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Comparing Cultures in Southern Ethiopia: From Ethnography to Generative Explanation

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This special issue of *Northeast African Studies* is an exercise in comparative ethnography and theoretical exploration. It starts with the following question: Why is there such remarkable regional diversity in the cultural traditions and modes of life in the societies of southern Ethiopia, and with what kind of theoretical and ethnographic understanding can we explain it? The question has often been posed as to what extent these small-scale societies with their notable linguistic commonalities (being of the Omotic, Cushitic, and Surmic language families and thus per group suggesting a common "origin") have shared social and economic traits, political institutions, ideologies, and ritual complexes, and what has generated their paths of differentiation.

Apart from evoking fascinating ethnographic questions, this issue also raises theoretical problems, of wider significance outside the Ethiopian ethnographic context, related to structural comparison, societal change, and the import of underlying ecological and socioeconomic factors or processes that fuel cultural differentiation. Regional comparison is a well-established research tradition in anthropology and has many forms. There is the school of statistical comparison and correlation, going back to the now largely ignored work of Harold Driver and his group (Driver 1973; Jorgensen 1974), and which is partly continued in the electronic journal *World Cultures* and in the large number of studies of the Human Relations Areas Files at Yale University. The work of

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C. Lévi-Strauss on American Indian mythology is another form, marked not only by erudition and controversial comparisons, but also by inspiring research questions about the workings of the human mind and the properties of "culture" as an abstract system or human predisposition. For many "classical" areas of anthropological theorizing, like Papua New Guinea/Melanesia, southern Africa, Sudan, and Indian South America, there has emerged a host of publications on regional-structural comparison (for some examples, see Barth 1975, 1987; Kuper 1982; Rivière 1984; Barnard 1992; Simonse 1992; Knauft 1993). Remarkably, Ethiopia, a country of much internal variety yet with a notable history of intergroup relations and a basis of similarities in cultural traditions, has lagged behind as a domain of study and has not been prominent in the international debate (except of course in the realm of paleoanthropology). While several authors have already called for such a comparative effort, the work done on cultural traditions in Ethiopia and adjacent regions has been fairly limited, and often the attempts made can only be found in monographs on certain ethnic groups or culture areas aiming to place them in a wider regional setting.[1]

This volume, the result of a pioneering workshop in Oxford in 1999 organized by D. Freeman and E. Watson (then of the London School of Economics and Political Science and of Cambridge University), tries to restart the discussion in a more concentrated manner (see Freeman's "Introduction" below), somewhat analogous to previous efforts like, e.g., A. Kuper's "regional comparison" approach (1982) on southern Africa, although with more eye to agency and praxis. It goes without saying that this kind of comparative study must be based in solid ethnography, and there is indeed plenty of it in this special issue. But the empirical fact that many "customs," kinship patterns, religious ideas, and rituals are shared and were even partly exchanged among southern Ethiopian groups points to the fascinating transgroup connections that must be explored in a more theoretical and systematic fashion.

The study of the above themes allows scholars to combine historical, structuralist, and agency-oriented approaches. For instance, a study of the cosmologies and worldviews of people in the south reveals that the role of "dual structures" in this culture area is remarkable, referred to by Donham in his analysis of the Omotic-speaking Maale, and already the

subject of study since the findings of the German Frobenius Institute expeditions in Ethiopia of the 1930s and 1950s (Jensen 1953; Straube 1957; see also Orent 1970 and Almagor 1989) and the work on Oromo social structures (e.g., Haberland 1963; Hinnant 1989). Also among Surmic-speaking agro-pastoral groups, such as the Bodi, Tishana (Abbink 1992b), and Suri, dual clan orders and, in one case, moieties are found as conscious structures. These structural representations of opposition or pairedness are used to organize society, ritual, and historical self-reflection, but can also become elements in a modern discourse of group relations.

The southern Ethiopian research experience confirms what has been accepted in anthropology in the last twenty-five years already: that "ethnic groups" and "culture" are cumulative historical constructions, and evolve not in isolation but in interaction, often within a regional or wider political-economic network. This statement implies that there is no primordiality to be ascribed to "ethnicity" except at the danger of reifying difference, and essentializing "culture" (including language). This does not mean that the cultural complexes and ethnic identities referred to by people and elaborated in ritual, world-view, and values have no meaning or are arbitrary *bricolages* of cultural material. On the contrary, they are a rich source of belonging and group-esteem and show a measure of internal cohesion. But they are dynamic and changing. They cannot be pinned down only to criteria like language, a common territory, a common "psychological make-up," whatever that is, or shared economic life.

