needed to get a chance.

As the quotation with which I opened this chapter from Aseffa makes clear, running is a privileged way of revealing your *idil* clearly, in a way similar to warfare as described by Messay (1999). When Aseffa says that running allows you to 'prove what you have' in front of people he draws attention to the importance of visibility but also authenticity and honesty, in contrast to the trickery he associates with other ways of earning a living. There is, he implies, nowhere to hide in a race; it sorts competitors into a hierarchy. This is how coach Messeret addressed the problem of runners taking more rest and only coming to some training sessions (and therefore making themselves appearing stronger than others) in a meeting after training one day.

'If someone is poor and sleeps on a bed of mud in a blanket of flies, sewn by needle and thread, then he covers himself in a white cloth, he will consider himself a rich man in front of his friends and neighbours won't he? You see, the white cloth is clean because he washes it, but not the blanket on the inside. The question is, does he sleep in it or not? The one who is accustomed to it will sleep in it, the other will not. If you get used to knowing how to keep condition you will keep it, if not you won't.'

This quote lends itself to different interpretations and conveys more than one message – there is something of the ‘wax and gold’ (Levine, 1965) about it. The first point to make is about authenticity and appearances. What Messeret seeks to make clear is that there is no point trying to hide your true ‘condition,’ which will in any case be revealed in a race. In this sense ‘condition’ is somewhat like *idil*, an interior state about which only God has truly privileged knowledge. The second point is about being accustomed to hardship and virtuous suffering. Being able to ‘sleep in’ your ‘condition,’ to accept the discomfort and fatigue that comes with heavy training and to patiently wait to improve is important here.

Given that it was unusual for an athlete to contact a manager directly, and that this was seen as inappropriate and clumsy behaviour, the sub-agent had significant mediatory power over which athletes went ‘outside’ to race. Cultivating a moral economy of ‘deserving’ characterised by consistent attendance of training sessions, hard work, and above all else silence, was an important skill for a runner to learn. As Malara and Boylston (2016) show, remaining silent when you receive commands from a superior is an important way to index obedience and deference. Aseffa’s relationship with Hailye was good, and he would regularly stop by our compound on the way back from training to exchange greetings and chat about running. These conversations would be about training, and about other athletes’ races, but Aseffa was careful not to ask for races for himself or to talk about money. Often prize money from races abroad could take months to arrive (via the manager) in the athlete’s bank account, but this was another thing Aseffa was careful not to mention in his conversations with Hailye. As Hailye himself put it, ‘Aseffa understands, he’s a good guy.’

For Aseffa, the important thing was being seen to work hard. He had heard Hailye complain of the other athletes’ ‘nagging’ often enough to know to avoid

doing so himself. Aseffa's respect for quiet, unassuming hard work was revealed on one particular occasion when he called a meeting of the athletes to discuss our training bus conductor Tadesse. The manager of the group hired a bus three mornings a week to take us to various different places around the city that were seen as beneficial training environments. Alongside the driver, Tadesse came to open the door for the athletes and to prevent members of the public from boarding the bus, which looked like a regular city bus from the outside. Tadesse had been a runner himself for a few years before finding himself under too much pressure to earn money and without the time to train, and as the bus followed the runners on a training run he would jump out every five kilometres clutching an armful of water bottles, sprinting alongside the athletes to hand them out and then collecting them up again after they had been discarded.

This was all done without the athletes explicitly asking for it, and seemingly without any expectation of reward, and Tadesse seemed to enjoy the challenge of trying to hand out water bottles whilst sprinting in jeans and flip flops. Aseffa wanted to reward this behaviour by collecting money to help Tadesse to afford driving lessons of his own. This is how he and Hailye pitched the idea to the group:

Aseffa: I have been thinking about Tadesse for a while. In God's name, I think we should facilitate something for him...

Hailye: I will contribute, and coach will contribute 100 birr, others can contribute 50 birr each... He deserves a lot, giving water even though he is very busy. He is working very hard...

Aseffa: He's working so hard!

Aseffa and Hailye are rewarding behaviour they see as exemplary - hard work with no complaints and no expectation of reward. This is also the behaviour of the ideal runner, who is expected to trust Hailye completely and not question

anything, especially concerning money. On several occasions I witnessed Hailye attempting to show athletes the printed 'breakdown' from the races they had competed in abroad. These were calculations made by the manager showing the amount of prize money won, the amount deducted as a percentage by the manager and the various other deductions for flight costs, meals and transfers. I will discuss these in more detail later in the thesis, but for our purposes here I want to note how often athletes would act offended by being presented with this, pushing the paper away. I was present on one occasion when Hailye attempted to show an athlete a 'breakdown' showing that they had won a net amount of \$15,000 and would be receiving just over \$8,000 to their bank account after the deduction of 20% tax and a 15% Athlete Representative fee. 'No, coach, I trust you in everything,' the athlete said, refusing to look at the paper. As we walked away, I expressed surprise that he would not want to see the details, especially as the amount deducted was significant. Hailye just said, 'Asmara is good, he is very happy after that race.' When I mentioned this to Malcolm he had this to say.

'You know what, I said to Hailye, if there's an athlete who's not under sponsorship then there's prioritisation of who gets kit and Asmara 100% gets some of the best stuff because he does the hard work in training, he accepts the races that we think are best and then he agrees with the breakdowns and doesn't cause any problems.'

Adopting a disposition of silent acceptance of the decisions of those in positions of authority, then, could bring very definite material rewards.

### **'Not a Single Word'**

As Malara and Boylston (2016) write, 'the marker of hierarchy' for Amhara Orthodox Christians is 'not just that you must obey your superiors, but that you must not question them: hierarchical relations are *defined by silence*' (41, my

emphasis). This was an idea articulated very clearly by the driver of the team bus during a team meeting, when he said ‘the government uses the word ‘integration’. This work needs integration. The words of God and the words of bosses must be respected.’ Here we see how various ideas about submission to authority (whether divine or government-orchestrated) are reproduced in the fostering of a sense of team ‘integration’. For Berhanu, who was at least twenty years older than the runners, ‘integration’ essentially meant for the runners to obey the wishes of their superiors, in this case Hailye the sub-agent and Messeret the coach.

It was important for runners to know their place (*lil mawek*) and also to demonstrate visibly that they know their place. Performing submission, in fact, could be as important a strategy for creating a ‘chance’ as more assertive attempts to do so. For Hailye, the worst behaviour an athlete could exhibit was to question his decision making and petition him for races. He would, in fact, deliberately reward athletes for their submission and silent hard work. Melaku was a young athlete who had recently moved from a rural training camp to Addis Ababa, and barely had the money to rent a one-room house in Sendafa, 30km outside the city. He would get up before 4am to take a bus to Maganegna, the main transit hub in the east of the city, where he could be picked up by our team bus. In his first few weeks with us, he barely spoke. Hailye selected him to travel to a race in Turkey after just six weeks with the group, and justified his decision thus:

*‘Melaku is a really good person. I’m really pleased that he got this chance. But some of them, like, you know, they don’t tell me straight, they tell Tsedat, or someone who is very close to me, they say “if he doesn’t arrange [a race] for us we’re going to go with another manager.” So if they are dishonest, we should give a chance to the honest ones, especially if they are strong. There is no-one like Melaku. He is the one person who*

*never said anything about a race. Not a single word. He just keeps working.'*

To 'deserve' a race was to work hard and in silence, and to accept the decision about where you were 'sent' to run and the result. A strong belief in one's *idil* was demonstrated by acceptance of poor performances as well as good ones. This is how Aseffa described his attitude to a poor race:

'If I run and don't get any prize money, I don't complain. I'm not sad because I know that if that money came I might use it to do sin, or to do bad things with it. God has a purpose, he knows what is useful for you. Like, if you get money, and you buy a car, then you get hit by another car and you die, that is not useful for you.'

This unequivocal acceptance of a poor competitive performance was very frustrating for the manager of our group, who took it as a sign that the athlete did not care sufficiently about their career. As the above shows, however, there was a very clear sense that you had to accept God's role in the unfolding of your *idil*. For someone like Aseffa or Melaku, to question Hailye's judgement and to 'nag' him for a race without 'deserving' it could have serious and potentially fatal consequences. Rewards are associated not with striving and seeking to create a 'chance' through negotiation but rather through a long-term display of loyalty and submission. This moral economy of 'deserving' and acceptance of the very real likelihood that all the 'work' done in training may amount to nothing in material terms extended to the insistence that money should not be considered the main indicator of success. Mekasha explained the failure and disintegration of his previous training group as follows.

'We had a group, we discussed things and learned things together, but we were from different religions and money came and it disrupted

everything. What I learnt from that is that if money destroys our unity, if it detaches us, if it turns us into show-offs, tomorrow we may not have our legs – there are athletes who are committing suicide with their own cars!’

Here we have Mekasha making a link between short-term economic interest as a divisive force and religious diversity. Elite Ethiopian runners are primarily from two ethnic groups, the Amhara and the Oromo, and whilst most are Orthodox Christians there are also fairly large proportions of Protestant, Pentecostal and Muslim athletes. In spite of this, the Moyo Sports group was very homogenous, with all but a couple of runners being both Amhara and Orthodox Christians. It is significant that on the social occasion on which Mekasha made these comments the two non-Orthodox runners were not in attendance, a fact that had been pointed out on a few occasions. The moral economy of deserving through patience, silence and hard work without expectation of reward is thus projected as particular to Amhara Orthodox runners. These two warnings against short-term economic self-interest leading to fatal car accidents demonstrate quite clearly the analytical distinction I want to make between the categories of *idil* and ‘chance’: getting a short-term opportunity can be actively detrimental to your *idil*.

The values of silence and submission to authority praised here were often interpreted by Hailye and other runners as *rural* values that could be threatened by life in the city. For two young athletes from Gondar in northern Ethiopia, who qualified for the national team selected to travel to the World Junior Championships in Poland, it was the lack of authoritarian coaching that struck them most during their ‘pre-competition’ training time in Addis. This is how Kidane, who competed in the 3,000m steeplechase, described the difference:

‘In Gondar the coaches look after you very well. They say, ‘where have

you been, what have you been doing?' There is seriousness there [...] The coaches even hit and punch you to encourage you to run well, but here you have to do things and deserve for yourself.'

Malara and Boylston (2016) have noted that focusing primarily on power in studies of northern Ethiopia misses a key aspect of the workings of asymmetry and hierarchy, namely 'a deep-seated ethic of mutual care and neighbourliness.' That coercive power can co-exist with relations of love and care seems clear from the above quotation, and often athletes would request more authoritarian behaviour from our coach. Hierarchy was associated not with violence but as a value. Messeret would often end our post-training discussions by asking athletes for their comments, a 'democratic' gesture he had learned from a coaching course in Newark, Delaware and from the self-help books he read. This was almost always met with silence, much to his frustration. Privately, the athletes told me that they felt that Messeret undermined his authority by asking them for their opinions, that it was his job to tell them what to do and ensure that they did it.

I want to now return to the quote with which I opened this piece. Messeret's attempts to encourage runners to think of themselves as 'merchants' responsible for their own 'bankruptcy and profit' came into tension with the disposition of deserving, silence and submission outlined above. As Messay (1999) has noted, Ethiopians traditionally have 'difficulty in seeing the merchant as a person of value' given that their efforts 'betrayed an attempt to become what they were not, to occupy places to which they were not entitled' (221). In what follows I seek to argue that something like the attitude encouraged by Messeret co-existed with a disposition of submission and 'deserving,' and that runners could even slip in and out of these dispositions according to their circumstances. Crucially, though, assuming a disposition focused on creating your own 'chance' in the short term was associated with accepting a lesser athletic future, as I now

go on to describe. Conversion to this entrepreneurial disposition was not – in contrast to other work on the anthropology of Christianity and sport and Pentecostalism described above – associated with religious conversion in Ethiopia. As I have made clear, it was the disposition of silence and submission to authority that was associated with being a good Orthodox Christian.

### Creating 'Chance'

'There are someone who is sending invitation from Panama. On a website, "Panama is one of the most attractive cities in the world" it says. So the economy is strong, one dollar is equal to 0.98 Panama money...'

- Mesgebe, October 2015

'Panama is gone, but still I try with Peru. And today I will meet with a man from Finland and I am also contact a man from New Zealand'

- Mesgebe, March, 2016

'In Brazil, they will pay you 60,000, 80,000... Brazilian money. Which is you divide by 3.9 something because one dollar is equal to 3 point something... The money is like this. They have so many races but they could not speak English. Even though there are different websites, Facebook, Twitter everything but they are not able to speak English. I don't know why...'

- Mesgebe, July 2016

It took me a while to recognise the men who sat opposite me at the *chemaki bet* (juice house). So used to seeing them in tracksuits in the forest, their jeans and shirtsleeves looked strange on them as they pored over three phones like businessmen. After chatting for a while I asked why Mesgebe had two phones.

'One is for international running contacts' he told me, before showing me the web page of AIMS World Running, a site which features the organisation and contact details of many of the world's biggest road races. Mesgebe and Danny occasionally trained in what they called the 'management system' described in the preceding section, but - unusually - they organised their own trips to races as well. As the quotations above suggest, opportunities sought by sending speculative e-mails and attempting to create networks with race directors were often experienced as opaque and frustrating, and demanded a lot of time and effort to pursue.

In fact, in the time I was in Ethiopia, Mesgebe and Danny only managed to travel to India to race, which represented a compromise in a number of ways. They had to raise the money themselves from friends and family - often those who had already been abroad themselves - and India was a cheap place to fly to which did not require complicated visa arrangements. Mesgebe was keenly aware of the problems associated with trying to travel to races independently, and had several visas refused in the course of my fieldwork. In spite of this, he still thought he could 'make business' by being strategic about his applications. India was intended as a first step that would prove to other embassies that he was not merely trying to 'disappear' as he put it. 'After India,' he said, 'I will go to Romania, or Czech or Italy for a visa and win, and then I can go to big countries, the UK, France, or Spain.' In a sense, India as a destination could create a chance in a similar way to that described above, though on a different scale: through a public display to a state authority that you are an obedient servant. Mesgebe had developed a clear awareness of the strategies necessary to access races, but his experiences in India had been exhausting and fraught with problems. This is how he described his trip on his return.

'Oh, India, India was tough. It was just too hot, the lifestyle was not adequate for me. We had a lot of suffering because if you have a

competition in Mumbai, then the next day you will travel for 1,300 kilometres, 1,500 kilometres, something like that. And no training at all. If today is Sunday, today you compete, for the next Sunday you will compete 1,500km away or something like that. It takes two nights, two days of travel. You may win 20,000 rupees, but for food, for bedroom, for transportation, for everything it will go. Because normally I train hard in the morning and the afternoon, my body became locked and I couldn't sprint at all.'

Ethiopian runners place a huge amount of emphasis on the environmental resources of different areas surrounding Addis Ababa, and on the benefits associated with the 'air' of highland Ethiopia. To remain away from Ethiopia for more than a few days is associated with a big drop in an athlete's 'condition,' and therefore to stay in India for so long required sacrificing long-sought 'condition' in order to make a few thousand rupees. The second time he went to India, in fact, Mesgebe decided not to run at all, but rather charged other runners for the service of acquiring invitations from races and facilitating their travel and accommodation. 'Because the runners don't know English,' he said, 'I facilitate for them. Two even went for hospital treatment, because I know a big hospital in India that is better than in Ethiopia.' Here it was his English language skills and ability to network that allowed him to make some money from the sport, but Mesgebe still had dreams of making it as a runner. Mobility in itself was not enough to do this, though - successful running required a specific kind of mobility involving travelling to a race for a couple of days and then immediately returning to Ethiopia.

### **Small Races, Small Money**

'To be successful you have to use all the good working places around Addis' Mesgebe told me at one point, assuring me that if I stayed in Ethiopia I would have an advantage over runners in Europe. When I explained to him that there

were actually a number of Ethiopian and Kenyan runners resident in the UK he shrugged and replied, 'you work here though, you can beat them if they stay there.' Whilst the approach described in the previous section of cultivating a moral economy of deserving was defined by patience, and faith that the right race would 'come,' seeking a 'chance' of your own accord often meant accepting diminished returns from your running. Mesgebe told me about a friend of his who travelled to Belgium in the following terms.

Mesgebe: 'One guy I know went to Belgium. He went for a race in Italy and then directly he went to Belgium and he is doing his best now. He is winning small races. In Ethiopia he couldn't even follow us in training but he got a chance because he got an Italian visa because he knew someone there who could send him an invitation. He paid 5,000 birr for the invitation and then when he got to Italy he disappeared to Belgium.'

Michael: 'Why did he decide to go to Belgium?'

Mesgebe: 'Because here he decided he could not be a good athlete anymore. Because he became over 35 years, he became old.'

Michael: 'So is he doing a different job now?'

Mesgebe: 'No, just he is running. Small races, small money. What is good is that in developed countries there are many small races, he can collect a little bit every week.'

A conventional narrative of neoliberal sporting aspiration might assume that to gain permanent residence in a country in the global north in which to compete would be the ultimate aim of an athlete in the global south. As the conversation above demonstrates, however, this is in a sense a last resort, or at least a categorically different form of mobility to that sought by runners seriously hoping to 'change their lives' through their athletics careers. The following is an extract from a conversation between two runners. Berhanu had just returned from running a couple of races in America, and Teklemariam sought his advice

about going there himself.

Teklemariam: 'Can you run for a club there?'

Berhanu: 'Yes, but you run voluntarily.'

Teklemariam: 'Just for the sake of running?'

Berhanu: 'Yes. For instance if you run a race and you finish in the top five you will make \$200. No other benefits.'

Teklemariam: 'No other benefits?'

Berhanu: 'No, you just go there instead of sitting around here.'

Teklemariam: 'If I get a chance to go, what would your advice be?'

Berhanu: 'Go, but if you want to run make sure you are strong first. Otherwise, if you are just average even if you get something you will just spend it - there is no profit. You'd better work, you understand? If you stay here and train you'll have a better chance. Here it is better, massage is cheap and the food is good. I will prepare for my next race here, if you stay there you can't be successful, and when you get back here it is difficult to re-adapt to the altitude.'

This passage demonstrates quite clearly how 'getting a chance' as Teklemariam puts it might actually be detrimental to his progress as a runner, just as it was for Mesgebe in India. In the time I knew him Teklemariam often wavered between wanting to focus on his own running ('I need to just train and nothing else for six months') and preferring to seek other strategies to make money. One of these, which he reverted to on a couple of occasions, was to work as a pacemaker for the female athletes in our group. This was a widely employed strategy. As prize money in athletics is almost always equal for men and women, and because fewer female athletes compete, it was a widely held perception that it was 'easier' for female runners to make money. It was rare to see female runners training in the forest on their own however - usually a male pacemaker preceded them.

### **'All Ethiopian Females Need a Male Pacemaker'**

Teklemariam, who lived a few kilometres to the east of Kotebe, would sometimes come to stay with Hailye so that he could run as a pacemaker for a female runner he knew. This involved getting up at 3.30am in order to avoid the traffic on the asphalt roads in the city centre. Hailye explained this to me by saying, 'you know, if you are not able to run well on your own, you will find a girlfriend to pace and she will run well.' Male runners were usually paid a small 'salary' for this, but Hailye said that 'often after two or three runs the man will say, "don't worry about the money, you can be my girlfriend instead"'. For Teklemariam, pacing was a strategy employed in tandem with his own running career. He would pace for a couple of months in order to make enough money to continue his own training, and hoped that if he did a good enough job he might be sent abroad to pace a marathon. This was a path that had been followed by one of the more successful athletes in our group when he first arrived in Addis Ababa. As Hailye put it, 'I told him to pace females, and that is how he changed his life.' He was able to 'eat well and set goals for himself' while he was pacing, and save enough money to focus on his running completely.

Management groups paid a reasonable amount for pacing, and it could create a 'chance' to race abroad. Fasil, a young runner in our group, saw pacing as an opportunity to save enough money to pay his own way to a race. He calculated the number of months he would have to save up for, allowing for a final month of training alone that included using some of the money to attend a gym. Much like running 'small races' for 'small money,' though, pacemaking was seen as something that - whilst a 'chance' that was preferable to other forms of work in the city - interrupted an athlete's attempt to improve their 'condition' to a point where they could compete for significant prize money. Teklemariam told me that 'as a profession pacing is good, but pacing women and running with men is difficult. After you pace it is difficult to compete or train with men, in speed sessions especially.'

The dispositions that characterise the two ways of approaching running I have described here are quite different. The first, animated by patience and submission to an authority figure, is associated with developing an athlete's 'condition' and, concomitantly, their *idil*. The second, characterised by actively seeking a 'chance,' operates alongside the first, in a relationship sometimes of compatibility, sometimes of antagonism. To seek a 'chance' can be detrimental to one's 'condition,' their development as an athlete and their *idil*, but it can also allow them to keep the dream of one day winning a big race alive by allowing one to save enough money for a period of devoted training.

