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FOREWARD

The idea of this research project came to my mind when I was living in one of the asylum seekers' camps in the Netherlands. In this camp, which is located outside a small city, there were about 900 asylum seekers from almost every continent. This gave me the opportunity to exchange different ideas and views with fellow asylum seekers from very different socio-political backgrounds. I started to ask myself so many questions. Why on earth did we leave our countries? Who are we? Why do pregnant women and children as young as a few days find themselves in this situation? What do we have in common and what not? Why are there so many asylum seekers from Africa, especially from the Horn of Africa? What will be our destiny and who is going to decide? Do we have the right to do something about our future? And many more. For the time being I could not come up with any answer to any of these questions.

While I was raising all these questions I got the idea that this would be an interesting research project for my next study, first from my friend and teacher Dr. Henk Overbeek and later on from another very important friend and teacher, Professor Peter Vale, both of whom became my co-promoters. With the help, encouragement and direction I received from both of them I developed a research project proposal. With the additional extraordinary help and assistance from Professor Gerd Junne I tried my best to develop the idea, very fragmented but very close to my soul, that I had in the asylum seekers' camp into what it has now become now. Though my (and many other's) status has remained that of asylum seeker up until now' I have a better understanding of who I am (we are), why I am (we are) where I am (we are), and what to expect from the existing political structure (the state).

I would like to make it clear that the research is mainly library research. It is based on secondary resources. I was not able to do any field research. This was not because of the usual financial problem or lack of interest from the university or on my side. It is because I was not allowed to travel outside the Netherlands until my asylum request is accepted by the sovereign state. I was not allowed even to travel within 'borderless' Europe because I am not a citizen of Europe. I am an outsider and an asylum seeker. The national boundaries that are nonexistent for citizens of Europe are still effective for outsiders, especially asylum seekers. This is the problem I have been sharing with hundreds of thousands, may be millions, of asylum seekers in Europe.

There are so many people who helped me intellectually and emotional. I would like, first of all, to thank Prof. Gerd Junne, Prof. Peter Vale and Dr. Henk Overbeek (my promotors) for their invaluable help for many years. If it was not for their help, it would have been far more difficult to reach where I am. My gratitude to Ms. Anthea Hamaker who helped me in editing the draft manuscript. I would also like to thank Prof. Jan Abbink for his constructive comments at the initial stage of the research.

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Finally, to my own family, Asres Degu, Tsehanesh Alameneh, Bosena Getahun, Ashagrachew Wondem, Selamawit Wondem and Abate Ejigu, far way in Ethiopia, and Adi Sebsibe, Helen Wondem and Genet Sebisibe here in the Netherlands I owe you much more than what you can imagine. Thank you so much for being behind me all the way through. This book is dedicated to my beloved daughter Ferehiwot Wondem who died when she was only 16 years old and to my other daughter Helen Wondem who is trying hard to live the disability she was born with.