In view of this dynamic character, much more work is needed on the historical-evolutionary processes of differentiation, assimilation, and mutual influencing that have occurred, and still do occur. This diversity in cultural traditions and especially languages is itself an evolutionary, adaptive outcome of the relative isolation or self-containedness of groups in the past millennia. It is modified by contemporary economic processes, and by the modern bureaucratic state which registers, documents, and administratively immobilizes "ethnic difference" between groups and cultures, and thereby *essentializes* group distinction (cf. Herzfeld 1992 making a similar argument in the context of Europe and its bureaucratic structures).

Stories of people migrating to and assimilating into other groups and taking up their identity are now scarce. However, during my fieldwork I traced quite a number of immigrants among the southwest Ethiopian Suri through their family histories, but these were to all intents and purposes "Suri" and did not know what I meant when (in the beginning, before I felt the embarrassing tone of the question) I asked what the "ethnic group" of their ancestors was. There was a much more territorial than "ethnic" idea of group belonging.[2] Apart from the fact that the concept of "assimilation" itself needs rethinking, the openness of local societies to the influx of others is now seriously reduced, especially with the current political system in Ethiopia (and elsewhere). This in itself is a disturbing fact and has already had baneful effects on group relations and cross-group intermarriage. In southern Ethiopia these days, if you are a Sheko or Anuywa or Dizi or Suri, you will remain one—you even *have* to remain one—till the end of your days.

What these analyses below also restate—following a line of argument in contemporary anthropology—is the concept of culture (cf. Kuper 2000). Again we demonstrate here that the existence of distinct cultures as vessels or containers of meaning specific to one group of people only, as ontological entities, is fallacious. While cultural traditions can be discerned and show a measure of coherence and durability over time, because they are shared, transmitted, and internalized by people, they are not like "natural species," but dynamic, open-ended systems. The point here, however, is that these traditions, as repertoires of meaning, *have* a content and a relative amount of identity and consistency that set them apart from others. While not retracting theoretically from the currently widely accepted view of the dynamic character of ethnicity (though this is usually denied by political authorities), we want to call for investigating and respecting the actually existing cultural traditions and the views of local people who live with them. Dena Freeman's "Introduction" below elaborates more on the core elements that figure in comparative discussions on southern Ethiopian cultures.

All contributions in this volume are based on original fieldwork, done in the late 1990s and afterwards.[3] Research findings in most of the papers substantiate the underlying unity of southern Ethiopia as a complex cultural system of exchange and mutual influence. While some

delve into a particular cultural tradition to explore ideas of variation and cultural difference (Donham, Strecker), others compare across space, among neighboring groups known to have historical links and current patterns of interaction (Freeman, Wood, De'a, Tadesse). In the last contribution to this volume, Gideon Cohen, in a quite original paper, reflects on language policy in the Southern Region, addressing the implications of education policy, language use, and group identification. He provides a link between the analysis of the local and the national level, which will have to be explored in future anthropological research on cultural variation and change in the Ethiopian southwest. His conclusion that ethnic group identity and language identity are not coterminous is very important and underlines a point that anthropologists have asserted over and over again on the basis of solid research, as against the policy makers.

Theoretical approaches used by the authors in this volume are varying, but the nature of the subject of cultural variation and regional comparison implies an extra emphasis on ideas and their itineraries (or their "epidemiology," as D. Sperber [1986] would say): how are ideas adopted, spread, and made successful? Donham seems to stress an approach combining ideational and material processes; Ivo Strecker, in his contribution on the *genius loci* of Hamar, offers an interesting and innovative view, emphasizing a rhetorical approach to cultural phenomena, which sees the constitution of "reality" as inextricably linked to its rhetorical performance. In some crucial respects he follows Stephen Tyler, a prominent postmodernist thinker in the field of anthropology and linguistics. The approach is quite fascinating and original but also evokes critical responses. Marvin Harris (1994, 65–66) rejects the postmodern viewpoint underlying it because of its relativist and "anti-science" implications, and calls for a rethinking of serious scientific explanations of observed human social life,[4] i.e., implying a renewed attention to material processes and infra-structural determinants. But a rhetorical approach, in the stimulating way Strecker has elaborated it, is empirically revealing and calls attention to the partly discursive formation of social and cultural phenomena. At the same time, the underlying question should always be how people's agency links ideas and discourse with *practices*: why and how are ideas, rhetorical strategies, customs, ritual

elements, etc., taken up and accepted, and how do they redirect social practice? This calls for attention to the sometimes determining and constraining impact of structures of power, economic exchange, inequality, and political domination, beyond the attention to human individual inventiveness and rhetorical and symbolic versatility.