### Adaptation

Ethiopian runners train for years to improve their 'condition' - the fickle state of health and fitness necessary to sustain a career in the sport. Training as a long-distance runner requires acceptance of a simple, repetitive lifestyle characterised by a cycle of work, food and rest and by the virtues of patience and consistency. I have demonstrated that conventional narratives of 'conversion' (Bourdieu, 2000) to an individualistic mindset fail to account for pre-existing notions of individualism, contributing to the understanding of the ways in which these concepts meet neoliberal impulses and give rise to new and interesting objects. Rather than seeing running in terms of entrepreneurship of self, I have shown how to survive as a runner means to teeter between two systems of belief, to cultivate your *idil* but also to place yourself within the pull of social and environmental forces in such a way as to create a 'chance' to change your life. The disposition required to create a 'chance' to run abroad may not look like the strategies of self-assertion we associate with the entrepreneur, but may instead be characterised by silence and submission to authority. I have demonstrated the importance of sustained ethnographic study of forms of hopeful and speculative behaviour that may not, at first sight, appear as such.

In the following chapter I examine the ways in which young men who have chosen to attempt to 'change their lives' through running define themselves in opposition to other precariously employed youth in the countryside and cities of Ethiopia. In doing so, I explore how attempting to become an athlete was conceived of as a divergent temporal strategy, involving withdrawal and the embrace of a more extreme deployment of energy in the hope of a big pay-off at some point in the future.

## Chapter Four: 'Time is Running'

It is a Sunday afternoon. Fasil and I have been at Abere's house near the forest, where he invited us for lunch, a vast salad of avocado, lettuce, tomatoes and chillies doused in salt and vinegar. We have finished watching his collection of Ethiopian pop music videos on a small television surrounded by trophies, the videos all shot in the Gondar region, where he is from. After several hours of lounging around, watching the footage alternate between farmers in traditional Orthodox dress dancing in fields of swaying teff and young men in the city posing by the dual carriageway, Abere walks us back towards the road. As we walk through the middle of a group of young men playing football, one of them says something to Abere, and he responds angrily. The three of us are dressed recognisably as runners; we all wear running shoes, Fasil wears a purple Nike hooded top and Abere the yellow Adidas tracksuit provided to all runners under contract with the brand the year before. We are quickly surrounded by the men, and after Abere shoves his way past one of them, a young man in a faded Arsenal shirt, sleeves cut off to reveal tattooed biceps, throws a lump of concrete at him. It misses his head by inches. I am taken completely by surprise by the sudden escalation of the confrontation. Fasil, who works as a night guard, has one of our assailants on the floor pretty rapidly, but there are seven of them. Just in time, an old man in a traditional cotton *shamma* intervenes, standing between us and them and eventually succeeding in diffusing the situation.

'They are just people who have already lost hope,' he told us when they had left. 'Why were you arguing with them?' Groups of young men like this are ubiquitous in Addis Ababa. At the intersection of streets near where I lived there were always five or six of a revolving cast of around twenty men. They sat in different places depending on the time of day, moving with the shade, and chewed *khat*, smoked cigarettes and occasionally kicked a ball about or did some press ups. All had a level of education, but, they told me on numerous occasions, there was 'no work'. Hailye disagreed. 'There is work' he told me, 'but they think they are too

good for the kind of work Fasil does.’ Hailye condemned the kind of idleness described above – hanging around in the street to pass the time – in strong moral terms, telling me on several occasions that he thought the Ethiopian government should ‘collect up’ people like this and force them to work ‘breaking stones or something.’

Daniel Mains (2011) conducted extensive fieldwork with groups of similar young men in Jimma in south-west Ethiopia. The title of his book is derived from the Amharic phrase ‘*tesfa quoretewal*,’ which means ‘hope is cut.’ In it, he argues that the narratives of modernisation that structured the hopes of young men in urban Ethiopia have been frustrated. ‘When hope is cut,’ he writes, ‘one’s relationship to the future changes. Progress no longer takes place. The connection to the future is severed.’ My interlocutors frequently defined themselves in contrast to young men like this, as the following discussion with Fasil makes clear. This conversation took place immediately after the altercation described above, as we walked home through the eucalyptus forest.

Fasil: ‘Guys like that don’t have a plan of living (*yemanor alama yelachew*). They wanted to hurt us so that they could go to jail and get food without working (literally ‘so they could eat government injera’). They have no goals, no hope. But Abere is a man with goals. For instance, if Abere runs and gets money, he will help others. In this way development comes. If he gets money and builds a hotel, people will benefit from it. They will be employed and work.’

Michael: ‘So runners are hard workers?’

Fasil: ‘Athletes are good people, they work hard, they think about their country. Those other guys, their only work is fighting. It’s not good for the image of Ethiopia.’

The stark opposition Fasil paints here is interesting in light of the similar material circumstances shared between the two groups. In most cases, these young men - considered by the runners to be 'lazy', and lacking in 'hope' and a 'plan of living' - are actually considerably better educated. In terms of conventional 'development' narratives, with their strong emphasis on education, then, they are actually in an advantageous position in many ways. Usually they come from comparatively well-off, urban backgrounds, and still live at home. The runners I knew, however, were for the most part from rural backgrounds, and lived independently, if precariously. Fasil, for instance, worked as a night guard at the time, which gave him a small room to live in and 600 *birr* (around £20) a month to live on. Like many of the runners on the edge of the club structure in Addis, he was not yet in a position to earn money directly from running. He hoped to progress enough to join a first division club and be paid a small salary of around fifty dollars a month. Even though his aspirations as a runner relied upon one day racing for prize money at a race 'outside' of Ethiopia, he was not yet in possession of a passport. And yet, running allowed him to place his life within a hopeful narrative, to see himself as moving forward in the world.

### Temporalities of Work

The confrontation described above was one between runners and non-runners, but it was also one between Addis Ababa residents and rural migrants. Often my informants would define themselves against '*ya katama lijjoc*', or 'city kids,' in terms of their relative strengths. The following is from a conversation between myself, Hailye and Fasil, which took place in the back yard of our compound. Fasil has just been digging the vegetable patch, the soil of which is full of stones and a hard, clay-like soil.

Fasil: 'The city kids can't run like the countryside kids. Your body has to be strong in the countryside. I couldn't have adapted to running on asphalt if I hadn't had to work in the rural area, herding cows and going up and

down the hills all day. My legs were strong already. The city kids are looked after too much, so they can't do much work. They're not ploughing fields, carrying loads and digging ditches all day.'

Hailye: 'You saw him digging just there, he could dig up this whole yard in fifteen minutes. Could you do that? You'd have blisters all over your hands. When they do things in the countryside they aren't thinking of saving their power. They eat, they work, they eat, they work, eat, work...'

Fasil: 'When the house you're living in was built, I dug all the foundations myself. City kids can't do that, they're too lazy. But they're good at studying because they did that starting from childhood.'

Much like in the exchange in the previous section, here it is *hard work* that is perceived as separating the runners from other young men trying to get by in Addis. This is not only the immediate hard work being done in the present, but also the (to a degree involuntary) work Fasil had to do as a child and teenager on his uncle's farm. Runners conceived of their training as a long-term process of 'adaptation' to the demands of running which, as we see here, consisted of more than just the period of formal training they had undertaken as athletes. Fasil's upbringing was seen as a kind of foundation for the athletic training he was now doing.

As I will describe later in this chapter, running was seen as requiring patient and consistent work over a number of years, and as such as operating in a different temporal frame to the hustle of the rest of Addis Ababa. As Janeja and Bandak (2018) note, scholars from Virilio (1997) to Rosa (2015) have seen modernity primarily as a process of acceleration whereby 'people's hopes for a better future and particular futurities are catapulted onwards [...] and the ability to wait for one's turn seems to have become scarce in a technological landscape of immediacy' (15). Waiting one's turn, and a disposition of patience and silent hard work were very much a part of the narrative of being a runner, however, and

here I discuss the various strategies runners are able to deploy in order to escape this 'catapult[ing] onwards' and embrace a different temporality of work and a different way of deploying energy.

Kathleen Millar (2014) has written that the literature on precarious labour has tended to conflate states of 'anxiety, desperation, unbelonging and risk' associated with post-Fordist societies in Europe and America with the experience of poor workers in the global South for whom precarity has arguably 'always been a part of the experience of labouring poor' (42). Rather than folding all kinds of risky and precarious work into categories of informal, irregular, or precarious employment, in this chapter I seek to take a 'phenomenological approach to precarious labour' (42) by delineating the differences between running as a risky and precarious form of work and the other kinds of precarious labour that the runners would otherwise be doing. Through doing so, I describe how these kinds of labour are distinct in the ways in which they engage temporality, and in the intensity of the ways in which energy is deployed.

In this chapter I also discuss the complex relationship young runners have to waiting, time-pass and transition to adulthood. I was often told that 'patience' was the most important virtue for a runner; often a 'chance' to race abroad would not 'come' for several years. Sometimes it would not come at all. This was accepted as part of the reality of the sport. Even when someone does win some money, waiting for it to arrive can take months and become a significant source of anguish. Running, like education, is characterised by a series of defined stages. As such, runners can get 'stuck' at a certain level in much the same way that they can in education. In rural camps, it is therefore quite common for runners to try to keep their education going alongside their running. In what follows, I discuss several ways in which time and the relationship runners have to the future is shaped.

Firstly, I discuss the day-to-day reclassification of 'dead' time as productive. I then go on to discuss the practice of resetting passport ages, and finally I discuss running as a form of work that permits hope to distinctively 'change your life,' by moving towards financial stability, increasingly elusive in Ethiopia. Crucially, I aim to consider how different forms of work are valued and to argue that my informants were certainly not rejecting hard work in becoming runners but were rather rejecting particular kinds of work that were seen as incompatible with imagining particular kinds of futures. Their rejection of precarious work that was seen as merely allowing one to 'work, eat, work, eat' allows for a consideration of work and labour from its margins (Dobler et al., forthcoming). I argue that the study of running, characterised as it is by an unusually intimate relationship to abstract time, reveals that abstract clock time can be a source both of hope and despair, and joy as well as alienation.

### **Hope, Work and 'Waithood'**

Numerous scholars have written about the dismantling of modernist expectations for employment, commodities, and education in Africa, with Weiss (2004) arguing that young people become 'frustrated with an inability to place their own lives within a hopeful narrative' (14). In the Ethiopian context, the urban poverty rate for young people between 18 and 30 is estimated to be over 50% (Mains, 2011), and young people with a secondary level of education but no employment are increasingly common. Mains (2011) writes that 'just as maturation from child to adult involves attaining a specific set of biological and social markers, becoming modern requires moving along a linear track.' Such frustrations are often experienced as temporal disjunctures; young people are faced with excessive amount of free, unstructured time, which leads to boredom and brooding on lack of opportunity. Weiss (2004) has written of the grounding of the future in the present, whilst Jeffrey (2010) and Chua (2014) have discussed periods of waiting and 'doing time-pass' as being particularly problematic for young people in Kerala.

The widening gap between expectations and reality in the developing world has been articulated by Chua (2014), who writes of the coexistence of 'soaring aspiration and drowning disappointment' in Kerala, which combines a reputation as a beacon for development and for the highest level of education in India with the country's highest level of unemployment and one of the highest levels of suicide. Jeffrey (2004) and Mains (2011) also focus their attention on a post-Fordist consideration of the relatively highly educated and on the gap between young people's expectation that education will lead to stable and reasonably remunerated work and the reality of a flooded job market.

We might distinguish between this body of literature on the one hand, and that which focuses (in the African context in particular) on those further down the social ladder as characterised by stuckness, 'stupor' (Mbembe and Roitman, 1995) or 'paralysis' (Jones, 2010). Honwana (2012) has coined the term 'waithood' to describe how young people exist in limbo between childhood and adulthood, although her analysis tends to reify the two categories, and she connects 'waithood' to a somewhat alarmist portrayal of criminal youth in both Africa and elsewhere in the world. Honwana characterises 'waithood' as a period of being 'on hold' or 'stuck' characterised by attempts to eke out precarious livelihoods in temporary and underpaid labour. The category of 'waithood' has been taken up by numerous scholars who often focus on the active and agentive nature of 'waiting.' As I will go on to describe, my informants reclassified time spent 'waiting' as productive, and their running was seen as a form of energy expenditure and 'work' that was more intense than other forms of precarious employment. Given that many scholars recognise the agency of those in 'waithood' I seek to question how useful it is as a category, asking; how we can talk about 'waithood' when people are so active?

In their recent collected edition, 'Ethnographies of Waiting,' Janeja and Bandak (2018) note that most engagements with waiting focus on the 'destitute and disadvantaged, whether from lower classes, youth, refugees or otherwise marginalised positions' which 'encapsulates us in a particular way of thinking about waiting' (2). They advocate working with waiting as a category that 'allows people's doubts and uncertainties [...] to coexist with potentials of hope' (2) invoking the figure of Penelope who in weaving by day and unravelling by night 'indexes not merely a passive form of surrender to circumstances but an active form of endurance amidst the most mundane of chores'. Waiting can be a kind of 'future-making strategy,' and "'skillful waiting'" can produce "temporal subjects" suited to the speed and contingencies of late capitalism' (Janeja and Bandak, 2018). As I will go on to argue, much of the waiting that runners engaged in is figured as productive and rejuvenative and as an active choice.

Marco Di Nunzio (2012) writes of his informants – street hustlers in the informal economy in Addis Ababa – that they were 'a step down the social ladder from the educated, jobless youth who often feature in statistical and anthropological studies on unemployment' (92) such as Mains' *Hope is Cut* (2011) and, as such, could not afford to wait and were rather busy constantly moving around (*inqisiqase*). In spite of this, Mains (2011) and Di Nunzio (2017) both reach similar conclusions about how young people navigate their precarious situations; Mains claims that young men choose to cultivate social relationships of reciprocity (*zemed* relationships), whilst Di Nunzio (2017) notes that young people's striving to improve their lot is a 'social trajectory experienced in relation to others' (101). Whilst this is also the case for runners, as I have argued throughout this thesis there is more of a tension between needing others to succeed and the reality of individual competition than either of these authors acknowledge. Temporal strategies, and withdrawal from certain forms of social life, can equally constitute attempts to move forward in the world.

## ‘This Time is a Time of Competition’

The lack of a clear connection between educational attainment and stable employment was something the driver of our team bus, Berhanu – who was something of a father figure, twenty-five years older than the athletes – drew attention to one day when we stopped at a café for a drink. This was actually a very unusual occurrence, and happened on the way back from a visit to one of the runner’s houses to celebrate the birth of his son. The driver had very kindly offered to take us all there free of charge, and then to stop on the way back to Kotebe and buy everyone a drink, an occasion that turned into an opportunity for people to make short speeches about what the team meant to them.

‘Gizeyaw ya wudeder gizey naw,’ Berhanu began when he stood up to speak. ‘This time is a time of competition.’ He went on:

‘In my time, certificates were precious. If you completed grade twelve, you had a place. Nowadays, teacher training centre graduates, diplomas and degrees are not so useful. How about Masters?’

Berhanu went on to explain his own views about solidarity in the face of such competition. He explained that whilst the fiercely competitive nature of running meant that ‘everyone was working for themselves,’ this work on the self for the self was in fact the best way to benefit the group.

‘Do your work with respect. If Zenebu respects her work, and if Aseffa respects his work, then we leave the rest to God. This team will be benefitted if we take strong athletes with a positive attitude. If I do not work properly, another will replace me. If Berhan does not do well, someone will replace her.’

Thus, the centrifugal force of competition – the cut throat reality that if you are not good enough you will be replaced – is a reason to work hard *for yourself*, but this work on the self is absolutely vital for the survival and prosperity of the team as a whole. Even in failure, the bonds created through working hard together were seen as worthwhile ones, as Hailye made clear in his response to the speech by Berhanu.

‘I never thought I would meet Gojjam, or Tsedat. The main reason we met is business. Maybe everything will be gone, but let us at least create some memories (*hullum nagar yalfal, gin yihona tezeta tilin enelif*)’

The period of time spent trying to ‘change their lives’ through running was often experienced as one of deferring the potential moment of loss of hope through their investment in the discipline of running. That is not to say, though, that there was not enjoyment to be found, and important relationships to forge, in the process of embracing a temporality of success that was quite different to that followed by other young men in the city. It is this divergent temporality of success that this chapter aims to unpack.

### **The Reclassification of ‘Dead’ Time**

Training as a long-distance runner is not a particularly time-consuming activity, especially when compared with other elite-level sports. The way in which training is structured by management groups in Addis - with the emphasis on travelling out of the city three mornings a week to benefit from a variety of environments - means that running in Ethiopia takes up more time than in Kenya for instance, where most runners train in their immediate location. The fact remains, though, that there is a lot of time to kill as a runner. On days when there was no ‘programme,’ and therefore no bus to take us to training, we had usually finished our morning run by eight o’clock, and we did not run again until around four-thirty in the afternoon. As such, much of our time was spent in the

kind of 'time-pass' mentioned above. Mains (2011) writes that for his informants 'unstructured time was problematic because it led to thinking about their prospects for the future' going on to emphasise the importance of '*assab*' or 'thought' in these narratives; unstructured time was associated with thinking about 'their continued dependence on their family, their inability to marry, and the indefinite condition of their joblessness' (47). The runners I knew also said they were 'thinking all the time' about their futures, but that this thought was directed towards mundane yet vital everyday choices about their training; what to eat and drink and when, how to 'replace' the energy lost through training, and which combination of training environments would be most likely to lead to success.

For runners, who place so much emphasis on the importance of 'rest' (*ireft*) for training, seemingly 'dead' time was reclassified as productive. I was often asked at afternoon training how many hours I had managed to sleep since our morning run. Any less than two was considered disappointing, and some runners claimed to sleep for five; three before lunch and two after. Sleep had a subjective quality linked to the intensity of the 'work' it followed. Rest is reclassified as productive, as the necessary compliment to work, to the extent that if runners were unable to sleep during the day they would usually skip afternoon training; the failure to sleep during the day would make afternoon training an overly significant drain on the body's resources. It is only through sleep that the body can repair itself and remain active and productive.

This is not to say that runners do not struggle with boredom, and in a sense sleep is used in a way similar to that discussed by Desjarlais (1997) and O'Neill (2014) in the context of homelessness in Boston and Bucharest respectively, as a way to stave off boredom. For this reason – and to ensure that 'thoughts' remained in a hopeful register, rest was often a communal affair. At the training camp I attended in Gondar, for example, one of the runners was physically pulled from a

room where he had gone to lie down on his own, the coach explaining to me that too much time alone could lead to 'the problem of thinking too much'. Often the runners I knew would spend their afternoons together listening to the radio and taking turns to doze on the bed, a cotton *shamma* enshrouding them from head to toe.

For Mains' informants, the main distraction from *assab* or 'the problem of thinking too much,' was chewing *khat*, and he writes of the cycles of hope and despondency the drug creates. In contrast to much of the writing about time, boredom and unemployment, for runners their means of maintaining their mental health and easing the boredom of daily life *was* the very activity intended as a way out of a situation of economic uncertainty. When I asked runners about their main sources of anxiety they often cited injury, emphasising the problematic nature of not being able to run. 'Running makes me happy' I was told by Tsegai in Bekoji. 'When I am training my body is relaxed, but if I don't train I get tense and bored. It is a kind of addiction.' This was something I heard frequently. I was told that running was a more powerful addiction ('*suss*') than smoking. Running justifies the time spent sleeping, and spending several hours a day asleep justifies the second run of the day. Separation from consumer society - from the people who spend their time 'warming up cafe seats' as Hailye put it - was thus seen not as an exclusion forced by economic hardship but as a productive choice and source of hope for the future.

Runners alternate between moments of intense activity and periods of lethargy and boredom. Time spent actually running was seen as hopeful time, whilst going too long without training led to despondency. The moods are intimately tied together, the one alleviating the other. I was told on numerous occasions that running in the forest was where people were happiest. In the forest they could run without the pressure of running certain times, and they were free to visualise their future success. Forest running is a staple part of every Ethiopian

runner's training, and to run in the forest was to tie yourself to the success of Ethiopia's famous (and rich) athletes, to imagine 'succeeding like them' by running the same paths. To run in the forest was thus to alleviate boredom, to provide a source of hope and to justify the rest and seclusion that followed it. Far from being unstructured, 'dead' time, time spent sleeping was very much an active part of the process of training.

Whilst this daily cycle between intense activity and lethargy and 'time-pass' was relatively stable, the longer-term concern with the passage of time and an inability to move on to the next stage of an athletic career could be a source of anguish and concern for runners, who shared concerns about 'youth transition' with other groups of young people in Ethiopia and elsewhere. As I will go on to show, however, it was constantly emphasised to me how long it could take to 'change your life' as a runner, and athletes had various strategies to cope with this. Runners' orientations to the future were usually focused on the immediate temporal horizon of the next race - months, at most, away. Races can therefore usefully be theorised as 'vital conjunctures', tied imaginatively to 'changing your life' in concrete ways, for instance by getting married and buying property.