Some authors, like F. Barth in his seminal contributions to ethnography and theory, have tried to develop a "generative approach" to processes of cultural change and variation (Barth 1987, 2002): identifying the structuring principles underlying those processes, and the basis on which people are able to elaborate varieties. For instance, his work on the Mountain Ok identified definite, causal links between social organization and cult forms among these people (1987, 55, 61). This approach also touches upon a related debate on the use of history in anthropology. Cultural elaborations and variations are the result of cumulative historical transformations in territorial groups and their material and ideational modes of adaptation. In an earlier line of debate, the American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has contributed to such an approach, unleashing a controversial, and therefore fruitful and productive, debate (e.g., with G. Obeyesekere 1992) on cultural change and structural history (Sahlins 1985, 1995, 1999), while Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney edited an influential collection on *Culture Through Time* (1990).

The study of cultural variation across space and time within broad cultural traditions or "traditions of knowledge" (Barth 1987) poses a number of methodological challenges. Actual differences in cultural details and divergent historical processes are easily summed up, but how is one to develop explanatory accounts or models, on the basis of which empirical details, and in what theoretical perspective? Should more formal model building be the goal, including the coding of elements in computer models? Should a political-economy approach be pursued, which might account for the emergence and reproduction of inequality on the basis of surplus extraction and power difference? Should prime attention be given to the inventive individuals that create variation and change? Barth's question (1987, see also his recent Mintz lecture [2002]) was about what the generative mechanisms of variation were: the causally active patterns and elements in the social and economic

organization of societies that tend to "produce" variation, innovation, and alternative forms on the basis of similar cultural materials or traditions of knowledge. This comparative effort has been central in much of anthropology since E. B. Tylor's pioneer work of the 1870s, but has recently been regaining a good deal of attention (see for instance Gingrich and Fox 2002). Several of the papers below address the issue of what generates variation. In future comparative work, a concern with generative mechanisms, as observed causal tendencies in sociocultural phenomena and human patterns of action, will probably become much more central.[5]

A significant factor that is reshaping local cultures and group relations in Ethiopia and elsewhere is state policy. Indeed, the policy and surveillance of the modern bureaucratically oriented state, even when less efficient or failing in Africa, has set a new discourse of control and regulation, thereby recreating identities and group relations. This was already the case in Ethiopia's imperial days, and it continued in disastrous form under the Derg regime. Although it takes considerable thought to perceive their positive impact, since 1991 radical changes in the administrative structure and the political outlook of the country's new elite have had a qualitatively different, far-reaching effect on the societies and groups described here. One remarkable fact is the notable increase in political insecurity, group tensions, and "ethnic clashes" all across the south (numerous reports in the local Ethiopian press, but see also Abbink 1993; Popp 2001; Young 1999; Tronvoll 2001; Donham et al. 2002). This political dynamic will change people's self-perceptions as they are inexorably, and in a way naively, drawn into the prevailing ethnicist state discourse in Ethiopia. One instance among many is the emerging rift between the Gamo peoples and the Wolaitta, because of new district boundaries and the forced language policy of the central government.[6] These recent problems are also discussed in Data De'a's paper.

Relatively little addressed in this volume are problems of social and political change, especially those related to processes of "globalization." This is because, firstly, cultural complexities, the nature of which is underestimated time and again by outsiders, not in the least by state agents and donor country NGOs, have to be addressed in their own right, without

subsuming them immediately under a discourse of change. Secondly, such processes are not (yet) very prominent in the Ethiopian south. Thirdly, we want to discourage the idea prominent in the work of some authors on globalization that all cultural differences are somehow a *result* of processes of hidden or overt globalization. Finally, we think that the globalization discourse still lacks convincing theories beyond the descriptive level. If it is not over-determined by an economist discourse, it seems to boil down a neo-diffusionist approach that tends to gloss over existing and historically evolved cultural traditions. As said, we feel they should be studied on their own terms and internal dynamics, rather than be pressed into a preconceived framework of globalizing structures. A general theory on the specifics of interaction between local and global factors is difficult to develop, although in many empirically based studies the two levels have been successfully brought together (e.g., Geschiere and Meyer 1999; Nash 2001; Piot 2000; on southern Ethiopia, Pankhurst 2000).

Nevertheless, we do not doubt that this ongoing process of globalization, with its dubious and sometimes disastrous effects on local society and culture, will make itself felt in Ethiopia as well. There is an ever-growing dependency of Ethiopia on external aid and donor country pressure in the face of its often ill-conceived development policies, a corresponding erosion of the sociocultural order, and an ongoing state neglect of local societies and their needs. Such factors make the impact of globalizing agents, including the IMF, World Bank, and the WTO regime, even more pervasive.[7]

These accelerated influences emanating from powerful external sources should not blind us to the fact that local societies have always been in contact with "the outside world," indeed were shaped by interaction with it. But the task of a comparative ethnography of cultural variation is to document and theoretically explain these existing local variations in a culture within the relevant historical-regional frameworks. It can thereby evoke more understanding and tolerance of diversity, because in a globalizing world these various forms will not simply whither away but become the issue of contestation and strife and thus have "policy relevance."

The present volume is only a beginning. The rich ethnographic diversity of the south needs continued scholarly exploration, recognition, and

also respectful treatment. One ultimate aim of social science can be to facilitate dialogue and exchange between southern groups[8] in the new era of ethno-federal politics and huge socioeconomic challenges. At present one can note quite disturbing political developments in the country, a relentless onslaught of commercially geared "globalization" processes—especially mass tourism, with its commodifying approach and commercial farming at the expense of peasants and pastoralists' land rights—as well as the top-down, so-called development schemes of both state and "donor country" institutions. These processes make a proper historical ethnography and a balanced scientific attention to the cultural and ethnic variety of Ethiopia—not only the south—all the more urgent. Such research is especially relevant, not primarily as a "history of the south" to fill in the lesser known aspects of the public record on Ethiopia, but as a contribution to address general questions in the study of culture and human behavior, as posed in anthropology as a transcultural comparative social science.

I express the hope that these papers inspire other researchers—both Ethiopians and foreigners in a fruitful, critical dialogue—to pursue comparative work on southern Ethiopia, either in the field through original research, or at the desk on the basis of the many published case studies available. Last but not least, I sincerely thank the contributors for their cooperation and patience in bringing out this volume.

Notes

1. See also my survey article (Abbink 1992a) on past anthropological work on southern Ethiopia.
2. Some examples are in the works of N. Sobania (1980) and G. Schlee (1989).
3. Of the participants, E. Watson, J. Lydall, and J. Abbink did not offer papers to be included in this collection.
4. See also Harris's excellent book *Theories of Culture in Postmodern Times* (1999).
5. The concept of generative mechanism is central in the emerging epistemological tradition of *critical realism*, an approach that has as one of its aims to bridge the explanatory gaps between "structure" and human "agency" (see Archer et al. 1998; López and Potter 2001).
6. The policy insisted on a "common language" for educational purposes called Wogagoda, a composite of Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa, and Dawro). This was vehemently rejected by the Wolaitta (prominent among them the

schoolteachers and pupils), and led to powerful demonstrations bloodily suppressed in late 1999 in Soddo (Wolaitta), with at least five people killed. In a rare move, the government subsequently gave in, abolished the plans, and gave the Wolaitta people their own administrative zone in 2000. Tensions, however, have emerged between various Gamo, Dawro, Dorze, and Wolaitta groups. See also the article by Data De'a, in this volume.

7. For some disturbing developments see Stiglitz, "The IMF Ravages Developing Countries, Ethiopia is the Proof" (2002), Chossudovsky, "Sowing the Seeds of Famine in Ethiopia" (2000), and Kirby, "Progress 'Undermines African Cultures'" (2002).
8. A remarkable example of such an effort is the founding of the South Omo Research Center (SORC) in the town of Jinka. The SORC, which combines research and local community functions, was the initiative of Professor Ivo Strecker of Mainz University.

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Cultural Variation in Southern Ethiopia: An Introduction

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Why Look at Cultural Variation in Southern Ethiopia?