### **Resetting the Clock**

The evening after the Istanbul half marathon in April 2016, Selamhyun, Bogale, Chaltu and I sat in the hotel restaurant eating dinner. They had been in Turkey for ten days, and were due to fly back to Addis the following evening. Chaltu was leaving Turkey with around \$1,000 having finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Borsa 15km race and 4<sup>th</sup> in the half marathon in Istanbul. Selamyhun finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in Borsa but was 11<sup>th</sup> in Istanbul; his prize money covered his flight but did not leave any 'profit' for him, after tax and manager's fees. Bogale was in 'debit' to his manager; he finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in Borsa and ran very disappointingly in Istanbul. The mood was subdued. All three runners knew that at this stage of their careers - they were all running their first or second race abroad - failing to make an impact could make

it difficult to get another 'chance' abroad. The following is a small extract from the conversation we had over dinner;

Chaltu: (to Michael) 'How old are you, anyway?'

Michael: 'Twenty-eight.'

Chaltu: 'Oh, you're just a kid (*lijj naw*)'

Michael: 'I'm old, really, Selamyhun is the kid. How old are you, Selamyhun?'

Selamyhun: 'Twenty-one.'

Bogale: (of Michael) 'Fifteen or sixteen is young in his country.'

Chaltu: 'Oh. In our country, up until thirty is young. Until thirty-five even.'

That youth had become a protracted category for Ethiopians was a theme that came up often in discussions of runners' ages. When Chaltu says that 'until 35' is considered 'young' - equivalent to fifteen or sixteen in the UK - she is referring to the length of time it can take to make the transition to adulthood. I was told that nearly all Ethiopian athletes' 'passport age' was different from their 'biological age,' usually by four or five years but sometimes by considerably more. This was often referred to, with a wry smile, as 'keeping five years in your back pocket'. When Selamyhun and I discussed the World Junior championships in Poland, for which all athletes competing should be under twenty, he said that he knew that I thought it was 'unfair' because the British team would have to genuinely be eighteen or nineteen, but that this was normal in Ethiopia. '*Hullum Ethiopia, edmeyo tilik naw, passport tinish*' he said; 'For all Ethiopians, their age is big but their passport is small'. We talked about this on the bus after training one day, and our driver, who had overheard the conversation, started laughing. 'They're twenty-seven but they say they're eighteen,' he said. 'It comes from our problems, from our poverty, I think.' At this coach Messeret interjected; 'they just want to be benefit from taking advantage of those youngsters over there. Benefit, benefit, benefit.' This was seen as a specifically Ethiopian trait, as a

'national' problem as opposed to one of the Athletics Federation. To 'solve' the problem, Messeret told me, would require the governments to reform the whole system of birth registration in rural Ethiopia.

I met some of the athletes who were set to attend the World Junior championships in a cafe in Kotebe. They told me that the Athletics Federation had demanded at first that they went back to their home town to collect their birth certificates, but as this would have taken twenty hours each way on the bus they were able to convince the Federation to allow them to name a 'representative' to fax the documents. While we were in the cafe they called members of their families with instructions. Their dates of birth were changed at a cost of 100 to 200 birr (£3 - £6) and the certificates were faxed to 'the immigration people'. They explained to me that this was a widespread practice, and one which the Federation generally turned a blind eye to, especially under a previous technical director. This is how their attitude was explained to me:

[He] did that because he was an athlete, and he knows the ups and downs, the difficulties, the hard work, what people deserve. He knows that they need to benefit with their age; otherwise, if things go wrong, where will that athlete go? He's going to be a farmer back! That's difficult, so that's why they can change their ages.'

Here the need to reset your age is directly linked to the precarious nature of progression in running, and to the numerous setbacks that characterise most running careers. As discussed elsewhere, linear progression is idealised but very rarely achieved. Resetting your passport age also makes sense with regards to the preferences of managers and brands. I was frequently told that Nike only wanted to work with the 'coming' ones, that is, promising youngsters. At the meeting described above, Selamyhun explained that qualifying for the World Junior Championships was a good way to attract the attention of a manager for

the same reason; the managers preferred to work with younger athletes. If you were unable to compete well against senior athletes, he said, it was better to compete as a junior.

It was therefore usually the 'weaker' athletes who were most likely to 'modify' their passport age. Athletes of twenty-three or twenty-four would apply for passports saying they were seventeen, because the World Junior championships are biennial and they could, in this way, give themselves two chances to make the team. For those living in rural training camps, as Selamyhun had, this was also a way of resetting their age and remaining in the camp. When I visited Selamyhun's camp in Gondar I was surprised to find that many of the athletes were in their late twenties and were still attending the local secondary school. They had permission to attend for half-days, and alternated between morning and afternoon lessons each week in order to allow themselves the time to train. As such, they were hedging their bets (*'ba and dingai hullet wuffocc'* they told me; 'two birds with one stone') and they were also extending their youth. To reset your passport age, one runner who declined to tell me his 'real' age, told me, was to acknowledge that 'time was running'.

This sense that the world was moving on faster than they were able to 'adapt' was common; a nagging injury can easily set an athlete back, leaving them 'in the same place' as they were the previous year, 'unchanged.' The success of Haile Gebrselassie was often explained in terms of his longevity; the amount of time he had been able to train uninterrupted. Consensus was that he was 'at least fifty' when he retired. Messeret said he was 'between sixty-two and sixty-five', and one runner even told me that he had seen photographs of him competing as early as 1974 'according to the Ethiopian calendar' - that is to say, in 1982. As I have elaborated upon elsewhere, 'adaptation' is understood as a process that anyone can go through and be 'changed' given that they have enough time.

Rumours such as this therefore sustain hope that an extended period of ‘resetting’ one’s passport age and continuing to run hard will eventually pay off.

The sense of standing still whilst ‘time is running’ as a cause of anguish has been widely written about in the Global South and more generally. Ferguson (2006) for instance has written of Africa as having been separated from temporal narratives of development. Conventional ‘youth transition’ from dependent youth to stable adulthood, marriage and children is increasingly experienced as a prolonged and drawn out process, and as a source of worry. Rather than considering shifts from ‘youth’ to ‘adulthood’ in terms of what Johnson-Hanks refers to as the ‘stultifying assumption of *etapes de vie*,’ (2002) it makes far more sense to consider runners’ hopes and aspirations in terms of her concept of ‘vital conjunctures,’ which she defines as ‘a unit of social analysis based on aspiration rather than event’. ‘Vital conjunctures’ are ‘experiential knots during which potential futures are under debate and up for grabs.’

The term ‘vital conjuncture’ is a highly appropriate description of a race abroad for an Ethiopian runner, for whom concerns about monitoring and expending energy are so important. Timing their approach to ‘condition’ – the delicate state of health and fitness required to compete at the top level – was an extremely difficult thing to do. Running well enough to win prize money required a runner to deploy their vital force – marshalled over a period of months and years – on a particular day at a particular moment.

### **The Race as ‘Vital Conjuncture’**

‘I am giving you the right training sessions, but they have to be implemented properly! Everyone here could be a husband and bear children! No-one is under eighteen here! Some of you are almost the same age as me. The problem is in your mind. You need to be changed!’

- Coach Messeret, post-training meeting

Here coach Messeret clearly sets the idea that 'time is running' whilst the runners are trying to 'change' themselves within the context of the life course. When he draws attention to the fact that all of the runners are at an age where they could be married and have children, he plays on one of their major preoccupations. When I asked people if they were planning on getting married, they invariably told me that it was dependent upon whether they won sufficient prize money to do so. '*Shilimat kametah*' they said; if prize money comes. Some even had a specific financial threshold in mind. Abere told me that he wanted to win at least \$30,000 before he got married, enough to set himself up in business, because he thought that running and marriage 'did not go together' given the narratives of separation and restraint described previously. Others were less extreme, and I want to use the rest of this section to tell the story of Aseffa and Teje, a young couple who were both runners. They met at a training camp in Asella, and lived together in Kotebe. The following is a composite of the story they told me one evening over *shekla tibes*, barbecued meat served in a clay 'shekla.' This was a rare trip out in the evening, and actually took place in honour of my impending departure. I was leaving for the UK the next day.

Aseffa: 'At this moment, I don't know how my family are doing, and they don't know where I am. I suppose they probably think that I am still in Asella. My parents life is just grow, eat, grow, eat, grow, eat. They go out in the morning without breakfast and work all day, then in the evenings they eat huge amounts of injera. They are backwards people. From the age of four I had to herd the sheep. They didn't want me to run. They didn't even want me to study.'

Michael: 'What about your parents, Teje?'

Teje: 'They know I am in Addis but they have no idea that I'm living with him. I tell them I'm fine, I'm living on my own and I can afford everything because my salary is 3,000 birr' (this is around double her actual salary)

Michael: 'How did you get to Addis, Aseffa?'

Aseffa: 'I moved from the rural area where I grew up to Asella. There I was running in the morning, carrying loads in the day (literally 'ya gulbet sera' - 'energy work') and going to night school in the evenings. I managed to complete the rest of my grades and found a local athletics camp in Asella. That was a difficult time. Then I went to Adama club, then to Sebeta club, and finally I came here.'

Michael: 'That's a long journey.'

Aseffa: 'Yes. Many times I had to run 3,000m to be selected. There would be over thirty athletes all over the track and you had to finish in the top four. But now, finally, we are here. We want to get married soon, but the 'engagement program' (in English) is very expensive. In Oromia, you have to buy sheep and cows, new clothes for everyone in both families... It is tough. It will cost around 100,000 birr (£3,000). With the first prize money next year I want to build a small house, and with the second prize money we will start the engagement program. That is why we are working so hard, and why I am pushing Teje always to run hard. We ran for three hours and fifteen minutes in the forest on Saturday, and at the end she was crying, but we are working out of love. When she improves I will pay for her plane ticket to a race outside. I was hoping that I would be able to do it this year, but I have stayed the same (he ran 2.14 for a marathon in 2016 and 2015). I won small money in Turkey and Dublin, but I should have won in Dublin instead of finishing third, and then it would have been different. If I'd have won it would have been enough to change our lives. I think the problem is the place. We will try to move to Sendafa soon where the altitude is more similar to Asella. When I was in Asella I was very strong.'

Several months after returning to Edinburgh I called Aseffa and found that they have indeed moved to Sendafa. In fact, several of my main interlocutors have moved there en masse, after lengthy discussions about how best to augment their 'condition'. Aseffa hopes that this will be the final 'change' necessary for him to reach the level where he can win a 'big' race with enough prize money to make the kinds of life changes he envisioned. As the text above makes clear, the hopeful narrative created by running relies upon the allocation of potential prize money to the achievement of goals such as home ownership and marriage. The race is a vital conjuncture corresponding to particular life events. Racing abroad makes these milestones tangible in a way that they would not be if Aseffa was still working on '*ya gulbet sera*', carrying loads for 'small money'. This kind of manual labour was usually characterised as something to which a runner could always return if necessary but which was a dead end in terms of 'changing your life'; the wages associated with such work were sufficient only for 'existing.'

When Aseffa makes an imaginative connection between a race with modest prize money (£3000 for first place) and buying the land to build a house, we are not in the realm of the Comaroff's (2000) 'millennial,' 'irrational' or 'magical' wealth. As Dolan and Rajak (2018) note, much of the work on African youth focuses on either the 'here-and-now of survival or on an impossible pipe dream of prosperity' (234) with scholars such as Guyer (2007) arguing that structural adjustment and neoliberal reform have 'evacuated the near future' (410). In their work with entrepreneurs engaged in 'bottom of the pyramid' initiatives, they argue that their informants are able to imagine instead 'an apparently achievable mid-term trajectory of personal development' (244), entailing a 'vigilant anticipation of the future' (Ringel, 2014: 54). Whilst runners do entertain notions of the millennial windfall, in cases like Aseffa's they also accept that a more likely scenario is that they will engage in a series of races with limited (though still potentially life-changing) prize money. The short-term temporal

horizon of the next race allows for concrete action in the present through which Aseffa is able to cultivate the hope of reaching specific life goals.

As the above account also makes clear, for Aseffa and Teje the attempt to 'change their lives' requires an almost total rupture with the past and the lives and lifestyles of their parents. Aseffa was in touch with one brother who also wanted to run, and was helping him to pursue this with small amounts of money, but he had no contact with any other members of his family. The 'difficult time' he talks about, when he was training hard enough to qualify for a training camp at the same time as earning a living as a labourer and going to night school, he saw as a form of catching up necessitated by his parents' 'backwards' attitude. The resetting of passport ages is part of this catching up, in the sense that it is a strategy that is easier for those from rural backgrounds to adopt; without an official birth certificate it is much easier to change the year of your birth.

Aseffa and Teje shared a one-room house in Kotebe when I knew them. They shared a bed but their relationship remained unconsummated, Aseffa told me. This was partly due to their faith - Aseffa nearly decided to train to become a priest instead of a runner - but was also motivated by trying to maximise their energy for running. 'Maybe in rainy season we could,' he told me once, because this was always a time of reduced training. Every last ounce of energy was to be invested in their running. All else had to remain on hold until then; even contact with their families.

Teje was a very promising junior athlete who won a medal on the track at the World Youth Championships in France over 3,000m. Since then she had suffered from injury, and on her return to running made the decision to move to competing in road races rather than on the track, citing the lack of money in track running. This explains the three-hour fifteen-minute run described above by Aseffa. The process of 'adaptation' necessary to turn a 3,000m runner into a

marathon runner is normally a long one, but - with some coercion from Aseffa - she was trying to do it within a few months. He had saved the money to allow her to fly to a race in China, his logic being that often the female elite fields are considerably less competitive than the men's, with only a few East African runners and prize money for the first eight. Still, there was a lot riding on the timing of the race and Aseffa's ability to predict which race would give an 'easy' chance of making money. She was desperate to 'adapt' quickly to a level that coach Messeret deemed sufficient for her to win some money, and this can only have put pressure on their relationship.

The prize money Aseffa won in 2016 was deemed insufficient for starting to build a house or to get married. He invested the thousand euros he won in Dublin in moving them to a more comfortable house and on providing good, nutritious food, and was spending 600 *birr* a month on milk in order to attempt to prevent the return of a back injury he had suffered from the previous year. These are other 'vital' concerns – designed to ensure that he has the energy to continue to run and compete. He and Teje accepted the reality of hard work and 'saving themselves' as a necessary precursor to winning the kind of money that would 'change their lives'.

### What Kind of 'Work' is Running?

That running was 'work' was self-evident for my interlocutors. The interview question 'is running work?' was met with a quizzical look. 'Of course,' they said. '*Sera*' (work) was used interchangeably with 'training.' The question 'is running fun?' or 'does running make you happy?' usually elicited an identical response; of course it was. Running was only occasionally compared with '*ya gulbet sera*,' mentioned above. Given the literal translation of '*ya gulbet sera*' is 'energy work' this connection was unsurprising. The difference between the two types of work was, I was told, in their intensity. 'You use more energy more quickly with running' a young man named Million, who ran in the mornings and carried loads

home from the market for people in the afternoons told me in Bekoji. As alluded to above, *'ya gulbet sera'* also precluded a hopeful attitude towards the future. The money thus earned was sufficient only for 'existing'; it allowed neither for saving nor for dreams of an eventual windfall.

Anthropologists studying informal economies often allude to the refusal of wage labour as a form of resistance (Bourgois, 1995). For Bourgois, dealing brings status and respect that demeaning wage labour would not. Yet the runners I knew were not rejecting wage labour in the service industry; they were, for the most part, rejecting other forms of informal and precarious work. As mentioned previously, Millar (2014) points out that the concept of 'precarity' has been used principally by social activists in the Global North, where Fordism was strongest and which has therefore been most affected by its unravelling. For my informants, alternative forms of 'precarious work' included *'ya gulbet sera'* but also working on the street as a tailor or shoe-shine, or plying the bus stations for commission delivering fares. These too are exhausting forms of work with little security. You may 'use more energy more quickly' with running, but this also means that you have time to rest, and to engage in the favourite Ethiopian pastime of *'chewota,'* playful chat.

Whilst very different contexts, there are comparisons to be made between the choice made by the runners and those made by Millar's informants, who rejected regular employment in favour of the Brazilian garbage dump. This choice, Millar (2014) writes, entails an 'act of release' which 'entails a rupture with normative forms of capitalist labour that opens up the possibility of other ways of fashioning work and life [...] allows relationships to be woven, life projects to be pursued, and social worlds to be reproduced amongst the disruptions of the here and now' (49).

There is a temporal element to this. Through running, energy is used up in an intense, accelerated way on a day-to-day basis, but this corresponds favourably to the potential benefits. With *'ya gulbet sera'* and other comparable forms of work, I was told, there was no way out. As Fasil put it, 'working as a guard was no good for me, it didn't change my life very fast (*tolom ayasadigenim*). If you work as a guard, you will do that forever, even when you are very old.' He, and many others, also emphasised the health benefits of running; 'even if you are not successful,' Fasil said, 'you will be healthy at least'. This he contrasted to his previous employment, when he worked as a labourer during the day and as a patrolling guard at night. 'Back then I did not feel healthy,' he told me, 'I had bad problems with my stomach.' Often when talking about wage labour, the runners spoke of it in the same way as Aseffa spoke of his parents farming. They said whilst you were paid immediately, all the money allowed you to do was to allow you to eat for that day. You became locked in a cycle of 'work, eat, work, eat' much like the 'grow, eat, grow, eat' cycle described by Aseffa.

Making the decision to become a runner meant to accept the intensity of work as a necessary conduit to 'changing your life' within a few years. No other profession could match running in this respect. This is how Mekasha spoke of his decision to move to Addis to try to succeed as a runner:

'Now I have left everything and come to Addis because you need to lose something in order to get something. I am healthy, even if I don't have money. Even if I don't have money, I have a goal. I have hope that I will get something tomorrow. As our elders say, 'a person who has a pregnant cow does not crave milk'

Mekasha alludes to the intensity of energy expenditure needed to become a successful runner when he says 'you need to lose something in order to get something.' I have written about this relationship to energy in more detail

elsewhere, but it is worth noting the relationship implied here between intensity of work and reward. When he says 'a person who has a pregnant cow does not crave milk' he alludes to a relationship to work associated with delayed gratification, an approach to work that is very different to that alluded to above. That being said, it seems clear that Mekasha accepts the possibility that this work will come to nothing in material terms; that running allows him to live with hope is enough.

Runners must accept that the work they do may never correspond to any material reward. It is most certainly 'work,' characterised as 'human energy expenditure' (Harvey and Krohn-Hansen, 2018) but not necessarily labour in the sense of being directly linked to capital. In their introduction to the recent special issue of the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Association on *Dislocating Labour*, Harvey and Krohn-Hansen (2018) argue that ethnographic approaches that focus on the labour/capital relation allow us to explore labour relations outside the economic, 'bringing kinship, personhood, affect, politics and sociality firmly back into the frame of capitalist value creation' (20). Whilst running was an activity pursued at the expense of other forms of work, and is, in the case of athletes who run for first division clubs, sometimes remunerated with a salary, there remains only a highly variable relationship between work, energy expended, and reward, and often runners explained to me that it was the social relationships that emerged from running together, and the positive effect it had on their health, that compensated for this reality.

Running, then, is not really labour. This it has in common with Anna Tsing's (2015) writing about communities of matsutake pickers in the US and Japan. For them, mushroom picking was 'looking for your fortune, not doing your job' (77). It was a form of searching. Runners approached their training in a similar way, inquisitively, constantly evaluating the merits of different parts of the city. As they spent hours planning training trips to best make use of different

environmental conditions, they too were searching for their fortunes outwith a system of labour that they felt did not allow them to hope for something better. That system – whether on the farm or carrying loads in the market place – would always exist, and could always be returned to. But running brought with it the chance to ‘change your life.’

To become a runner in Addis, a city where ‘time was always running,’ meant to accept a different temporal frame based upon patience, withdrawal and acceptance that ‘changing your life’ may take years or, indeed, never happen. Waiting was recast not as exclusion forced by economic necessity but rather as a productive choice that allowed for continued hope. As the opening of this piece demonstrated, runners defined themselves in stark moral terms against groups of young men who they deemed to have ‘no goals, no hope’. By aligning their temporal horizons to particular races – theorised here as ‘vital conjunctures – and by connecting these imaginatively to particular life events, runners were able to construct a life in which they both worked and did not. In doing so, they rejected both the day to day precarity of ‘work, eat, work eat’ and the rural precarity of ‘grow, eat, grow eat,’ whilst at the same time framing their work in a positive moral light quite unlike the narratives of criminality and destitution so often focused on in work on unemployment in Africa.

In the following chapter I move from a discussion of the temporal strategies employed by runners in their attempts to succeed within an ‘economy of limited energy’ towards a consideration of the ways in which external forces shape perceptions of capitalist time. In doing so I explore the use of GPS technology, conceived of in the global north as ‘lifestyle devices’ and ‘technologies of the self’ as *livelihood* devices which are limited and highly in demand. I explore the ways in which they are used collectively and in ways that seek to limit risk and manage an ‘economy of limited energy.’