There are many similarities and patterns of variation between the cultures of southern Ethiopia, and yet traditional forms of fieldwork and ethnography tend to restrict researchers to one particular people, society, or village. Differences in language can further hinder the curious researcher from exploring other cultures in the area, and differences in ethnographic style and focus can make it difficult to carry out detailed comparative research from the literature. The end result is that researchers tend to stay focused on one particular locale, and there is little exploration of regional linkages and interconnections. Thus we felt it was important to get people together to "talk across cultures."

Moreover, we believed that viewing cultural phenomena through a wider lens would allow for more insight into any one society. Phenomena such as "divine kings," rain chiefs, and initiations are found throughout the whole of southern Ethiopia, among agriculturalists and pastoralists, highlanders and lowlanders, Omotic-speakers and Cushitic-speakers. It seemed to us that the structure, function, and meaning of these institutions in any one society would be better understood when seen as one version of a regional set. Looking at their workings in other societies would suggest new connections and open up new lines of thought.

This much would be true of any area, but we felt that southern Ethiopia was a particularly appropriate area to look at for cultural

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variation because of the tradition of scholarship in this region that seeks to combine anthropological and historical perspectives (e.g., Donham and James 1986). Synchronic structural variation is often the result of temporal transformation, and thus trying to explain patterns of variation necessarily requires bringing together anthropology and history and focusing on processes of change. This is a theoretical issue at the heart of contemporary anthropology, and the diverse cultures of southern Ethiopia provide an excellent set of ethnographic examples with which to tackle this issue.

Last, but by no means least, we felt that the current political situation in Ethiopia made it particularly timely to look at cultural variation. The "politics of ethnicity" that is currently driving much government policy has led to an emphasis on difference and discontinuity between different peoples in the region, and in the country more generally. Ethnic groups are assumed to be clearly defined entities with rigid boundaries, and a homogeneous culture inside that is quite different from that found "outside," amongst neighboring peoples. This focus on difference ignores the manifest continuities, both historical and cultural, between many of the peoples in the area. In the papers in this volume, we hope to address this balance by focusing on similarity and continuity.[1] It is this type of approach, we believe, that is more likely to lead to cross-cultural understanding and interethnic peace.

The Main Themes

Four main themes emerged from the papers and discussions at the workshop, and are found in the re-written papers presented in this volume. In short, they are: fertility and power, dynamic historical processes, interethnic relations, and local understandings of variation.

Fertility and Power

Fertility and power emerged as key themes from many papers (Freeman; Tadesse; Abbink's workshop paper) and seems to be of central importance to many of the peoples in the region. The idiom of fertility is used throughout the region to elaborate hierarchies both within societies and between them. The very common idea that "the first begat the second" legitimated inequality between societies, villages, and moieties in

the same way that it legitimated inequality between fathers and sons. To have "given birth" to something is to have power over it. Hence the ideology of fertility and reproduction was a shared cultural idiom between and within different societies.

The notion of fertility also embraces control of the environment, and particularly of rain, for to control rain is to control agricultural fertility. Thus "rain chiefs" in different societies would be known as more or less powerful by other ethnic groups due primarily to their location (in fertile areas or not). The importance of Dizi chiefs (Abbink's workshop paper) and Hor *qawots* (Tadesse) amongst neighboring groups illustrates that people do not live only in the context of their own ethnic group, but will look to other peoples if they appear to have a more powerful control over the environment, and hence over fertility and well-being.

There is also a relation between the idiom of fertility and conceptualizations of gender. The ceremonial elaboration of fertility is frequently based on the manipulation of male and female symbols, although the dominant discourse in most societies is that fertility is purely "male." Several of the papers show how this dominant discourse is questioned and undermined. In some cases female metaphors of breast-feeding are sometimes used with regard to ritual leaders (Wood), while in other cases it is necessary for ritual leaders to be married in order to successfully carry out their roles (Lydall's workshop paper). In many southern Ethiopian societies fertility symbols are multivalent, and can be read as either male or female. The *kallacha,* which is said to variably represent both penis and breast, is such a common shared symbol.

Dynamic Historical Processes

Several of the workshop papers sought to understand variations between different groups, and also particular structural features within one group, in terms of historical processes, and in particular in the way that the contemporary people had come into being (Donham; Freeman). Southern Ethiopia has a long history of population movement, conquest, and internal colonization and it seems likely that this is reflected in the patterns of similarities and continuities found between different peoples. As people move around, they take with them their ideas and practices, and modify them according to their new context. Moreover, the

particular way in which people become mixed, whether it is by conquest, "migrating in," or intermarriage, will affect the way in which new cultural elements are synthesized. Dual organization in some societies, for example, might be better understood as the result of amalgamation of two groups at a frontier, than as simply an instantiation of abstract binary classification and reciprocity (Donham).