## Chapter Five: 'Some of you do not know the value of time': Quantifying Selves and Quantifying Others.

It is rainy season, and whilst the bus has been parked in a clearing of the Entoto forest for ten minutes, no one makes a move to get out. It is raining lightly and, at ten past six in the morning, only just beginning to get light. Coach Messeret, wearing a thick sky-blue Adidas rain jacket, turns in his seat and explains that today's training would be a 'moderate' run followed by some strength training exercises. He takes the Garmin watch that Malcolm gave him on his last visit out of his pocket and presses the button to activate the GPS. 'I want you all to run for an hour and twenty minutes,' he says. 'The men should cover between seventeen and eighteen kilometers and the women between fourteen and fifteen. Teklemariam [the pacemaker for the female athletes] already has a watch, and I will give this one to Bogale today.' Bogale, who sat in front of me with his head bowed and his hood up, looked up at this and rubbed his eyes before wiping the condensation from the window with his sleeve and peering out into the mist. He would have to lead the run through the forest this morning. 'I will check the kilometers at the end' Messeret said as we reluctantly disembarked with our bags to get changed for the run.

As was usual on a morning like this, it was difficult to pinpoint exactly when the run could be said to have started. We jogged slowly into the trees in groups of two or three, and most of us stopped for a pre-run bowel movement amongst the eucalyptus, some continuing their conversations in the meantime. Ablutions complete we started again to jog slowly through the trees, looping back on ourselves every minute or so in order not to stray too far from the group. Once everyone had emerged from the bushes a line formed with Bogale at its head, and I assume that it was at this point that he started the watch. We wound our way in gradual zig-zags across the camber of the mountain, and Bogale often turned a hairpin around a tree to go back on himself completely. We were soon soaked from the rainwater dripping from the eucalyptus leaves, but we were

running extremely slowly. Even at 3,000m above sea-level I was barely breathing heavily. Bogale led us down into a thickly forested hollow, where two hyenas suddenly scattered up the bank to our left, to whoops of excitement from the other runners who quickly grabbed stones just in case.

After thirty minutes or so of this careful meandering through the trees, one of the other runners – realising that we had no hope of covering seventeen kilometers at this pace - shouted to Bogale that he was going too slowly. ‘We should find ground where the kilometers come more easily’ he said. Bogale ignored this, saying, ‘this is forest training, we have to go up and down.’ We continued at this leisurely pace, and I enjoyed the feeling of being an easy part of the group, comfortable in mid pack, concentrating only on ‘following the feet’ of Fasil in front of me. Bogale silently picked his way through the trees, shouting back to us only after an hour to say, ‘*and sa’at motah*’ – literally ‘one hour has died’. When we returned to the clearing after an hour and twenty minutes, Bogale handed the watch back to coach Messeret saying ‘there was a problem with the watch, we have no kilometers today’. My own watch showed that we had covered fewer than fifteen kilometers in the time, meaning we had run more slowly than the female group led by Teklemariam, whose salary as pace-maker depended on his reliable use of his watch.

Later in the day I met up with Mesgebe, a young runner who I had met whilst running in the forest near Lideta Mariam church. He was extremely lean last time I saw him and he appeared to have lost weight. He looked exhausted as he leant over the table in the café, sipping a ‘fasting macchiato’ made without milk in recognition that the day was a fasting day according to the Orthodox calendar. He explained to me that he had decided to reduce his training from twice to once a day. ‘I was burning myself running fast in the morning and the night time’ he said, ‘so in that way I couldn’t conserve anything and I couldn’t catch up.’ He has been trying to improve enough to join a ‘first division’ club and receive a

salary like many of the members of our training group. Having spoken about the difficulty of ‘replacing what you have lost’ through training – especially when he is often compelled to work as a gardener or guard to make ends meet – he added the following about the ability of the ‘top runners’ to control their energy expenditure.

‘For example you may have a watch that can calculate how many calories you burn in a day. It means in the morning in addition to the night. So you can sum up even what you need. And it will fastly replace what you lose so that it will be nice... And for people like me, we have to wait, just wait until the result. After that, things will be open.’

Mesgebe had a somewhat hazy idea of what kinds of energy were available to the top athletes – he also explained to me that they could replace calories ‘using an injection’ – but the above quote nevertheless illustrates how desirable such devices could be. At the beginning of my fifteen months of fieldwork only one runner – Teklemariam, the pacemaker mentioned above - had a GPS watch. In a short period of time the devices went from being extremely rare to being highly desirable and by the time I left Ethiopia six or seven athletes in the group owned a watch and the coach had two which were used collectively. When Mesgebe invokes the time ‘after the result,’ he implies that the prize money he would win would allow him to afford a watch, but also better food and to not have to work. Things would be ‘open,’ then, that is, less opaque, and he would be able to rely on better information to control and monitor his training and energy expenditure.

Natasha Dow Schull (2016) writes that the wearable tech industry relies upon the ‘double insecurity’ identified in Dumit’s (2012) book *Drugs for Life* of ‘always being at risk’ and ‘never knowing enough about what one could and should be doing’ (1). Dow Schull writes that the industry depends upon customers who are

'unsure whether to trust their own senses, desires and intuitions as they make mundane yet vital choices - when and what to eat and drink, when and how much to eat or rest' (9). These are concerns that dominate the day-to-day lives of runners in Ethiopia, as I have documented at length in earlier chapters. Elsewhere, Dow Schull writes that 'denizens of so-called risk society are expected to shape their lives through choice in the manner of savvy, vigilant entrepreneurs – and yet, more often than not, they lack the knowledge, foresight or resources to navigate the abundance of potential choices they face' (201). Wearable tracking devices, in this reading, free the subject from the burden of worrying and constant vigilance about these things. As I will go on to show, however, for runners living and working within the 'intense temporality' (Stein, 2017, 42) of competitive distance running, for whom the temporal aspects of life were vitally important, these devices, and other ways in which corporations represented time, could be a source of anxiety as well as reassurance.

Alongside the introduction of these tracking devices, Nike (who sponsored a number of athletes in our group and many in other training groups in Addis Ababa) launched their '*Breaking2*' project, for which they sought to use 'science and technology' to try to 'deliver the first two-hour marathon' (Nike, 2017). The marketing around this attempt spread quickly amongst the athletes on Facebook, and the implications of such an attempt to dramatically improve the world record were discussed at length. Nike and Garmin are two of the biggest global corporations in the global running market, and the adoption of GPS watches and the discourses surrounding the two-hour marathon affected behaviour and relationships in Ethiopia in concrete ways. Through reading my data against the logics of Nike and Garmin, which depend upon a narrative of acceleration, I argue that instead my informants experienced time as rife with doubt and speed as dependent upon slowness

The existing literature on self-tracking devices treats them primarily as lifestyle

or leisure products. In this chapter, however, I will argue that for Ethiopian runners these are in fact *livelihood* devices, relied upon as tools to monitor performance and energy expenditure and protect careers. The stakes attached to the use of such devices are therefore far higher. I will present ethnographic material that demonstrates that these devices were highly desirable and yet could often also be sources of as much anxiety as reassurance about what to eat, where to run and with whom. I will argue that rather than conceiving them as ‘self-tracking’ devices as most of the existing literature does, in the Ethiopian context they are embedded in deeper relationships of collaborative work, submission and authority.

The existing literature on self-tracking fails to take into account communal uses of timing technology and the complex relational work that goes into learning about pacing and the monitoring of time in Ethiopia. My central argument is that for Ethiopian runners the production of achievement draws creatively on technologies of time management but also contests them. Runners recognise the need to become subject to time governance to bring about potential and monitor improvement. At the same time, however, such ‘scientific’ attempts to master time also meet with resistance. Such attempts are not rejected, rather runners seek to achieve a synthesis between external scientific knowledge and time-discipline and pre-existing ideas about energy, risk and collective work. As illustrated by the opening example in which the time discipline of the GPS device was rejected on Entoto, the science of running is something about which Ethiopian runners absolutely have something to say, both in their words and in and through bodily practices of rest, slowness and running differently. In running the way he did on Entoto, Bogale makes clear the belief that if places are different, so should training be, and so too should the attitude the runner adopts towards time.

I will begin by outlining the various ways in which time is valued and represented

by the corporations involved in the sport in Ethiopia, before discussing the ways in which the runners themselves thought about representations that relied upon acceleration. I will then go on to describe the practices associated with learning about and negotiating pace as a social practice, and how GPS devices are caught up in these dynamics. In doing so I challenge the dominant conception of such devices as being primarily about *self*-tracking.

### Time, Value and Modernity

‘I tell the athletes I work with, when they’re going to sign a contract, the transparency is: the time and the potential is what you’re worth.’

– Jeroen Deen, Massage Therapist, Addis Ababa.

For companies and managers involved with the sport in Ethiopia, the statement quoted above seems to be true. In spite of the fact that the athletes I knew spoke at length about particular places where ‘the time comes’ and others where it is not possible to run quickly, and of different kinds of races, those who dealt with athlete contracts did so according to a process of commensuration (Espeland and Stevens, 1998), where the time an athlete had run was the only important thing. When Jeroen mentions the ‘potential’ he refers to the preference of brands and managers for working with younger athletes, as I discussed in the previous chapter.

In most races there is explicit financial value attached to times run, which are decided by race organisers and sponsors. The paradox here is that East African runners are expected to understand that time is money - that the times they run will be directly rewarded financially - and yet should not display any concern with time when they are running. Below are two images. The first shows the printed breakdown of race winnings for the Marseille-Cassis 20km race, clearly indicating the difference in prize money for running faster than 58.45. The

second is a photograph of Jemal finishing the race in first place, slightly outside the time he needed to run to break the course record and win the extra prize money. He was widely criticised for continually looking down at his watch in the closing stages of the race, and for not throwing his arms up in celebratory fashion as he crossed the line, instead indicating his preoccupation with time by stopping his own watch. In some circumstances, his manager told me, the race can withhold prize money for this (if the sponsor's name on the runner's number is obscured) and Nike too can withhold bonuses if their logo on the athletes' vest is not visible in the photo of the finish of a race.

**CASSIS**  
**Dimanche 29 octobre**

MEN			WOMEN		
PLACE	< 58'45	> 58'45	PLACE	< 66'45	> 66'45
1	6000	4000	1	6000	4000
2	3500	2500	2	3500	2500
3	2500	2000	3	2500	2000
4	2000	1500	4	2000	1500
5	1500	1000	5	1500	1000
6	1200	800	6	600	400
7	1000	700	7	500	300
8	700	600	8	400	200
9	600	500	9	400	200
10	500	400	10	300	200

'Breakdown' of prize money, Marseille-Cassis 20km race.



Jemal finishing the Marseille-Cassis 20km race.

## Breaking2

In Nike's *Breaking2* event, runners followed a Tesla car which projected a line onto the road showing them where they needed to be in order to stay on pace for a two hour marathon. The car had a giant clock mounted on the top with the time displayed in red numbers. The mastery of time was the explicit focus of the event, yet when the Eritrean runner (and world record holder in the half marathon) Zersenay Tadesse started his watch as the hooter sounded to begin the race this was met with laughter from the commentary team. 'I found it interesting that Zersenay started his watch at the start' one commentator says, 'he didn't trust the very sophisticated timing we have here.' Nike, it is implied, possess sophisticated knowledge about time that Tadesse cannot be expected to match.

Before discussing Nike's *Breaking2* event further I want to stress that the process of accelerating careers and an explicit focus on running fast times was one that operated purely on the level of advertising discourse, nor was it one that circulated only in the global North. Adverts for the *Breaking2* event circulated

between athletes on Facebook, and slogans associated with it such as 'Go Hard or Go Home' (Nike, 2017) were repeated by the runners during training sessions. The acceleration of careers was explicitly written into the contracts Nike had with athletes, affecting embodied practice in concrete ways. Whilst a traditional distance running career would see an athlete progressing gradually from shorter distances to the marathon, Nike's contracts have specific bonuses written into them to encourage athletes to move to the marathon distance, and explicit financial incentives to run fast times *within the calendar year* for which they are under contract. They therefore encourage acceleration in the times that runners produce and also the shortening and intensifying of careers, encouraging young athletes to move to the marathon far earlier than they would have done in the past.

The valuing of time in terms of acceleration is exemplified by Nike's *Breaking2* project, for which they used 'science and technology' to try to 'deliver the first two-hour marathon' (Nike, 2017). The project was described as 'an innovation moonshot to deliver the first two-hour marathon' (Nike, 2017) and as, primarily, a test of Nike's scientific expertise. The world record for the marathon stood at 2.02.57 when they launched their project, meaning they were aiming at a huge improvement of almost three minutes. 'To make it happen' Nike's press release read, they 'assembled a diverse team of world-class innovators who are bringing this bold vision to life. Together, they offer an unrivaled combination of expertise. They are engineers and designers; biomechanists and nutritionists; physiologists and materials developers - all working together to help Eliud Kipchoge, Lelisa Desisa and Zersenay Tadese get the most out of every stride.'

At the beginning of the commentary to the event, Paula Radcliffe, the women's world record holder for the marathon, clad from head to toe in Nike apparel, made this comment before the start of the race in Monza, Italy.

‘In terms of breaking through that two-hour barrier, I think if you project [...] with the projections that we’re going with it’s definitely possible at some point. But can we accelerate it with the input of science and technology to advance history by something like 70 years?’

Nike spent a huge amount of money on the *Breaking2* project, on research and development, on hiring sports scientists and production crews to film a documentary, and on the athletes who took part – Eliud Kipchoge of Kenya was reportedly paid over a million dollars to run. The corporation selected their three most promising athletes for the event, based on past performances and physiological testing - Eliud Kipchoge of Kenya, Zersenay Tadese of Eritrea and Lelisa Desisa from Ethiopia. On the day, Kipchoge ran an incredible 2.00.25, a time two and a half minutes inside the previous world record. Desisa looked uncomfortable from the start, failing to keep up after around forty minutes and looking increasingly laboured as the attempt wore on. He nevertheless refused to give up and limped across the finish line almost fourteen minutes behind Kipchoge. It is instructive to compare their respective career trajectories in light of what I have written above about the incentives contained in athletes’ contracts.

The commentators described Desisa as the ‘young gun’ at just 25 years of age and noted that ‘if you look at his numbers’ from the lab testing ‘you could argue that he’s our best prospect’ (Nike, 2017). Whilst this may have been true *from the numbers*, my Ethiopian informants interpreted his career trajectory as risky and poorly thought through. Desisa had already competed in ten marathons by the age of 25, but his fastest time came from his first ever race in Dubai. In contrast, Kipchoge did not run his first marathon until he was 29. Alex Hutchinson (2017) has looked at the statistics concerning top tier marathon runners, arguing that almost all younger athletes who have run under 2.05 for the marathon did so on their first attempt and were never able to replicate the

performance, indicating that Messeret's concerns about the gradual 'development' of an athlete are well founded. For Nike to portray acceleration as 'progress' and to write this into the contracts athletes sign with them, shapes and alters economies of energy and time in Ethiopia in concrete ways.

In Nike's video of the *Breaking2* event (Nike, 2017), the three runners involved are presented as bringing the raw materials of belief and 'spirit' to the project, and a naive physicality upon which Nike's scientists could work. Desisa, the Ethiopian runner, is described as a 'happy guy' by the voiceover, which adds, 'I think he'll bring that spirit to this possibility.' Tadesse is quoted as saying, 'if you make the effort then God can do his part'. As Bale and Sang (1996) write, East African runners tend to be 'projected as possessing "natural" characteristics of the mythologised African - in this case uninhibited, naive, impetuous,' a characterisation that 'works to obliterate material conditions and material change' (43). Throughout the video, the runners' own watches, as well as their own embodied sense of time and rhythm, are portrayed as obsolete because of the more 'sophisticated' timing technology provided by Nike.

'What Nike have done,' commentator Sam Masakela comments, 'is to say, "I will take your belief, and I will plug in science, and help you get to the place where that belief can be actuated."' One break in the footage of the event features an interview with Dr Phil Skiba, described as an 'MD Performance Engineer.' 'My goal,' he says, 'is to tell them something they don't know. "What do I really have under the hood?" That's the question.' Dr Brett Kirby, the lead physiologist of the Nike Sports Research lab, says in another clip that 'we took them to the laboratory and said, "let's put you through the full tests and see what you're really made of"'. One of the few journalists given access to cover the event by Nike, Alex Hutchinson, wrote however that the scientists had found that it was 'difficult to predict' how Kipchoge, who went on to come very close to two hours in the event, would run, 'because his visit to the lab for testing had been his first

time on a treadmill,' adding that he had 'looked extremely uncomfortable' (Hutchinson, 2017).

When Nike's scientists claim that their testing works to 'show [runners] what they really have under the hood' (Nike, 2017) they are engaging in a process of externalising the responsibility for controlling the body. The scientists interviewed as part of the coverage of *Breaking2* do this repeatedly in terms of the metaphor of the car. 'How economical are they?' Brad Wilkins, the Director of Scientific Strategy asks in the Nike video, adding, 'you can think of that in terms of your gas mileage, it's how much energy are you expending to go at a certain speed?' An athlete's VO2 max, or maximal oxygen intake, is described as 'how big their engine is.' 'The runners,' Paula Radcliffe muses after considering that the racetrack in Monza was the site of the fastest speed ever recorded in an F1 car, 'are calibrated machines as well.' This is a characterisation that is often used in sport, especially with regard to boxing (Wacquant, 2006; Hopkinson, 2015) and yet it was a comparison that was never made by the runners I knew. In fact when coach Messeret warned about the dangers of overtraining he did so by warning the runners that 'there is no garage for human beings'.



Left: Apparatus designed for the 'science of work.'

Right: Eliud Kipchoge undergoing treadmill testing.

The photo on the left is from Rabinbach's (1990) historical study of the 'science of work' in the nineteenth century, *The Human Motor*. On the right is a photograph of Eliud Kipchoge undergoing testing at Nike Headquarters in Oregon. In his book, Rabinbach traces the history of the idea of the human motor to a period of great anxiety about fatigue and unsustainable energy usage among industrial workers. The 'science of work' arose out of the 'compelling assumption' that 'the body was a motor, and that scientific objectivity and expertise were sufficient to provide an objective solution to the worker question' (10). In contrast to Taylor, whose goal was the maximisation of output irrespective of the physiological cost to the worker, scientists like Etienne-Jules Marey who were concerned with the 'human motor' applied themselves to the problem of how energy could best be calculated for *long-term* use rather than productivity per se. Energy conservation became, for Marey, Helmholtz and others, a social doctrine. Productivism and reform were to be united through the 'law of the least effort' as fatigue, overwork and excessive motion were eliminated.

For many of the scientists concerned with the 'human motor' the goal was to diminish the fatigue of the worker *without damaging output*, not to seek efficiencies that increased speed and efficiency at any cost. This reformist tendency, which animated the science of work and produced the instruments designed to measure it, is crucial. The idea of a 'physiological limit,' which the *Breaking2* project explicitly aims to reconfigure, was actually introduced in 1910 by French sociologist Edouard Vaillant, who invoked it in defence of the eight-hour working day (Rabinbach, 1990). He focused on the potential of science to determine physiologically the maximal amount of energy that could be efficiently transformed and utilised by a worker; the abstract measurement of time (the eight-hour day) was merely a sensible average until this could be calculated more accurately. The aim of much of this early physiology was to *minimise*

energy consumption, to reduce working hours and to allow for a shorter working day.

Nike's scientists continually invoke the metaphor of the human motor in their commentary on the *Breaking2* project, and yet their testing, and the accompanying imagery like the photograph of Kipchoge above, are misleading. The testing all took place *after* the decision to aim for a two-hour marathon. It is all irrelevant to the event itself, which was always going to consist of Kipchoge, Desisa and Tadesse running at two hour marathon pace for as long as they possibly could. What the testing does, however, is to reinforce the idea that the expertise lies with the scientists. As one of the commentators put it during the coverage, as the camera panned up from Kipchoge to a cyclist behind him holding a stopwatch, 'as you can see in that shot over the shoulder of Kipchoge, the scientists on the bike, communicating, looking at stopwatches. The science is really the key to this possibility' (Nike, 2017).

In *The Productive Body*, Guery and Deleule (2014) argue that capitalism creates the 'productive body' by collapsing the tripartite relationship between the biological, social and productive into a stark binary that excludes the social. This elimination of the 'social body' enforces a division between knowledge (*caput*, or head) and the labour necessary for its operation (the body) through the intervention of a 'mediator,' a being outside the workers who directs and organises knowledge on their behalf. In their introduction to the text, Barnard and Shapiro argue that 'this manoeuvre makes it seem as if knowledge is not a shared human, collective endeavour, but belongs to a specialised corps of managers' (Barnard and Shapiro, 2014, 20). This is precisely how the scientists involved in the *Breaking2* project are presented, as 'mediators' providing an external 'input' that will make the difference between breaking two hours or not, and therefore as the source of surplus value. The productive body becomes 'normed by statistical and enumerated surveillance as systemic knowledge is

separated or split from the individual labourer' (29). The runner's own watch, and their own embodied sense of time and rhythm, are rendered obsolete by the more 'sophisticated' technology provided by Nike.

In an article with Kenyan newspaper *The Nation* before the *Breaking2* attempt, Kipchoge commented that 'this effort won't require a robot or superman drilled to perfection by scientific faith and medicine, but a good, time-tested human heart, blood and sheer resolve' (Njenga, 2017). His training would all take place at his usual Kaptagat training camp, directed by his coach of over fifteen years, Patrick Sang, with the occasional 'improvised' gym session and a diet of rice and beans. Nike did encourage the runners to wear Garmin GPS watches and heart-rate monitors, noting in their press release that 'the coaches and scientists analyze the data together to understand and interpret the athletes' performance and progress' (Nike, 2017), a description that once more diminishes the agency of the athlete. In reality what this data gathering did was to offer an opportunity for Nike to learn something - they expressed surprise at how *slow* much of Kipchoge's running was. As Ed Ceaser, another journalist who covered the *Breaking2* attempt put it, Kipchoge's mantra "'slowly by slowly' is not one that lends itself to hard-charging Western approaches to fitness' (Ceasar, 2017). In the second half of this chapter I will go on to show the importance of the social element of controlling pace and monitoring energy expenditure, and show that the use of devices like that provided by Nike are primarily used not for the acceleration of individual bodies but rather for the collective management of fatigue and energy expenditure. Nike expressed surprise (Hutchinson, 2017) at the sheer volume of running Desisa was doing according to the Garmin data they were receiving in Oregon, which indicated that he was running over 200km per week. When I mentioned this to our subagent Hailye he frowned and said, 'yes but he probably wasn't always the one wearing the watch,' as if this were self-evident.

## 'How Do You Measure Life?'

The following is from one of the many conversations I had with athletes and coaches about the two-hour marathon, whether it was possible, and what kinds of behaviour might make such a feat happen.

Messeret: 'Look, when a record is broken, everyone becomes happy, don't they? I am not happy. Why? Because as a coach the bar has been raised. It can make you lose hope. Now the men's record is 2.02.57 you are expected to run 2.01!'

Berhanu: '1.56!'

Michael: 'So do you think the two-hour marathon is possible?'

Berhanu: 'With doping, of course it is possible. With doping, you can run like a car.'

Messeret: 'It will happen within a short period of time. Why? Because most of the youngsters are being pulled towards the marathon. What does it mean to say youngsters? Fresh RBC (Red Blood Cells), fresh commitment, fresh mentality, with a chance of gaining something in front of him. If you see athletes of 18 or 19 in the past they were thinking only of competing in the Olympics and World Championships. But nowadays there are races weekly, weekly, with a chance of getting something. And everyone is expected to achieve some sort of time; the bonus is there, the reward is there.'

The concern with time and acceleration is twofold here. Firstly, Messeret is concerned that the focus of the sport is more and more on running fast times; that this is where the 'rewards' and 'bonuses' are. That he mentions young athletes' 'fresh red blood cells' suggests that he is concerned with the physiological effects of this pressure. Secondly, the races are 'weekly, weekly, weekly,' leading to athletes racing more often and therefore putting their bodies under more strain. This was perceived as a very real threat to the health and

livelihoods of the athletes he coached, whose 'development' depended upon patience and gradual improvement over many years. Below is another extract from the same session.

Messeret: 'For instance if you have [run] 2.12 and the record is 2.02 what is the difference? Ten minutes isn't it? How do you measure time?'

Berhanu: 'In hours.'

Bogale: 'In minutes.'

Messeret: 'How do you measure life? Imagine the gap between you and the world record is ten minutes. In order to be known by the world that ten minutes plays a huge role and makes you famous as well. Someone will sacrifice their life for the sake of that ten minus gap [...] For instance, if I am 23 and I have 2.12, in order to break the record I have to run 2.02... At what age will I reach peak performance?'

Berhanu: '34.'

Messeret: '34, so you have 11 years to break the record. Let me make it 2.01. So how do I break this 11-minute barrier within the coming 11 years? Answer me.'

Berhanu: 'One minute per year.'

Messeret: 'No! Running 2.02 and then 2.01 is impossible. It doesn't work. I can improve three minutes now, but when we approach the record even the microseconds become difficult. When I say know yourself, you have to measure yourself and know who you are. What do you want to achieve and where do you want to go. Where is your destination. You have to put your vision first, otherwise biologically you will have no hope.'

There is a lot to unpack in the above. Firstly, Messeret makes clear quite how much is at stake when he speaks about attempts to 'measure yourself' when he asks, 'how do you measure life?' and refers to the fact that without careful planning and monitoring of the body 'biologically you will have no hope'. He

makes his thoughts about the possibility of breaking the world record by several minutes very clear when he says that ‘when we approach the record even the microseconds become difficult’. Above all, he emphasises the amount of time and the level of consistency it takes to improve as an athlete. Measurement and self-knowledge are as much about *belief* here as they are about tracking the body in any quantitative sense. It is implied that it is the vision of the athlete that will make the difference in the end, not any external form of control or enhancement.

### Speed and Slowness

As Krohn-Hansen (2018) points out, ‘capitalism and speed are virtually synonymous terms’ (193) and for Nike to have a marketing strategy based upon acceleration and the mastery of time should therefore come as no surprise. The advertising slogans of both Nike (‘Better Every Day’) and Garmin (‘Beat Yesterday’) are exemplary of this connection between capitalism and exponential speed, improvement and acceleration. However, as Krohn-Hansen later goes on to argue in his ethnography on furniture manufacturing in Santo Domingo ‘this picture only corresponds to half the story,’ noting that in his ethnography the same networks and groups produce ‘both the compression of time and space and the braking and the foot-dragging’ (194). Later in this chapter I will describe in detail the practices of slowness that allow people to survive a conception of capitalist time dependent upon acceleration.

Laura Bear (2014) has argued that modern time, is, in fact, rife with doubt. ‘We no longer have to ask questions only about temporality or relative sense of time or about abstract versus experienced time’ she writes. ‘Instead we can map a complex field of representations, technologies and social disciplines of time’ (13). Adopting Gell’s (1992) concept of ‘time maps,’ she argues that ‘we are able to ask questions about the hierarchical ordering of time-maps within society’ as well as ‘diversity and clashes’ amongst these representations. Through mapping

the ways in which corporations (Nike and Garmin) portray time alongside the various ways in which GPS technology, social relationships and concerns about energy shape views of both speed and slowness, I will describe the various ways of thinking about time that animate Ethiopian running. Discourses of acceleration and speeding up are met with skepticism and anxiety in Ethiopia because of the concerns about energy levels and fatigue described throughout this thesis. My analysis therefore contributes to understanding of the hierarchical nature of time-maps and representations, and the concrete effects some representations (like Nike's attempt to 'accelerate' time) can have on individuals and groups of people.

### **Controlling The Pace and Social Value**

'Living together is a criteria to increase performance. When you run alone you cannot measure your performance. When you run together you can measure your performance with your friend. Am I really able to perform with Gebremariam? Or Selamahun?'

– Coach Desaleyn, Gondar

As the above quotation suggests, 'measuring' performances is a social issue. Here coach Desaleyn was speaking at the *Guna Wuha* training camp in Gondar about the importance of living and training together. Rather than focusing on the measurement of individual bodies according to time, he quite rightly points out that for the majority of runners performance is a relational issue. Access to clubs and management groups in Addis Ababa is open to those who finish within the first three athletes at regional trial races. It is therefore not so much about how fast you can run as about whether you can run faster than your friends, as he notes.

The following extract is from a conversation between two runners who have not yet reached the club level, Dejene and Tilahun. Dejene works as a massage therapist, and came to my compound to treat Tilahun and I, charging us 50 birr each (£2). This conversation was recorded whilst Dejene was massaging Tilahun, who was lying on an Ethiopian Airlines blanket on the floor. Tilahun had just finished explaining his decision to move to *Hannah Mariam*, a ninety-minute journey away by public transport, because rent is slightly cheaper there. He is 'supported' in his running by his uncle, who is a farmer, but has no other source of income.

Dejene: 'Is it good for training?'

Tilahun: 'It is hot there.'

Dejene: 'In a hot place, your body will say "go, go" so you have to control yourself'

Tilahun: 'Kenenisa [Bekele, world record holder at 5,000m and 10,000m] used to train there before. The famous athletes can train anywhere because they have their own cars.'

Dejene: 'It is important to learn from others what you don't have.'

Tilahun: 'I heard Deribe Robi trained there. He is an amazing guy at pace. He is very calculated, he will not push. Even on bus days, his fastest pace in the forest or on grass is 4.30/km. He is amazing at pace. When you come to asphalt he can go 3.05, 3.05, 3.05, he doesn't even need a watch.'

Dejene: 'He is dangerous, he can burn up your energy.'

The first thing I want to draw attention to here is the importance of the training environment. Before they mention the ability to 'control' the pace, Dejene warns Tilahun that he will have to resist the call of his legs to 'go' because he lives somewhere 'hot' (and therefore also lower altitude). The second is the social dimension of learning about pace. When Dejene says 'it is important to learn

from others what you don't have' he echoes a sentiment I heard hundreds of times; that to be successful you had to learn to 'adapt' to other people's running styles and to 'follow their feet'.

Why then is the ability to 'control the pace' seen as such an individualised skill? And why is Robi described as 'dangerous'? The implication is that because he is so measured in his training, Robi is able to save energy to 'burn' other athletes in races. His 'dangerous' attribute is his level of self-control. When I asked Hailye about his reputation, he said it was because 'he ran 2.13, then 2.08, then 2.07, then 2.05' in four consecutive marathons. In other words, it was the very consistency of his progression that was striking. This draws attention, as well, to how unusual it is for someone to be able to run so consistently; to do so invites suspicion and awe.

The ability to run without emotion, to 'control' your energy expenditure and progress gradually is highly valued but rare. It is also a skill that is easier to master the further up the running hierarchy you go. Athletes like Tilahun and Dejene, unattached to a club and uncoached, follow a far more haphazard training strategy than Messeret's athletes. Often their training merely consists of going to the forest and trying to keep up with other athletes until they can no longer do so.

In this context it is clear to see why self-tracking devices would be appealing: they purport to offer clear information about the body that can allow for steady improvement and the avoidance of 'burning up' your energy. The quote below, from coach Messeret at one of his 'life skills' classes in September 2016, actually echoes the discourse of the 'quantified self' movement founded by Gary Wolf quite closely (his article in *Wired* magazine entitled 'Know Thyself: Tracking Every Facet of Life, From Sleep to Mood to Pain, 24/7/365' (2009) for instance).

‘You let energy escape if everything does not go to plan and is not controlled. Controlling emotion is the first principle. The special principle of life: know yourself. Know yourself. It is very easy to say but very difficult to apply. Know yourself’

Whilst the ‘life skills’ class Messeret held was concerned mainly with measuring performance, planning and incremental improvement, the athletes often responded to his questions by drawing attention back to the group. When he exhorted the runners to ‘know yourself,’ Teklemariam replied by saying, ‘we need to believe in ourselves, not merely wish for something or discourage ourselves, but we need to do what we can.’ By switching from the individual to the plural he draws attention once again to the group – rather than the individual – as a vehicle for progress.

A voracious reader of American self-help books translated into Amharic, Messeret ran several of these ‘life skills’ classes with the athletes. The following quote is from the same session.

‘If you say running is my profession, I want you to understand something. Running is measured by time, but some of you do not know the value of time (sa’at waga). If you do not know the benefit of one second, you cannot be an athlete. One second and less than one second can change your life. So, if an athlete has been given 66 seconds for 400m, and if he comes in 65 or 67, you need to show him a yellow card. If he goes 64, or 68, it must be a red card. If you do not know the benefit of one second, you will not be an athlete. If you think that you are a hero if your legs are running without your mind, to be honest with you Ethiopia has more than 5,000 athletes. There are 5,000 athletes in Addis Ababa. They start as a flock of birds but they all melt away. When they start they are a lot, but a few of them become successful; you can count them on your fingers.

Unless you want to be one of those who fail, you need to use your watch and watch with your eyes and think with your mind to lead your legs. If you do not manage your legs, it becomes pure emotion. That is why Aseffa bore the burden [of pacemaking] yesterday. You need to give value to every second. I don't want to coach athletes who overtrain ('charasun athlete' – literally athletes who 'finish themselves'). I have talked about time, but really this language is the law of economisation.'

Coach went on to talk about Haile Gebrselassie, perhaps Ethiopia's most famous runner, who was once offered a bonus of a million dollars if he could break the world record for 10km at a race in Dubai. As Messeret recalls it, he broke the record by one second and remarked, 'in one second you can win one million dollars, and in one second you can lose one million dollars.' And yet in the quotation above, the 'value of time' that Messeret speaks about is not to be found in speeding up and breaking records, but rather primarily in terms of slowing down and avoiding 'finishing' yourself. As I have elaborated upon elsewhere in this thesis, day-to-day concerns with conserving energy and 'replacing what you have lost' were the major source of concern for the runners I knew. They emphasised patient, consistent training as the key to success.

When Messeret mentions Aseffa 'bearing the burden' of pacemaking, this is because Aseffa is seen as having the ability to remain calm and controlled; often the group will be told to run 3.42 per kilometre, and as Messeret says in the transcript above, if they are out by more than a couple of seconds this is seen as hugely detrimental to their training. As I discussed in my chapter on 'Energy, Efficiency and Trust,' 'going beyond the given pace' in training is seen as both a symptom of overly-enthusiastic youth but also as, on some level, a deliberate attempt to 'disrupt' training. 'Control' is physical; the ability to maintain a rhythm and 'feel' a pace; and mental - a lack of emotion. In his 'flock of birds' metaphor Messeret also invokes a tension between freedom (to fly like a bird)

and the discipline of counting every second. Here Asseffa's work of self-control is performed on behalf of the group, and was highly respected by the other athletes who saw this as protecting their energy levels and 'condition.'

A failure to respect the watch and run at a controlled pace in training is clearly linked to 'burning' yourself here. Messeret was extremely intolerant of athletes who ran faster than he told them to in training, to the extent that he asked people to leave the group on two occasions for 'disturbing' the group more than once. When he evokes the '*charasun athlete*,' or 'the athlete who finishes themselves' he means someone who has 'used up' all their energy by failing to control their training.

The introduction of GPS devices had a clear impact on the social value of being able to 'control the pace,' as this became less about individual judgement and temperament and more about who was in possession of the watch. As the following extract from my field-notes suggests, however, rather than alleviating worries about 'mundane yet vital choices' (Dow Schull, 2016, 9) about training, eating and sleeping, the watch could actually create greater anxiety.

'As we made our stiff-legged way towards the forest for our second run of the day this afternoon, Zeleke rolled up his sleeve and showed me the watch he won for finishing second at Funzhou Marathon in China. He has finally worked out how to change the language from Mandarin to English and acquired a Chinese adapter to charge it.

"It says I burnt 1,600 calories yesterday," he says. "But to be honest I have no idea how I am going to replace them."

He explains that he has started buying expensive imported food because it indicates calorie content on the packaging; he wants to ensure he

doesn't "lose anything" through his training. When we reach the forest he starts his watch and we begin to jog slowly between the trees. We are single-file, and run in silence until his watch beeps loudly. He glances down - he has set the watch to beep every kilometre - and laughs. "Seven minutes and twelve seconds!" he shouts.'

On subsequent days this became something of a game; seeing how slowly we could complete afternoon runs, the purpose of which was merely to 'massage' our aching legs. It occurred to me that Zeleke was using his watch in precisely the opposite way than that for which it was designed. He was using it to run *slower*, to ensure he *did not* lose weight. He also began to travel to Sendafa more often - something Hailye and Kumesi also started to do when they got a GPS watch - because there 'the kilometres came more easily'; they were running four minutes per kilometre rather than five with the same effort because of the flatter, more open terrain. The watch actually transformed the practice of training.

Deborah Lupton has suggested that such technology be seen in terms of the 'body-machine' metaphor, whereby the body is quantified in terms of 'inputs' and 'outputs' (Lupton, 2016, 29). As the transcript above suggests, however, the ability to quantify energy in terms of calories does not always lead to a sense of control. For Zeleke it seems to have caused a feeling of hopelessness and worry, especially as he assumed the data was accurate. As Stackpool et al. (quoted Hoy (2016)) notes regarding a study on wearable technology, 'errors in measuring EE[energy expenditure] were, in general, unacceptably large and became larger with non-standard ambulation.' An international marathon runner training at altitude in hilly, forest terrain is clearly not engaging in 'standard ambulation,' yet the data provided by the watch led Zeleke to change his eating and training habits in numerous ways.

As Lupton (2016) notes, devices like Zeleke's use 'complex algorithms to process and display the data collected,' thus extending 'the move from the haptic to the optic in the configuring of the body/self. As one's bodily states and functions become ever more recordable and visualized via data displays, it becomes easier to trust the "numbers" over physical sensations' (Lupton, 2016, 399). Whether or not to trust 'the numbers' – especially those created in the forest, where the watch would frequently lose signal in the trees – was something the runners I knew discussed at length. Zeleke's watch was often dismissed as inaccurate because of its Chinese origin – as with shoes, products manufactured in China were seen as unreliable and poorly made. Runners were also concerned to know whether watches were 'genuine' as on one occasion when I was presented with two GPS watches, one Adidas and one Garmin, and asked to determine which one was 'original'. I explained that they were different brands but both were 'original' products as opposed to fakes. These devices are also intended to have regular software updates in order to maintain their accuracy, something the runners, the majority of whom did not own computers, were not able to do. Whilst your numbers in races – as Jeroen, quoted earlier, points out – determine 'what you're worth' to a sponsor or race organizer, the numbers produced and relied upon by training devices can often be wildly inaccurate.

### **Tracking Selves, or Tracking Relationships?**

As I have discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the tension between the idea of the group as a vehicle for progress and the valorising of the individual is a major concern for many runners and people involved with the sport in Ethiopia. The concerns Ethiopian runners have about the erosion of the communal approach to training and the sharing of food and expertise is often spoken of as a problem of modernity. In her book on 'The Quantified Self,' Lupton (2016) turns to a trio of sociologists – Giddens, Beck and Bauman – to argue that 'self-reflexivity - seeking information and making choices about one's life in a context in which traditional patterns and frameworks that once structured the life course have

largely dissolved - is part of contemporary practices of selfhood.’ She goes on to write about the expanded ‘array of options’ now available to people, which render lives ‘much more open, but also much more subject to threats and uncertainties,’ adding that when people ‘take on the ethical project of selfhood’ they are forced to make themselves central to their own lives. In the context of preventive medicine she references a ‘paradigm shift from “my health is the responsibility of my physician” to “my health is my responsibility, and I have the tools to manage it”’ (398). This, she writes, is tied into the ‘political context of the *developed world*’ (my emphasis), which is characterised by neo-liberalism, competition and self-responsibilisation. As I described in my chapter, ‘This is Business,’ however, the Ethiopian context was one in which many athletes actively sought the authoritarian guidance of the coach, resisting his attempts to make them responsible for their performances and instead requesting that he accept responsibility.

Whilst most writing on wearable technology focuses on ideas about *self-cultivation* and *-discipline*, in the Ethiopian context GPS technology was implicated in wider relations of submission and dominance and collective ownership of tracking devices. Lupton (2016) quotes an earlier article by Wolf (quoted above) in the Washington Post, in which he said that ‘for a certain type of person, data is [sic] the most important thing you can trust. Certain people think a feeling of inner certainty is misleading’ (90). Dow Schull (2016) similarly quotes a representative of Verizon, who claims that the visual data produced by self-tracking devices ‘is really who you are’ (202). Viseu and Suchman refer to Foucault’s conception of the body-object articulation as one of a ‘meticulous meshing’ defined by discipline (quoted Viseu and Suchman, 2010, 34). All of these writers implicate tracking devices within the Foucauldian ethical project of ‘technologies of the self’ – that is, ways in which people perform “operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and ways of being, so as to transform themselves” (quoted Dow Schull, 195). The direct relationship

between 'assemblages of wire, chips and batteries' (Dow Schull, 195) and one body described by Dow Schull (2016, 195) does not fit with the Ethiopian context, however.

For Ethiopian runners belief, as discussed above, is cultivated through social relationships and various different orientations towards time, and GPS devices are used in ways that contrast with the analysis in much of the 'quantified self' literature. The majority of this work (Lupton, 2016; Hoy, 2016; Gilmore, 2015) is Eurocentric and focuses on the ways in which people monitor their own health, the ways in which the data are used in a social networking context, or the political implications of the sharing of (voluntarily recorded) physical data between corporations. In Ethiopia, though, the data are rarely shared - the data collected by the watch that were considered important (total distance, average speed and sometimes split times for each kilometre) were read out by an athlete to the coach who would write them down in his notebook before they were deleted. The watches themselves circulated between runners, were frequently borrowed for particular training sessions and were used collectively during group training. They had vibrant social lives and careers and analysing their trajectories can help us, as Appadurai puts it, to 'interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things' (1988, 5).