The idea of the frontier, drawn from the work of Kopytoff, is a useful starting point for a discussion of how groups form and re-form in the context of migration, movement, and colonization. It helps explain the existence of moieties throughout much of the region, as groups have come together and yet retained some internal differentiation. The asymmetrical nature of moieties in southern Ethiopia, however, leads us to slightly reformulate Kopytoff's notion. Where there are moieties in the region, it is almost always the case that the junior moiety is more heterogeneous and less strictly exogamous than the senior moiety. This suggests that successive waves of "colonization" or conquest have taken place and that there is a "bunching up" effect, such that the salient categories are always "indigenous" and "new arrival," irrespective of any prior distinctions between the "indigenous" people. In this context of cumulative stages of formation, Kopytoff's original notion of frontier as "empty space," even rhetorically empty space, needs to be re-thought.

Interethnic Relations

A number of papers focus on the micro mechanisms by which ideas move between different peoples, and then change or become inverted. Some focus on the exchanges of people, goods, and ideas that take place across cultural boundaries (e.g., Tadesse). These papers discuss various different interconnections and pathways of exchange, such as marriage, trade, bond friendship, and shared rituals.

Traditional trade and travel routes have been extremely important in facilitating the movement of people and goods in southern Ethiopia, and they have been able to function well because of the *Fund'o* organization, a kind of local licensing system, which provides security and order along the routes (Tadesse). The passage of people and ideas along these routes meant that people living on these routes had a good knowledge of neighboring peoples and their similar, but different, customs. More than that,

the passage of essential goods maintained an interdependency between many of these groups that linked them into a wider regional network.

Other papers focus on the fact that many rituals appear to be attended by people beyond the limits of a particular group. Suri, for example, attend Dizi rain rituals; Borana and others go to Hor for blessing; Hor go with their Hamar bond friends to watch their relations "jump over the cattle." In all these contexts there is the possibility that these new ideas will be taken back home and discussed locally. In some cases these ideas will be copied, in others they will be inverted, and in yet others they will be laughed at. It is important to consider how innovations take place, and in particular to look at how ideas from neighboring peoples might be borrowed in order to resolve internal structural problems in one's own society.

Local Understandings of Variation

An important theme that must be considered when looking at variation and its generation is how local people themselves think about it. The papers in this volume deal with this issue from a number of different perspectives (Cohen; Data; Strecker; Wood).

In some cases people are very aware and indeed interested in the variation between themselves and their neighbors (e.g., in Gabra and Hamar), whereas in other places there is far less of an interest (e.g., in Gamo). Why this is, and how it relates to the way in which identity is constructed, is an important issue. Variation and inversion is a way for some groups to be both "the same" and "different" as other groups, and thus related variations allow ambiguous identities to be elaborated or denied on different occasions (Wood). These relations can be put to great rhetorical use on appropriate occasions (Strecker).

In other cases the basis of identity might be the clan, rather than the ethnic group (Data), and since many clans are found widely in the area it perhaps follows that there is a level of super-ethnic identity based on these shared clans. Again, the ambiguity of being the same yet different would allow such an identity to exist alongside a relatively strong ethnic identity.

The issue of identity can also be tackled from the perspective of language and history. Some people share a sense of identity when they speak different languages, while others maintain a sense of difference

even though they speak the same language. In order to understand this paradox it is necessary to consider whether these people have a sense of shared history, and to look at how this idea of history is used in their construction of identity (Cohen).

The theoretical challenge here is to understand how people think about variation, as the background to being able to understand how they make the transformations and inversions that they do. Are these in fact conscious manipulations? Or simply the end results of a series of unintended consequences following some small internal change? Or the results of conquering or intermarriage that took place many years ago? Several papers shed light on these questions, and we hope that this volume will provide plenty of food for thought on these complex and important issues.

Conclusions

The papers in this volume represent a first attempt to analyze and understand patterns of cultural variation in southern Ethiopia. They demonstrate clearly that "ethnic groups" or "cultures" cannot be understood in isolation, but must be seen as part of a wider regional network. Movement and flux are pervasive at every scale, leading to shared ideas, group and clan relations, and cultural innovation. It is this dynamic aspect of culture that we find fascinating, and we hope that the papers in this volume will stimulate further thought and research on this important topic.