Hoy (2016) claims that 'personal activity trackers are an inexpensive and easy way for people to record their physical activity and simple biometric data'. For runners in Ethiopia, however, the cheapest GPS watch cost the equivalent of three-months salary for a first division athlete. That the demand for them nevertheless grew markedly in the course of my fieldwork indicates that they were extremely desirable products imbued with the potential power to help athletes to regulate their training with more accuracy. Gilmore (2015) writes that 'wearable fitness technology is ostensibly designed to help users live longer,' a health discourse that would be unfamiliar to my Ethiopian informants. In his

2015 article 'Exercise as Labour: Quantified Self and the Transformation of Exercise into Labour,' Chris Till argues that 'in our present context, exercise and labour are in a process of merging in such a fashion that in a short space of time, the two may seem inseparable'. So what can we learn from studying wearable technologies in a context where exercise is not merely being transformed into labour but *is* labour in the very real sense that it is remunerated through salaries and prize money? How are the practices of using such devices transformed in contexts where they are more *livelihood* devices than lifestyle ones?

Whilst a couple of the wealthier athletes in the group owned Garmin watches, most of the runners relied on the watch our coach was given by the manager. This was given to a different athlete each session, depending on who the coach especially wanted to monitor, or to the male pacemaker of the female athletes. Lupton (2016) claims that at a 'symbolic level, self-tracking devices can be understood as the prosthetics of selfhood' (70), but in Ethiopia a shared device more often represented responsibility to the group, as the above example of Asseffa demonstrates. After one training session in which the male pacemaker (who did not have a GPS watch) of the female group failed to run at the right pace, the athletes complained to the coach. His response was to defend the pacemaker and say, 'it is not only your problem. If we tie something to your hand (*yehona nagar ejjiy lay bikwotur*) it will be easier for you.' As I have explained elsewhere in this thesis, a strong discourse of individual responsibility and duty to the group surrounds pacemaking; the GPS watch is presented as a way of facilitating this responsibility. Rather than the autonomous individual seeking 'control over their destiny' (Lupton, 2016, 77) in a context of uncertainty and risk, the device offers a kind of *collective security* against the very real risk of overtraining and athletic 'burnout'.

The watch that was owned collectively by the training group was often given to an especially promising athlete to wear when we went to Sebeta, a place

renowned for being flat and fast, presenting them with an opportunity to prove their fitness. There would be no choice in this matter, and this presented an opportunity for the runner in question but also the added pressure of knowing that the data would be sent to the manager abroad for consideration. When Messeret says 'we will tie something to your wrist' we are clearly not in the realm of *self*-discipline. Rather, the watch becomes part of larger relationships of domination and control.

GPS watches became embedded in the deeper relationships of trust and responsibility described in my chapter on 'Energy, Efficiency and Trust'. Messeret made the following comment after a training session in which one of the runners 'disturbed the pace' by running too quickly.

'A person should be controlled by the watch they wear. If they don't have a watch they should be controlled by somebody else's watch. If someone is asked to calm down then out of respect for his friends and team mates he should leave or stop.'

The watch, rather than a device for controlling the self and cultivating a sense of *individualized* responsibility, is here seen as capable of mediating relationships of trust and respect. Part of the desirability of such devices, however, was in their *potential* ability to free people from such relationships. This is how Hailye described his conversation with one of the runners who was irritated by other athletes 'pushing the pace.'

'He said, "they don't want to lead, and they are trying to spoil my shape." I said, "you are tying up a smartwatch on your hand, so why do you have that watch? You can control yourself! There is the pace Messeret gave you. They can push if they like. Or they can go slow. Why don't you go by your own pace?" He didn't have any answer.'

Whilst the watch might offer the opportunity to ‘control yourself,’ it is clear from the fact that the runner ‘didn’t have any answer’ to Hailye’s argument that using the watch in this purely individualistic way, entailing separation from the larger group, was not really seen as an option. Here the watch offers an enticing possibility to gain an advantage over other members of the group, but one that, if seized upon, would be seen in very negative terms by other members of the training group. The ability of the watch to operate as a *self*-tracking device was thus a potential disruption to the group dynamic that was never actually practiced during group training, where runners still valorised running in a group and ‘sharing’ pacemaking responsibilities. The sharing of watches, and their collective and collaborative use, suggests that they might best be conceptualised not as ‘technologies of the self’ but rather as ‘technologies of the others’ (Malara, 2018), entailing not merely work-of-the-self-on-the-self but rather the making and remaking of social ties.

### Energy, Fatigue and ‘Knowing’ Time

‘Science does not work for Ethiopians. A doctor does not know time, a doctor does not run. If mind and legs are not one, it is impossible to run (*chinkilat enna egur and lay kalhona, marot aychillum*)’

- Rata, Ethiopian marathon runner.

‘Running is thinking’

- Eliud Kipchoge (Nike, 2017)

The careful monitoring of fatigue (*dekam*) was seen as a vitally important skill for a long-distance runner in Ethiopia. This concern expressed itself, for instance, in the prohibition against doing a second daily training run (as is usual) if a runner

has been unable to sleep during the day for one reason or another. Fatigue was interpreted in a similar way to the European scientists of work referred to in my discussion of the *Breaking2* project, for whom it was a pathology of productive, routinised labour but also a 'defence which protects us against the dangers of a work pursued to the extreme,' (quoted Rabinbach, 141), or a kind of biological defence. As Rabinbach puts it, fatigue was 'on the one side a defense, marking the limits of the body's ability to convert energy into work, a limit beyond which the human motor could not function,' and on the other, 'the body's method of economising its energy, acting as a regulator of the body's expenditure of energy' (Rabinbach, 141). Scientists of work like Marey and Mosso 'agreed that biological time and body rhythms seemed to regulate naturally the pace of work and reduce waste in human labour' (Rabinbach, 172).

Gregor Dobler (2015) has recently called for anthropologists to 'take rhythm seriously as an empirical category,' and focuses on a rehabilitation of Bucher's work. For Bucher, it was not necessarily the uniformity of work that caused monotony and fatigue but its externally-imposed, unrhythmic character. The ability to determine the pace of work was seen as vital, as Dobler puts it, because it 'allows us partly to forget the extraneous and alienated character of our work. It gives aesthetic meaning to the working process, 'diverts workers' attention from necessity, and lets them experience work's performative aspects instead' (Dobler, 2015). Various different rhythms animated the training of the Ethiopian runners I knew, from 'following each other's feet,' the practice of deliberately running in step whilst doing speed training on asphalt, to the relaxed rhythm of winding in and out of the trees in the forest. For runners rhythm was not merely a distraction, as described by Dobler, however. Runners had a far more reflexive relationship to rhythm, which was constantly monitored, pondered, regulated and discussed. The ability to balance the load (*c'ana*) of hard training with easier running was a vital skill for an Ethiopian runner to learn, calibrating a rhythm of easy and hard days that would allow them to remain on the delicate tightrope of

physical 'condition' required of top level marathon runners.

In his attempt to create this balance, coach Messeret was constantly trying to calibrate this 'load' as precisely as possible. Using the GPS watch was part of this, but such devices were drawn upon creatively by Ethiopian runners and seen as appropriate in some contexts but not others. To return to the example at the very beginning of this chapter, here the watch was implicated in a traditional relationship of authority between the coach and the athletes, and was rejected as being inappropriate for numerous reasons. Firstly, Entoto is imbued with a particular power because of the number of churches within the forest, and is therefore a place for a particular kind of running. Secondly, rainy season was seen as an environmentally dictated opportunity to rest by many athletes, who took the opportunity to reduce their training to once per day and lessen the intensity. Perhaps most importantly as Bogale points out, forest training is about 'going up and down,' and using the camber of the mountain intuitively to reduce the stress on the joints and lessen the chance of injury. It is seen as a particular form of training that is not suitable for the kind of external time discipline imposed by the coach.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that devices for measuring runners' bodies are implicated in wider relationships of control and submission than the current literature on *self*-tracking suggests. I have demonstrated the ways in which Nike and Garmin characterise 'development' as acceleration, and the ways in which discourses of acceleration as progress have concrete effects on runners' bodies. These representations of time may be a particularly dominant representation within a hierarchy of 'heterochronies' (Bear, 2014), yet whilst Ethiopian runners recognise the need to become subject to time governance to bring about potential and monitor improvement, such 'scientific' attempts to master time also meet with resistance.

Whilst Nike seek to construct a 'productive body' (Guery and Deleule, 2014) by excluding the social, social relationships and ideas about sharing and collective work continue to dominate Ethiopian runners' conceptions of time. Rather than adopting narratives about *self*-control and self-responsibilisation, measuring technologies are often used both selectively in particular situations and environmental conditions and collectively in order to protect the integrity of the training group. Runners seek to achieve a synthesis between external scientific knowledge and pre-existing ideas about energy, risk and collective work.

Whilst in this chapter I have outlined how discourses of improvement, and devices of measurement and monitoring are conceived of within an 'economy of limited energy,' in the following chapter I will describe in detail the ways in which runners, coaches, sub-agents and managers imagine trajectories of progress. In doing so, I demonstrate the structural challenges runners face when trying to make plans for the future, arguing that careers are often rather characterised by interruption, disjuncture and a cyclical relationship with ideas about progress.

## Chapter Six: Trajectories, Real and Imagined

'I want to be 99% sure that he can run faster than 2.14. Otherwise it puts him back financially, in terms of sponsors. He needs to ask himself where he wants to be in November of 2016'

- Malcolm, in a meeting with Hailye and Aseffa, November 26<sup>th</sup> 2015.

'We spent most of today sitting around the compound, and Fasil has washed twelve pairs of running shoes. He is unusually quiet and seems to be trying to distract himself. Every hour or so he asks me to check the results from Aseffa's race in Seoul. Finally I find them online. "He ran 2.14" I tell him, and he shakes his head. "Balufow sa'at naw," he says. "That's his old time."'

- Fieldnote, 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2016

As the quotations above make clear, and as I discussed in detail in the introduction, progress and development are firmly ingrained in the imaginary of the sport of running at all levels. In the quote above, Malcolm's concern is that Nike and Adidas, the two sponsors capable of providing financial stability in the form of a 'finance' deal with an athlete, will lose interest in anyone he 'pitches' to them who seems to be going backwards or standing still. This logic permeates the sport to the extent that Fasil, who has only recently started running and who is yet to apply for a passport to travel abroad, recognises Aseffa matching his previous marathon time as a failure. When he laments that 2.14 is 'his old time' he recognises the importance of constant forward progress.

The emphasis on acceleration which I described in detail in chapter five in relation to the marathon world record and the focus on the times an athlete has run above all else extends into the way in which managers and brands think

about the trajectories of athletes' careers but also to races themselves, which would ideally also show 'progress' year on year. One evening when Malcolm was in Addis Ababa to try to re-sign some of the athletes he had been working with the previous year and secure signatures from new athletes, he explained to Hailye that another sub-agent, Abiyote, 'keeps coming to me with older guys who are fast but haven't run well recently.' He went on, 'I'd rather have a young guy who has run 2.14 this year than a guy who ran 2.07 in 2012 and 2.12 this year. We want to show that our athletes can progress under us.' Here the reputation of the management company - both with other managers and brands and with the athletes themselves - is dependent upon a narrative of consistent progression.

Malcolm often lamented the fact that some of the races he had worked with in the UK in the past had stopped focusing on fast times at the front of the race, content to encourage British runners and the mass participation side of the sport. 'This year Brighton marathon had no elite field and look at the winning time - 2.27 by some random guy nobody has ever heard of,' he told me on one occasion. 'From a British perspective that might be what they're looking for, but from a management perspective it's a shame because that race has just gone backwards by about 100% after all the hard work over the past six years.' Here it is implied that part of the manager's role is to encourage and provide progress for athletes, race organisers and brands. The absolute ideal situation from Malcolm's point of view is for an athlete to improve every single race. In July 2018 *Moyo Sport's* star athlete, the Kenyan 1500m runner Tim Cheruiyot, had run five Diamond League races (the most competitive athletics circuit in the world) each in the fastest time run in the world for the year (a World Lead, or WL). *Moyo Sports* tweeted the following:

'3.31.48 Shanghai, May 12

3.49.87 (mile) Eugene, May 26

3.31.22 Rome, May 31

3.29.71 Paris, June 30

3.28.41 Monaco, July 20

#Consistency'

The choice of hashtag is interesting here. 'Consistency' does not mean maintaining a steady level of performance. It means getting better all the time, every single race. John Bale (2010) writes that 'a project - work or a race - has a beginning and an end. Its logic is characterised by the spatial metaphor, "linear"' (37). Coaches speak constantly of 'progress' and 'development' and running careers are imagined as trajectories with clearly defined stages and objective ways of measuring development. For Manuel Schotte (2012), a running career thus mirrors the educational career runners have often abandoned, as 'differentes etapes scandent une progression inscrite dans une temporalite lineaire' (88). As such, it allows for the articulation of a narrative of progress, or way of imagining the future, in contexts where other aspirations may have been disappointed. 'Illusio,' Desjarlais (2012) writes, 'is forward-looking, as it's tied to a person's ideas of future endeavours and commitments.' Nowhere is this more true than in long-distance running. As Bale (2010) points out, the perspective encouraged by running, 'front space,' is 'primarily visual; it is perceived as the future. It is sacred space, towards the horizon, yet to be reached' (38).

In *The Life of Lines*, Tim Ingold writes that 'the straight line has emerged as a virtual icon of modernity, an index of the triumph of rational, purposeful design over the vicissitudes of the natural world' (152). He goes on to write that this line seems to have been 'broken into fragments' with the fragmented line emerging as 'an equally powerful icon of postmodernity' (167). He chooses to read this positively 'in so far as it opens up passages - albeit unconventional ones - that might previously have been closed off, allowing inhabitants to find their own "ways through" and thereby to make places for themselves, amidst the rupture of dislocation"' (169). A similar argument has been made by Cooper (2014) in the

introduction to the collected edition *Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa* which sought to 'understand the positive and productive potential of uncertainty' (1). 'Uncertainty,' Cooper writes, 'is a social resource and can be used to negotiate uncertainty, conduct and create relationships and act as a source for imagining the future.' (2)

In Di Nunzio's (2015) work on Ethiopia he proposes 'an open-ended approach to the examination of life trajectories' which learns from his 'informants' engagement with a multiplicity of terrains of practice, roles and careers' and which was 'grounded in a fundamental appreciation of the limits of not only what they could do, but also of what they could know' (152). This does not mean, however, that attempts to plan and plot for the future are not important to people. As Oian (2004) notes, whilst most people's lives are no longer 'organised unidirectionally in the same manner as they used to be' and fragmentation and confusion characterise self-identity in many parts of the world, this kind of 'crumbling' may be overcome by 'leaning on the existence of linear time as it continues to exist on the level of cognition and ideology in spite of the frequent temporal interruptions that can be identified on the level of the social' (174). I seek to argue in this chapter that whilst most runners' trajectories were characterised by interruptions, frustrations and a cyclical rather than linear relationship with ideas about progress, they nevertheless sought control through planning. Attempts to plan for the future co-existed quite comfortably with the awareness that plans may not come to fruition and that risk is inherent in the project of a running career.

As Charles Larmore points out, 'the canonical view among philosophers ancient and modern has been, in essence, that the life well lived is the life lived in accord with a rational plan' (1999, 96). The idea of the well-planned life as the good life represents a position that Larmore rejects, however, as he argues that the good life is one lived with a 'sense of our dual nature as active and passive beings'

(1999, 111). There is certainly a sense in which an ability to plan at least some aspects of life affords a sense of control, however, and Desjarlais (2012) identifies a similar process in chess, which allows players to ‘find they are acting in the world, initiating lines of thought and action, rather than simply responding to whatever life throws at them’ (42).

In what follows I trace various ways of thinking about trajectories and progression from the perspective of runners, sub-agents, coaches and managers, exploring how various imagined trajectories rarely flow smoothly or together but are rather characterised by interruption, disjuncture and interference. I then go on to discuss the structure of the sport and the ways in which the structure works against attempts to plan for the long term.

### The Runner

When planning for a specific race or period of training, runners tend to imagine a smooth upward trajectory, building distance and intensity until they reach their best ‘condition.’ Different runners would approach this in different ways. Berhanu, for instance, would always work purely on ‘kilometers’ for three or four weeks before ‘adding speed’. Below is a short field note extract made after returning from training.

‘I sat with Berhanu on the bus back from training today. He was in an unusually jovial mood, with his feet up on the seat in front of him. He told me that he was planning ‘personal’ training for a series of weeks, aiming to build the length of run he did every Saturday in the lead-up to Gold Coast marathon. ‘This week I’ll run two and a half hours,’ he told me. ‘I’ll go really high in the forest at Arat Shi. Next week, three hours.’ At this point he looked a little sheepish before adding quietly, ‘then I’ll do one run of three hours and forty-five minutes.’

This is an unusually long run for anyone to consider, but the point is that it seemed to be psychologically as well as physically important for Berhanu to feel that he was 'building' his training like this, and that he was planning it on his own. Whilst runners tended to do very similar things on 'programme' days, it was common for them to formulate training plans of their own without the coach's knowledge, and to plan them carefully in terms of the most beneficial environment (in this case, *Arat Shi*, at extremely high altitude.) In fact, when coach Messeret found out about the three-hour forty-five minute run he tried to talk Berhanu out of it, which was probably sensible *physiologically*. In terms of his psychological preparation it had become so important, though, that Berhanu did it anyway.

After he had completed his initial phase of focusing on 'kilometers' he told me 'now my endurance is full' in English, adding 'now I need to add speed.' This involved him planning specific visits to the track as well as the usual training sessions with the group. Again, he was trying to do a little bit more than he had to, and thinking carefully about where the supplementary training should take place for the ultimate effect. The track is widely acknowledged to be the best place to develop speed, and he had to negotiate access to the track in Addis Ababa University in order to train there.

His imagined 'trajectory' to his race would have looked something like a gradual upward slope representing his 'endurance' phase, followed by a steeper upward slope representing speed training, which would be followed by the race and then a gradual downward trajectory indicating his loss of 'condition' after the competition. In reality, though, after running such a high volume of kilometres in the 'endurance' stage, he found his hamstring unable to cope with fast running. After speed sessions he would grimace and when I asked him about his hamstring he would just hold up a clenched fist to indicate the problem: cramping muscles preventing him from running freely. Nevertheless, he managed to make it

through some really good training sessions and was in extremely good 'condition'. Coach Messeret, unaware of the doubts Berhanu had due to the lingering hamstring problem, estimated that he could run 2.07 in Australia, which would have won the race and broken the Australian all-comers record. Berhanu's doubts lingered not because of the times he was running in training but because it wasn't how he *imagined* he would be feeling.

In spite of his concerns he was still improving two weeks before the race, and Hailye was optimistic about his chances of winning, running faster than he ran in Rome (2.09.27) and of thereby securing a kit deal with Adidas or Nike. Until, that is, he suddenly started feeling ill and was diagnosed with typhus and typhoid eight days before the race. These are quite serious illnesses, and coach Messeret was fairly unequivocal in his estimation of Berhanu's chances when I asked him about them during a training session on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July:

Michael: 'Did you hear about Berhanu having Typhus?'

Mes: 'Oh! Typhus positive? It is difficult for him to keep up with the stress of the race. Typhus is mostly found in the side of the RBC [red blood cells], it is very dangerous.'

Michael: 'How do you get it?'

Mes: 'Contamination of mostly the personal hygiene problem. Through bad sleep place, I think. From food. You can take contaminated food and have typhoid, but typhus is a problem of the personal hygiene problem of the sleeping room.'

Michael: 'I hope he's OK, it's a long way to travel to Australia.'

Mes: 'Difficult, difficult for him even to run.'

Running a marathon takes several weeks to recover from; running a poor marathon where you get gradually slower can take even longer. With limited opportunities to race, this means that an unprofitable race – like traveling all the

way to the Gold Coast to finish 8<sup>th</sup> in 2.15.22 – can be a real setback. It is considered to be better to finish a race than to drop out completely if the race has paid for the flights, because a race is unlikely to invite you to run in subsequent years if you fail to do so. Yet running the final ten kilometres of a marathon if you are ‘outside the prize list’ is detrimental to your ability to return quickly and have a chance to win some prize money at another race. Whilst Messeret reacted like this – doubting whether it would be possible for Berhanu to even run, let alone compete – he made no attempt to talk him out of flying to Australia for the race. Whilst keeping tight control over his training three mornings a week, decisions like this are left to the athlete and it is assumed that the athlete will still ‘gamble’ and decide to run and hope for a miraculous recovery.

If the race had come after 11 weeks of his twelve-week build up, he would have been in peak ‘condition’ and in all likelihood he would have won a lot of money and secured a two-year contract with Nike or Adidas which would have given him guaranteed income and financial stability. Instead, he struggled through the race and returned exhausted without earning any money at all.

When I spoke to him after the race he told me, ‘I won’t run at all now for at least a week, then I will jog for the rest of July. Then I’ll start a good program. What will that be? August. Constant training, August, September, then I’ll have my condition back.’ In other words, he is aware of the need to allow the downward trajectory that started with his contracting typhoid and was exacerbated by the race to continue with a couple of weeks of not running, but he is already plotting his return and a serious block of ‘constant training’ for August and September.

Berhanu’s season was actually to include four marathons; first Lagos, then Rome, Gold Coast, and finally Frankfurt. Whilst he failed to finish the races in Lagos and Frankfurt, he still did the training each time; a two month period of rising

intensity which by design left him on the edge and vulnerable to injury or illness. After the Rome marathon, I travelled with him to his old training camp in *Debre Tabor*, Gondar, where he had gone to recover and ‘jog’ before beginning his training for the Gold Coast. He told me there what he thought the physical limitations were for marathon runners. The following is an extract from my fieldnotes.

‘As we were sitting in the café drinking laos (a hot peanut butter drink) today, an interview with Gezahegne Abere, a retired marathon runner, came on the TV. We watched it for a while until a powercut put an end to the transmission, giving me a chance to ask Berhanu and Selamyhun about it. “Marathon only ba one year sost marathons, kazah balay ba beretacc medahinet naw yemirotot” Selamyhun said; “in one year you should run three marathons, those who run more than that do so using medical enhancement...” I asked Berhanu what he thought of that and he said, “Maybe... *Wutetu wutet ateshenefum wutetum aserum aratim terotaleh!*; “You can run four, or even ten, but you won’t get results.”

This is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, Berhanu runs four races in nine months in spite of recognising that to run more than three in a year means you will not get results. Implied here is also that not getting results can *cause* you to run more races; without results you can end up running up to ten races in a year, which would certainly be detrimental to your ‘condition’. This was the case with Berhanu. Because he dropped out of Lagos, he immediately wanted to run another race, then after his poor performance in Gold Coast he immediately wanted to run in Frankfurt. Only the very top athletes have a choice of where they run; most are told where they will race by their sub-agent or manager, and this could lead us to conclude that the pressure to over-race comes from the manager. But when I interviewed his manager he made it clear that from his point of view, Berhanu was putting *him* under pressure. In the hotel at Rome

marathon, his manager told me, 'even before the race at the weekend he [Berhanu] was already starting to talk about other races and I was like, "look you don't even want to start to think about that because you have a job to do on Sunday..." That he was already thinking about the next race in this instance was probably because he knew he was in good 'condition' (he came second in Rome) and wanted to keep his upward trajectory going.

### Planning and Contingency

In the example given above it seems quite clear that a rational approach to planning Berhanu's racing schedule would have seen him withdrawn from the race at the Gold Coast. That he was not withdrawn is partly to do with how the sport is organised. The elite field for the race would have been finalised months beforehand, and it would not have been possible to substitute another athlete. Added to this, the relationship between the manager and the race organisers would have been damaged by a last minute withdrawal, which would have made it more difficult to get a runner invited in subsequent years.

However, it also seems clear from the above that whilst planning and monitoring training are perceived as extremely important, there is a clear awareness that chance comes into play, and that it is still worth taking a risk and hoping for a miraculous recovery and a good result. In a sense my argument here is similar to that made in chapter one, then, that 'condition' is dependent both on careful and meticulous marshalling of energy *and* on sometimes embracing risky and seemingly extravagant training practices.

In this light it is useful to consider the following conversation between Messeret and the athletes, which took place during one of his sessions on 'life skills.'

Messeret: 'What does it mean to plan? First you have to set a goal, and it has to be specific. How do I train to get this goal? Can I plan as I like? OK, I

made a plan, but do I have shoes? What shoes do I have? What track? What asphalt? What can I do? How much money do I have? What should I choose? If I choose it will it have a negative impact? Will it be beneficiary? Can I minimise the risk? What shall we eat today? Shiro? How many of you have planned a timetable for food?! We are living according to chance! Let me show you the 2010 calendar [Ethiopian]. We have hardly begun 2009 yet here I have the training sessions for 2010. I want to plan for the next five, six, seven years. You have to plan, plan, plan, plan.'

Teklemariam: 'You have to be a risk taker.'

Messeret: 'Risk? It could be... You have to face challenges, it is the secret of success. Through ups and downs, upset, sickness, being healed, being hungry, being thirsty... If you don't suffer you won't get anything. Do you have any comments? Any suggestions?'

Bogale: 'I have a suggestion. Success may be achieved earlier than planned, at the planned time, or sometimes later.'

Messeret: 'Yes, but what is important is that you have a dream and make a strategic plan towards achieving your target. Otherwise you will become compassless. You need to have a vision, a target to wake you up from sleep.'

In the above we see the same minute attention to detail as I described in the first chapter of this thesis, the desire to monitor and measure inputs of energy to the extent of making a timetable for food. We also see the runners quite clearly offering some resistance to the idea that planning is all about 'minimis[ing] the risk' as Messeret puts it, with Teklemariam claiming that 'you have to be a risk taker.' The idea that planning necessarily leads to control and predictability is also questioned by Bogale when he points out that success may come at any moment. It is in fact this attitude that Messeret and Hailye spent a lot of time countering, because it led to runners always wanting to go to the fastest races with the best prize money even if nothing they had done in training suggested

that they were ready. This is how Hailye explained this to Mekasha, a new runner in our group who I will write about in more detail later in this chapter.

Hailye: 'You know Mekasha, the athletes do not understand that there is a huge opportunity in this group to get a race. Most of them want to run where the course is 2.04, 2.05, they say, "Dubai, Dubai!" But Malcolm advises them that there are races where they can run 2.10, 2.11 and get much more money than if they finish 5<sup>th</sup> at Dubai. In addition, change will come gradually, running 2.10, then 2.08 and 2.07. But they do not understand.'

There is a sense both that planning and careful, incremental improvement are important, and that you must be open to the possibility of a rapid and inexplicable transformation in your ability as a runner, that you must in Larmore's words entertain a 'sense of our dual nature as active and passive beings' (1999, 111). 'Passive' is perhaps not quite the right word to describe this, however. Runners take an active approach towards planning and visualising how their training trajectory will go, as I demonstrated above with the example of Berhanu. The 'passive' element is not so much passivity as willingness to imagine that in spite of this planning, something unexpected might happen. This often manifested itself in the beliefs about *idil* that I described in detail in chapter three. There was a tension between the conscious planning of training, and the desire to control 'condition' and a more passive acceptance that even if an individual's preparations for a race may be perfect, it may not be part of God's plan for you to run well. Consider the following extract from an interview with Aseffa, which took place after he had failed to finish a race:

Michael: 'So you're not too disappointed with the result?'

Aseffa: 'No, not really. You know, maybe it wasn't my time to run well. Maybe if I'd won the money I would have bought a car and died in a crash.'

God will know when I am ready to win big money.'

There is a clear sense in which personal morality and leading a good and virtuous life are seen to be vital to a runner's success, and part of this has to do with being a good Orthodox Christian. As such, planning a rigorous training schedule and following it 'religiously', observing the Orthodox fasts and avoiding sex and alcohol may be assumed to make it more likely that God's plan will align with one's own. Yet there is also a sense in which the knowledge that in spite of what you do in training and how hard you work it might just not be your time makes it easier to cope psychologically with defeat and failure. 'Living a luxurious life' of material comfort was, in fact, often associated with people who believed in devils. To be too comfortable could cause suspicion.

Working hard and initiating plans for your own training – taking control – seems to be hugely important for Ethiopian runners, especially in a context in which they have little control over many aspects of their career, such as whether or not a manager will 'sign' them, when and where they will be sent to a race, whether they will find a club willing to give them a salary, whether their family will continue to 'support' them and other uncertainties. This discourse of 'hard work' and 'deserving' is clearly mediated by the belief that it is ultimately God who decides how you will perform, however. Most of the runners seemed to believe that God's plan could be influenced through hard work, but the extent of this influence was in doubt.

### **The Manager**

In a more extensive interview with Berhanu's manager, I recorded a longer explanation of *his* plan for Berhanu's season, extracts of which follow. This interview took place shortly after Rome marathon, where Berhanu ran 2.09.27 and finished 2<sup>nd</sup>. Having failed to finish his previous two races (in Shanghai and Lagos) it was also not far off being a last-chance race for him, as managers will

often drop athletes who fail to finish races and he would have struggled to find a new manager.

Malcolm: [Rome came] 'after two pretty shocking results as well which is so important because if that didn't work, he'd have gone back to eating burgers and pizza and be like, well I didn't finish in Shanghai, I didn't finish in Nigeria, what the heck? And there's no progression whatsoever [...] For some of them it's just a case of they have to be patient. But they're wanting money and that's the way the sport has, over the last four or five years, progressed, where you run for two or three years and you just try to blitz it and that's about it...'

I want to briefly interrupt the transcript here to point out the importance of the terms 'progress' and 'progression'. In one very short excerpt, the manager points out both the *reason why* it is hard to consistently 'progress' as an athlete – the frequency of races and the pressures of a short career – and implies that this speeding up of a runner's career represents 'progress' in the sport. An athlete is expected to keep moving forward, as will be made clear below in the continued transcript, but they have increasingly short periods of time between races to recover and improve.

Michael: 'So are you trying to negotiate something for him at the moment?' [with the brands]

Manager: 'Yeah. He'll get kit for sure. But finance is highly unlikely for now. The only reason finance would come is if Nike know he's been with Adidas, which he has... The only reason Berhanu will get money is - which is why his next race is so important – because they're not stupid these guys, they'll know that he was on the start list for certain races, they only need to look at some of the media reports to see that he hasn't proven himself as a marathoner yet. He's gone and jumped from being very good

at Dubai at the beginning of 2015 to not doing anything significant until the end of the season, to then coming back to he's got a PB and good form. Now what he's got to do is in his next race I've got to try to convince him not to go to China, potentially do another 2.09 or under kind of course and then that backs up his performance from Rome and then come the Autumn you know he goes for a consistent time, he doesn't blow it. If he runs 2.13, 2.11, that's any idea of finance out the window. *He's got to prove that he's the same, or better.* And yeah, 2.09.27 is good but it's nowhere in terms of East African running.' (my emphasis)

As I hope I have made clear, proving that you are 'the same or better' every single race is an incredibly difficult thing to do. The 'consistency' valued by the brands is perhaps the most difficult thing for an athlete to achieve, given the precarious nature of the 'condition' they are trying to cultivate and the short-lived nature of the 'peak' of fitness necessary to run well in a race.

For Malcolm, the ideal was to chart a trajectory from smaller 'development' races towards the bigger races with significant prize money and exposure. The reality, however, was often that middle-ranked runners went back to the same races every year, mainly because of the social ties between Malcolm and the race organisers. This was the case with Aseffa, who went back to Dublin marathon several years in a row. He explained this as follows:

'For me to get Aseffa into a race in the Autumn that's not Dublin, it's highly unlikely I'd be able to persuade them going in cold just based on his results. His PB is from three years ago, 2.14. Last year he ran 2.15 and the year previous was 2.16 so his trajectory has actually gone like that (he gestures a downwards slope). But because of the relationship I have with the race I know I can get him in. And they know him there. Dublin always say I can have two spots, and I like Aseffa a lot and I don't want him to

think that I have no race for him. And it's a no-risk race, everything is in place.'

In this context, 'risk' refers to the cost of paying for a flight and accommodation for an athlete, which is something Malcolm did on occasion for 'development' athletes, to give them a chance to prove themselves. Often they were not aware that this was the case, a point I will discuss in more detail shortly. When Malcolm first started working with Aseffa it was because he had performed extremely well in a 15km race in Addis Ababa. Malcolm arranged for Aseffa to run in a 10km race in London because he was 'being hassled by another management so the important thing was just to get him a race as soon as possible'. He explained to me that for 'development' athletes this often meant running for very little money, and on this occasion there was actually no prize money at all - Malcolm just gave Aseffa some money from the management company, imagining that he would improve and go on to run much bigger races. When this failed to happen, Aseffa was left with the only option of returning each year to Dublin, his trajectory marked not by linear improvement but rather by repetition and a cyclical pattern defined by the social ties cultivated between the manager, race organiser and athlete.

### **The Coach and Sub-Agent**

'Your results tell a story about yourselves'

- Coach Messeret

'You keep asking us for races and when it gets too much we arrange them for you, but when your race is poor it is Messeret and I who are blamed'

- Hailye

The responsibility for selecting which athletes to send to races was shared between Hailye and Messeret, with Messeret in charge of devising the training to prepare athletes to compete. As the quotations above suggest, an athlete's result was presented both as a reflection on them and as a reflection on the coach. Their results told a story about the runner but also about the decisions made by Messeret and Hailye. Given that a runner failing to finish a race reflected worst on the coach and sub-agent, consistency and reliability were the traits most sought after and encouraged in a runner. Interestingly, the above comments were delivered at a post-training meeting, in Amharic, whilst Malcolm looked on. Messeret went on to say the following:

‘When you ask for a race and Hailye informs Malcolm, I will be asked, “do you believe 100% that he is fit to compete?” If I answer dishonestly, “yes, he can run,” then the bullet will have my name on it. “You said you trusted him but he didn’t perform well!” What should I reply? In order to avoid this, let me control you strictly.’

The ‘strict control’ Messeret speaks of here relates to his and Hailye’s attempts to instill discipline in not missing training sessions, which was seen as an attack on ‘transparency’ and ‘honesty’. This demand for visibility and as objective a measure of performance as possible extended to Messeret recording attendance and Hailye taking photographs of the training group in order to ensure that there was evidence of athletes’ performance and reliability. This demand that people attend every session was often resisted by the athletes who claimed that it led to overtraining and injury, but it was constantly reiterated by both Messeret and Hailye as reliability in turning up to training was equated to consistency in racing performance. Often it was assumed that an athlete was skipping training sessions in order to ‘save power’ for specific sessions in order to try to impress the coach, especially when Malcolm was in the country.

Malcolm was rarely in Ethiopia, however – he spent about three weeks in the country in the period of my fieldwork. This meant that Hailye played an extremely important mediation role, and it was his relationships with athletes that largely determined who would run abroad and who would not, and who stayed with the management group and who left. As he put it, ‘to be honest with you, these athletes are not staying with this management because they trust Malcolm. It is because they trust me.’ As I touched upon in chapter three in relation to the printed ‘break downs’ provided by the manager, however, decisions about the races athletes would run, and the risks taken by the manager and athlete, were often not communicated well to the runners themselves.

I would occasionally accompany Hailye when he went to meet with athletes and their partners to discuss their races, and I want to discuss one such meeting in some detail here. In this particular case, in fact, the meeting was conducted entirely with a runner called Dembele’s boyfriend, Dessie. When this became clear to Malcolm via *Whatsapp* he messaged Hailye asking him to terminate the meeting, writing, ‘we shouldn’t meet athletes’ partners without the athlete present.’ The conversation, extracts of which follow, demonstrates the lack of information about the financial realities of the sport experienced by runners and their families.

Hailye: ‘In her most recent race she covered the flight cost and had money left over, but there was debit from previous races.’

Dessie: ‘How much debit does she have? \$400?’

Hailye: ‘That was from Henlong. She came fourth and got \$2,000 in the first race and then nothing in the second. Zeleke went to the same race and I have his figures here. Three days of accommodation, \$150. Food for three days and the domestic flight in China, \$732. Then the international flight was booked at the last minute, \$1548.’

Dessie: ‘Hmm.’

Hailye: 'Here are the expenses from Turkey. Chaltu got \$1800, and the tickets cost \$890 for both races.'

Dessie: 'But Dembele came first in Turkey.'

Hailye: 'Yes, but there was \$890 for the flights, \$300 for the manager's commission, \$150 for food. So let's calculate...'

By this stage of the conversation, the piece of paper Hailye had bought with him to the meeting gradually filled with numbers, crossings out and sums as he sought to calculate the 'debit' Dembele was in with Malcolm. It is easy to see why Dessie and Dembele were confused and angry here, though. They are wondering how it is possible to win a race and still come home with nothing to show for it. However, these are races that Malcolm would describe as 'development races,' with comparatively small prize money and no budget to pay for runners' flights and accommodation. He took a 'chance' on sending them to the races knowing that she would need to finish on the podium in both of the races she entered. Running well (and even winning) in one of the races was not enough, but that was not adequately explained to Dembele before the trip.

Dessie: 'So she was in debit from the race in China?'

Hailye: 'Yes. The flight was not paid for. Usually we pay for the flight and then deduct it. But if Dembele had known about the flight, would she have said, "no I'm not going"?''

Dessie: 'No-one told her. If the price was that high it would have been better to cancel the race. The Turkish one wasn't too bad, but if it is really high she shouldn't go.'

Hailye: 'Everyone says this. When athletes go to races and do well they never complain. If they are preparing for a race and you tell them the flight is too expensive and they shouldn't go, they will not accept it. Last time you said to me, "there are no races, you are spoiling Dembele's life."

I wanted her to wait and go to a race where she could do well. When we

assess her performance it is clear that the China race was not that difficult. It is her performance that let her down. Last time I told you to ask Gelgelo about her performance because you trust him, and because there is obviously a difference between what I tell you and what she tells you. My only wish is that she improves. I always say that running is competition, you have to upgrade yourself. She is not smart enough to grasp every opportunity.'

Dessie: 'I know, but she is very negative at the moment. After hard training she needs many things, but without money you can't do that. She runs 35km then has no money to eat with.'

In the case described above the protracted visa application involved and the process of securing release letters from the Ethiopian Athletics Federation meant that the flights were very expensive by the time they were booked. On top of this, the various levels of communication between the race organisers, manager, sub-agent and coach and finally athlete and their family can leave much lost in translation. The combination of these structural and logistic factors and the lack of transparent communication meant that the gap between expectation of reward from races and the reality of the situation was huge in this case. The athletes and their families, however, have very little power to make calculations of the risks involved in going to races. Hailye asked Dessie again whether Dembele would have agreed not to go to the race if she had known how much the flight cost, and he accepted that she would have refused and wanted to go anyway. It also transpired in the conversation that because Dembele was sometimes given running shoes and kit by *Moyo Sports*, Dessie assumed that she had a contract with Nike. When he said this, it was met with laughter from Hailye, for whom this was ridiculous given the times that Dembele had run.

In the end, the exchange ended with Hailye angrily scrawling the word 'THANK YOU' on the piece of paper and underlining it twice, saying, 'athletes never ever

say thank you even though I am working so hard to give them a chance.’ This marked both the end of the conversation and the end of Dembele’s relationship with Moyo Sports. She left the management group and went to train with another group, leaving Malcolm with several hundred pounds of ‘debit’. The sport is structured in a way that makes timing an athletes’ ‘condition’ with a race, and planning long-term, gradual improvement, very difficult, as I go on to explore in the rest of this chapter.

### The Club System

Messeret coached the *Moyo Sports* group on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, but on alternate days he was head coach of first-division club *Mebrat Hayle*, the athletics club of the state-owned electricity corporation. He explained that for both runners and coaches ‘it is difficult to live in the management system if you don’t have some sort of money to be self-sufficient,’ which was provided by a first-division club in the form of a salary and often accommodation and food. He told me that ‘at the moment there is a system of club management and a management system, and we have to compromise and keep the balance between these two systems in order to sustain the lives of the athletes’. He had actually signed an agreement with the club saying that he would not work with a manager, but said the salary they paid ‘wasn’t enough to satisfy our needs on its own’. As such, those involved in the sport were forced to navigate carefully between the two systems, trying to benefit from each without jeopardising their relationships with either.

Often the club would plan months in advance which athletes they wanted to compete in domestic races, but this was never communicated to the manager, which often led to clashes and conflicts between the athletes - who would always prefer to run abroad than at home - and their clubs. Athletes are contracted to run at least two races a year for their clubs, and expected to prepare for six weeks within their clubs as opposed to with the management group, before

these races. Runners needed the clubs, because running for a first-division club was the only way of having a guaranteed income, paid as a monthly salary, regardless of their immediate race performances. Given that the foreign races were far more lucrative, runners would often break their contracts with their club in order to go abroad to race. This involved an element of 'risk,' as they would normally be fined two or three months' salary for doing so; if they failed to win prize money abroad this led to serious problems, including inability to afford rent and food until their salary was paid again.

When Mekasha moved to Addis Ababa, he signed a contract with *Moyo Sports* and, shortly after, was able to sign with *Mebrat Hayle* to ensure that he had a monthly income. When Malcolm was able to arrange a race for him in China, it fell on exactly the same day as the club half marathon he was contractually obliged to run. Below is an abridged transcript of the conversation about this between Messeret, Mekasha and myself.

Messeret: 'The club does not want athletes to work with managers. That's why we communicate and help you. Both work together to help you. The club cannot pay for flights and arrange races, but the manager can. And the club works on development, which the manager can't. The club does the development work but doesn't reap the fruits. We are helping with development and also providing work, that is why we ask you to compete in two races. All athletes complain about these two races a year but we want to keep athletes for four years. When you ask for rights you also have to have obligations. It is better to tolerate both, Mekasha! [to me:] Another plan should be scheduled for him.'

Mekasha: 'Can you not substitute other athletes?' [for the club race]

Messeret: 'To change this programme, it would take an agreement to change the schedule from other athletes who are assigned another program. There are five or six guys working with different management

systems, and all of them are assigned to two different races in city championships and regional championships. The thing is that if Malcolm had known earlier about such kinds of scheduling before two months, we would have had the opportunity to change for someone else from November to January. But now already they agreed with their manager. Two weeks ago we had a meeting and discussed this, and the three of them said “we don’t have races at that moment so we can compete.” Because they said that, already the club arranged, and the club manager told the other guys to change their schedule towards the middle of November.’

Michael: ‘It’s a shame, because it is rare for Malcolm to find a race in China willing to pay for the flights.’

Messeret: ‘I know that, I know the pressure. The only solution is to speak to the coach from the other management group.’

Michael: ‘I’m sorry Messeret, it sounds like you’re in a difficult position.’

Messeret: ‘The great mistake is missing Mekasha for this race. Malcolm can adjust another guy from the group. But the opportunity given for Mekasha will be lost, that is the biggest problem for me. Other guys can be fit enough like Mekasha to take part [abroad], but I know how Mekasha has been suffering up to now to get something. I don’t know, let me talk with the coaches and see what we can do. If not, it is a lost opportunity, or we’ll both be fired by the club. They don’t want us to work with the management system but we can’t satisfy our needs on our own. It is difficult to live in the management system if you don’t have some money to be self-sufficient to live yourself.’

Here we can clearly see the disconnect between the management system and the club system in Ethiopia. Whilst Messeret clearly sees his job as the ‘development’ of the athletes, he sees this primarily as something the club is involved in rather than the manager who usually comes in towards the end of this process to

facilitate races abroad. When he emphasises that the club ‘want to keep athletes for four years’ he does so to contrast this approach to that of a manager who would only sign a contract with an athlete for a year, but in fact both clubs and managers will usually only sign a one-year contract, enabling them to release a runner if they are injured or performing poorly. In this sense both the club and the management system work against Messeret’s desire to plan for ‘five, six, seven years’ quoted previously.

For Mekasha to run in China involved a complex set of negotiations between Messeret and the club management of *Mebrat Hayle*, as well as a series of conversations between Messeret and the coaches of the management groups representing the other athlete who had to be substituted to run for *Mebrat Hayle* in the half marathon Mekasha was supposed to run. In the end, Mekasha was allowed to run in China, where he finished in the final prize-money position to win \$1,000 for eighth place. After the manager’s percentage was deducted he won \$850, but would have to wait several months to receive the money, as I will go on to explain. *Mebrat Hayle* fined him two months’ salary for missing the club race, meaning that he was forced to borrow money from friends and family to pay his rent and eat for this period of time.

### Foreign Prize Money and ‘Waiting’

I travelled to the Hangzhou marathon with Mekasha on the same weekend as he was supposed to be running for *Mebrat Hayle*. Whilst he was fined two months’ wages, he was also owed \$2,500 for pacemaking in Panjing six weeks previously, and, assuming that this money would soon arrive he thought this was a gamble worth taking. The money, though, was ‘waiting’ as he put it. Often this is because the drug test results take a long time to process, but often races failed to release money for six or seven months without explanation. This happened to Zeleke after he ran a race in China. This is how he explained his failure to finish Barcelona marathon three months later:

‘After that first marathon, the money did not come on time. I waited six months, so I didn’t have the money to feed myself well. I spent the money I had on the wrong things.’

Not knowing when prize money will arrive - or, on occasion, whether it will arrive at all - makes planning for the future extremely difficult. In this case, Zeleke had actually won several thousand dollars at another race previously. Hailye and Messeret were therefore frustrated with him for not ‘managing properly’; he spent that money on constructing a house in Debre Birhan, which ended up costing more than he had anticipated. He also had to travel to Debre Birhan (over 100km away) several times during his training for Barcelona in order to oversee building work. Hailye therefore predicted he would run poorly, due to a combination, he said, of a ‘divided mind’ and not ‘investing in good food.’

### **Repetition, Return and the Cyclical**

When Mekasha first came to training with *Moyo Sports* he would perch on a ledge at the front of the bus, facing backwards towards the other athletes rather than taking a seat. Hailye explained to me that because he had not signed a contract he did not want to take up space on the bus; he needed time to prove himself and therefore wanted to keep a low profile. In the first training session I watched him take part in, he warmed up in a bright pink pair of women’s Asics trainers, which he took off and wrapped in a plastic bag before our ‘speed training’ session, which he ran barefoot, nevertheless keeping up with the others.

He did not speak much to the other athletes, staying close to Aseffa and only saying a few words, and kept his head down when Messeret spoke to him. I assumed therefore that he was, as Hailye tended to say, a ‘fresh’ athlete – with little experience of the club or management systems. I was, therefore, surprised by the account he gave me of his running career so far, an abridged version of

which appears below.

'My parents wanted me to continue with my education, but eventually I was able to persuade them that I could earn as much as a runner as if I worked in an office. I lived in the church and the nuns paid me to look after the garden, and I was lucky that my parents allowed me to run. They did more for me than other family members, which increased my sense of responsibility. As the place was in the forest, and very silent, there was nothing to disturb me. They gave me many books, and I read them. I knew that if I worked hard I would achieve my goals. Then in my third year I came to Addis and came 3<sup>rd</sup> in a 10,000m race. An Italian guy came who wanted to find good runners for 21km.

I competed in a race. There were eighty of us at the beginning and at the end the race was won in 1.02. I was third in 1.04 and we came to a camp in Addis. Things were strange at first. I'd never tasted rice until that point. It was difficult because we trained a lot but the food they gave us was very little. After one year he sent me to Beirut marathon as a pacemaker. He said he would pay me \$500 and if I felt strong I could finish the race as well. I could have finished on the podium but I co-operated with the one I was supposed to help and finished 5<sup>th</sup>. He said he would send me to another race so I used all of the prize money for training. I told him if he didn't find me another race I would leave the camp. He allowed me to leave and I found a club called Oromia road construction.

The club asked me to go back to Asella, so I did. A friend promised me that I could work with a manager at the same time, but after I signed and went there, they told me they wouldn't allow it. They paid me 2,300 birr per month, which was enough to live on, but I didn't do the right kinds of training. After two years I told them I wanted to leave the camp and train

on my own. I could not afford to come to Addis, though, because life is difficult here. I left the camp and rented a room, but I didn't have cooking utensils, bedclothes or blankets or anything like that. I stayed with that club for four years in total.

Then I had the idea of going to India for a race and using the money I won to provide myself with necessities for training. I asked them if I could go and train in Addis and they said no. I asked them, 'how am I supposed to change my life with the club salary?' Finally, we discussed it and they agreed that the head of the club could write a letter saying they were releasing me because of poor performance. They were worried that if the other runners knew the truth they would do the same. The coaches would have no jobs if all the athletes came to Addis. They agreed to help me. I went to India and came third in a race, then used the money to go back again and came 5<sup>th</sup>. I decided to come to Addis and use that money until it was finished. I came to this group. I hope to prove myself here.'

I heard many similar accounts from runners over the course of my fieldwork, and towards the end of my time in Addis two of the runners who had been training with *Moyo Sports* made the decision to travel back to the training camp in Debre Tabor where they had started out. They were not giving up – rather, they saw this as a way of working on their 'condition' where the environmental conditions were more amenable to 'bringing change' and where there were fewer distractions and cheaper and more nutritious food.

Decisions about how to invest money won abroad and how to navigate between the club system and the management system are above all energetic concerns – runners seek to deploy their limited energy reserves as sensibly as possible and to seek out living arrangements which allow them to plan and focus on a period of training. As I have shown, however, being able to plan a significant period into

the future is often frustrated by short-term contracts with clubs and managers, competing schedules and the sheer unpredictability of the sport. Attempts to plan for the future co-existed quite comfortably with the awareness that plans may not come to fruition and that risk is inherent in the project of a running career.

## Conclusion

It is a few months short of two years since I left Ethiopia. I sit in a hotel room in Frankfurt with Tsedat and his friend Kelkile Gezahegn. The room is strewn with empty bottles, overflowing plastic packets of *kolo*, and sachets of energy powder. Tsedat and Kelkile will mix these into eight bottles each, which will then be transported to the drinks tables positioned every five kilometers along the course of the Mainova Frankfurt marathon in the morning. Tsedat keeps entreating me to eat more *kolo*, and telling me to drink one of the bottles of water piled on the table to ensure I am ready to run in the morning.

Kelkile lies in bed under his duvet. He barely moves and says little, but he seems confident. Today is all about saving energy. I have transported a 19kg bag of Nike kit to Frankfurt for Tsedat, one of two he will receive this year as part of his sponsorship deal with the company. He carefully inspects some of the shrink-wrapped items of clothing, and removes all sixteen pairs of socks and lies them out on the floor. 'This one is nice' he says, showing it to Kelkile. 'It is very thin, and very light.' 'You should wear those tomorrow,' Kelkile says. Tsedat carefully pulls a sock on, and tests the feel of it in his racing shoe. Satisfied, he puts the socks in the shoes for the morning and places them in a small bag.

He puts on a gilet and a broad-brimmed baseball cap from the bag, and tries on a few other items of clothing. Among them is a knee-length padded jacket of the kind a football manager in the English Premier League might wear, which he carefully lays on the bed. 'You can sell those for a lot of money in Addis Ababa,' Kelkile points out. Tsedat nods, and they discuss which of the clothes are useful for training and which are better sold. 'Who needs sixteen pairs of socks?' Tsedat asks me. Like the other sponsored athletes I knew, the number of pairs of running shoes he was given did not affect the economy with which they were used or the care that went into their maintenance. Those that were deemed to be superfluous would be sold in the shops around Addis Ababa.

After a while a smartly dressed Ethiopian woman came to the door, holding a bag full of gift-wrapped presents and children's shoes. The three talked for a while about the baggage allowances available with different airlines, and which of the Ethiopian athletes in the hotel might still have space in their bags. Already in the room, alongside the two Nike bags given to the athletes, there were three large packs of nappies that Kelkile would take home for his one year old son, and three suitcases full of women's and children's clothing that would be taken back to Addis on behalf of various acquaintances in Germany. For a while the conversation turned to the selfish nature of some runners. 'Athletes are different from everyone else,' the young woman said. 'They won't co-operate with you because all they care about is sleeping and running. They only have time for themselves.'

When she left it was around three o'clock in the afternoon, and Tsedat climbed into bed and covered himself with the duvet. We had discussed his race strategy for the morning and decided that he would go with the second of four pace-makers and aim to run the first half marathon in 63.30. 'I just want to run 2.07,' he kept saying. '2.07 would be a nice time, right?' I could tell he was tempted to try to run with the first group, who were aiming to be 45 seconds faster at the halfway point, but Malcolm had asked me to try to persuade him not to. 'It's a difficult one,' Malcolm said. 'He could have a huge breakthrough and run 2.05, but it's far more likely that he would completely blow up and run slower than 2.10 or fail to finish.' The idea was to demonstrate forward progression to Nike by running faster than the PB of 2.09 that he ran when winning Riga marathon earlier in the year. 'Zero seven would be great,' I tell him. 'It is within my capacity,' he replies.

The next day I cross the finish line in Frankfurt's *Festhalle* in a little over two hours and twenty minutes and, when I am able to think straight, head off to find Tsedat. The top runners are all sitting on folding plastic seats behind an advertising hoarding, waiting to be escorted back to the hotel or to drug testing. Tsedat and I

share a brief and sweaty embrace before I ask him how it went. He shakes his head and keeps repeating 'I couldn't do it today, I couldn't.' He points to his heel, which has been bothering him for the last two months. I am not allowed to stay in the elite athlete area for long so I leave assuming that he had to drop out and could not finish the race.

Later in the day, after a shower and a lie down, I look up the results to find that he finished 8<sup>th</sup> in 2.09, just slightly slower than his best time, which seems like a positive result. When I get back to the hotel he is in bed again, but seems a little happier than he had in the morning and asks me to look up whether there was any prize money for eighth place. With his 2,000 euro appearance fee and 1,500 euros for eighth he would take home 3,500 euros. His roommate Kelkile won the race, and with it 37,500 euros. He would receive a large bonus from Nike on top of that. 'Where is he?' I asked. 'I don't know,' Tsedat replied. 'Prize ceremony, drug testing, interviews. You do many things when you win.'

Tsedat and I limped over to the department store across the road to spend some of the cash he had bought with him from his win in Riga. As we were shopping a young Ethiopian man in a battered Levi's jacket sidled over to us to chat about the phones. He ended up spending an hour helping to discuss the various handsets in Amharic, English and German with the shop assistant, before Tsedat finally settled on a Samsung smartphone which he paid for with two 200-euro notes. We left the shop and sat down on some benches to take the weight off our aching legs, where a couple more elite runners and another man of Ethiopian origin in a German national team tracksuit joined us. He explained that he had come to Germany for a race three years previously and decided to stay and try to make it as an athlete in Germany. He now had eligibility to compete for Germany and clearly spoke good German. The young man whom we had met in the shop had also come to Germany as a runner, but with no intention of running once he had arrived. 'I just want to work,' he said. 'Any work. But at the moment there is nothing.'

As Tsedat and I walked back over to the hotel, I asked him how his heel was feeling after the race. 'It's very painful,' he said. 'Make sure you tell Malcolm.' I asked him which race he was planning to run next and he was unsure. 'First I need to wait a month and hope this pain stops. Then it will take two months to regain my "condition."' For both of us, the previous three months had entailed carefully marshalling our energetic resources in such a way that we were in the right 'condition' to run so hard for just over two hours that we rendered ourselves incapable of regaining such fitness for weeks if not months hence. For both of us – or for anyone living on the edge of 'condition' - there could be no certainty that we would ever reach it again.

We sat in a café and traced where the runners whose stories feature most prominently in this thesis have ended up. Abere was now in Melbourne, and whilst he intended to find a club and become an athlete again, he was yet to run a race in Australia since he had decided to 'disappear' there almost a year earlier, and nor had he found any other work. Berhanu was still in Addis Ababa working with a Dutch manager, but had been unable to regain the 'condition' he had when I knew him. Selamyhun was back with his club in Gondar, and looking for an opportunity to race abroad. 'His goal is finding a race and disappearing there,' Tsedat said. 'He is losing hope at the moment.' Gojjam and Aseffa were, besides Tsedat, the only two still working with Malcolm, and as we were talking I learnt via Twitter that Aseffa had won the Dublin marathon whilst we were running in Frankfurt, after twice finishing second and once finishing third in previous years. With it, he won the 12,000 euros which would allow him and Teje to get married and finally 'change their lives'. This transformed Tsedat's mood, and he kept saying, 'first place for Aseffa!' in obvious delight at his friend's success. As for the other athletes who had made up our group, however, he said he was no longer in contact with the majority. 'Athletes are moving here and there,' he said, 'they are not interested in staying still.'

When I caught up with Hailye about the direction the team had taken he described a 'new style' that was evolving in Ethiopia. Rather than a system where the manager paid a coach and sub-agent salaries to work with a large group of athletes, the coach was now working with a much streamlined group of runners represented by Malcolm. Alongside Jemal, Tsedat and Aseffa the coach also worked with several other managers at the same time. 'To do it like this you have to have capabilities, and you have to have success,' Hailye said of the coach. 'He helped athletes run fast times, and he built a reputation. And now he can negotiate his benefits with individual athletes. He does business.' Hailye was much happier with the new setup, whereby he worked only with the athletes who 'understood' him and the way the system of organising races worked. 'So many of them do not know what they are doing,' he said. 'It is a kind of drama, honestly.'

### **The Anthropology of Limits: Relational Energy, Trust and Success**

This thesis set out to capture a moment in time where this group of young men came together as a group and tried to 'change their lives' as individuals. I argued that, for these young men, operating within an 'economy of limited energy' and under conditions of extreme competition involves a particular way of embracing risk and approaching time that differs markedly from those of other young Ethiopian men seeking a precarious living in the city. The high levels of risk and uncertainty that characterise the sport of running in Ethiopia entail relationships of trust and mutual dependency between runners, and demand intensely intersubjective forms of moral labour to maintain. I have also shown that the intimacy of the training group, and the necessary of proximity and of sharing energy entails the articulation of trust and distrust. The fact that runners perceived themselves being 'on the edge' of what was possible, and at the mercy of others to achieve their goals, served to intensify the relationship between intimacy and suspicion identified by Geschiere (2013).

The Ethiopian running economy is defined by limited access to the financial rewards associated with the sport. Structural limitations imposed by short-term contracts, shrinking prize money as a result of the withdrawal of sponsors, and a system that rewards the top fraction of a percent of its participants, informs the ways in which runners conceive the risks involved and think about their energy levels and how to protect them. Professional long-distance running is both 'neoliberal' and 'millennial': deeply individualising, wrought with insecurity and personal risk, underpinned by speculation and casino capitalism (Comarrof and Comarrof, 2000; Strange, 1997). I have described how such apparently 'neoliberal' subjectivities do not indicate the 'conversion' (Bourdieu, 2000) of young men to an individualistic mindset but rather illustrate the re-alignment of Amhara notions of individualism, competition and the living of life within limits (Jackson, 2011) with globally circulating ideologies of running that are part of an international athletics economy. In Ethiopia, the coming together of these ideas gives rise to new athletic subjects. Each runner's awareness that they are confronting limits informs the ways that they relate to other people, the ways in which trust is built and broken, the ways in which they conceive of and plan for the future, and the actions that they are willing (or not) to take.

Through my analysis of the ways in which runners spend huge amounts of time planning their food consumption and training to minimise the risk of 'burning up' too much energy, yet paradoxically also voluntarily choose to embrace particularly risky and exhausting forms of training on certain occasions, I have demonstrated how runners bring to the surface the precariousness of the sport. In an 'economy of limited energy' I have shown how such strategies – designed to bring about a more dramatic improvement in 'condition' – are undertaken according to particular relationships of trust that are not accessible to all runners within the group. Such analysis deepens our understanding of the relationship between risk and trust, like that identified by Miyazaki (2006). Whilst it was important for the group as a whole to emphasise and demonstrate the visibility and synchronicity of training together,

these riskier forms of training were undertaken by smaller groups of very close friends, indicating that the discourse of trust and the reality of how trusting behaviour was enacted in practice were quite different.

Against the backdrop of a resurgent interest in the anthropology of time, especially as it relates to capitalism (Bear, 2014), international long-distance running has offered a particularly rich ethnographic context in which to study the tangible relationships people have to time and money. I have argued that in order to ‘change your life’ through mastering ‘race pace’ during the ‘vital conjuncture’ (Johnson-Hanks, 2002) of a race, runners must embrace a temporality that is very different from that of other precariously employed young men in Addis. This temporality, characterised by withdrawal, by the reclassification of ‘rest’ time as productive and by the conscious and institutionalised elongation of ‘youth,’ contrasts markedly with that of the main corporations involved with the sport in Ethiopia, for whom sporting development is defined by acceleration. Rest – that is, spending long periods of time during the day in bed, or doing very little – was the key to augmenting energy for the runners I knew, and therefore to their success. As such it was very different to the idle inactivity of the unemployed described by Mains (2011). Rest for the runners I knew was key to futurity, to the planning and doing of good, life—changing things in the future.

Whilst much of the literature on anthropology, sport and migration focuses on the cultivation of a particular kind of Foucauldian (1978) entrepreneurship of self, here I have demonstrated the intense intersubjective moral labour that goes into maintaining the relationships that allow people to ‘work together’ towards progress. Whilst Foucault was aware of the relational character of the techniques of the self he described, most of these relationships were dyadic. In trying to ‘change their lives’ and augment their ‘condition,’ the runners I knew had to conceive and maintain a multiplicity of obligations both within the group and outside it (with neighbours, kin, race organisers). Because energy was conceived of as trans-bodily

and social, its flow between the environment and between different people meant that energy was deeply implicated in people's ethical relationships. This ethics of energy involved the constant evaluation and re-evaluation of relationships with others, and a shifting standard of moral assessment that was influenced heavily by the intensity of the competition they were involved in and the tension between shared value and personal advancement.

Whilst the anthropology of energy has focused primarily on the use of fuel and ethical judgements about that use (Smith and High, 2017), there has been little work on the energetic subjectivities of people themselves. Through emphasising that 'condition' is an emic concept that animates the way in which Ethiopian runners view and act upon the world I have demonstrated the importance of foregrounding energy as a heuristic category to make sense of human sociality. Whilst my work has focused on a group of people who perceive of themselves as operating at the very edge of their energetic potential, the concept of an 'economy of limited energy' is nonetheless useful in other contexts of physical labour, and for considering what an anthropology of competition might have to contribute to the discipline.

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