Acknowledgements

The papers in this special volume derive from a workshop on the subject of Cultural Variation in Southern Ethiopia. It was convened by Elizabeth Watson and myself and took place at Harris Manchester College, Oxford, in January 1999. At a time when a new generation of researchers had recently returned from the field, we thought it was important to gather together people working in southern Ethiopia to share their findings and to exchange ideas.

The Oxford workshop was made possible by grants from the British Academy and the Chadwick Fund of Cambridge University. Many thanks to all those who participated in the workshop, and extra special thanks to Wendy James, who provided much needed encouragement and organizational support.

On Being "First": Making History by Two's in Southern Ethiopia

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Southern Ethiopia is a structuralist's delight. Here are dozens of cultural groups, many small, in historical interaction for millennia, all different in one way or another, but all resembling one another as well. Had his personal history been different, Lévi-Strauss might well have made Ethiopia his laboratory, and most of his structuralist points would have emerged as clearly as in South America.

Structuralist insights are important, but here I would like to argue for an ultimately different approach that attempts to look at cultural variation in the context of regional historical processes. If one takes the example of dual organization, Lévi-Strauss seized upon it because dualism epitomized for him the logically simplest and most sociologically elegant way of institutionalizing the principle of reciprocity: all of society is divided into As and Bs, and the continuance of social life depends upon the give-and-take between these two. In this way, Lévi-Strauss soared from the details of obscure South American ethnography to the most fundamental assumptions about sociality and "the structure of the human mind."

My own bent is to stay closer to the ground and to attempt to base comparison in the contours of regional histories. The immediate difficulty that one faces is, of course, that we know so little, in fact, about the long-term history of southern Ethiopia. What we *do* know is that the Ethiopian highlands were a center of proliferation of extremely ancient languages and cultures. The family of Afro-Asiatic languages includes Semitic, Cushitic, Omotic, Berber, Chadic, and Ancient Egyptian. Of

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these six, three occur in present-day Ethiopia, making it a plausible point of origin and dispersal for all of the Afro-Asiatic languages.

Over the past two millennia, one of the most consequential processes in northeast African history has been the creation and expansion of northern, mostly Semitic-speaking empires into the south. Donald Levine has analyzed this process in *Greater Ethiopia* (2000), and a collection of essays edited by Wendy James and myself, *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* (Donham and James 2002), took up the particularities of the period from the late nineteenth century to 1974. Looked at overall, this history of the expansion of the power of Semitic-speakers and the eventual assimilation of many Cushitic- and Omotic-speaking groups to Semitic language and culture is understood now, at least in outline. Only one of the residues of this complicated history is the presence of words in Amharic for spiritual beings other than God that have been borrowed from both Cushitic and Omotic languages. As Levine has argued, northern Ethiopians' possession of the book, and as others have suggested, their dependence upon the plow, made the dynamics of the expansion somewhat different from that typically found in the rest of Africa.

But any similar understanding of the outlines of the long-term cultural history of Omotic- and Cushitic-speakers is less developed. Some work has been done on the Oromo expansion, but a large-scale regional synthesis remains to be done. Part of the problem is, of course, a lack of historical data on an area without written indigenous languages. Another difficulty is understanding Cushitic- and Omotic-speaking cultures in their own terms—not just as they contribute to a supposed Ethiopian synthesis.

This paper is a preliminary attempt to analyze a recurrent theme in southern Ethiopian history. It is speculative to a degree, and because it proceeds largely from one small group—the Maale—rather than covering the vast array of southern peoples and cultures, it will inevitably be biased.

How does one do a comparison in a historically sensitive way in a context in which we in fact know very little history—at least history of the conventional sort? Here, I take my lead from Igor Kopytoff's stimulating essay (1987) on the frontier in African history where he sought to

construct a model based in what he called "functionalist historicity." In the absence of time depth for any particular area, Kopytoff used examples across the whole continent in order to explain certain processes that recur in African history.

The essence of the frontier as a historical phenomenon lies in this: once outsiders have defined an area as a frontier and have intruded into it in order to settle in it, there begins a process of social construction that, if successful, brings into being a new society. The central thesis of this analysis is that most African societies arose out of such a conjuncture of events. And, further, that this process of building new societies, paralleled by the demise of established societies, has been a continuous one in African history.

The way that African frontiersmen typically constructed new societies was by claiming (and having their claim at least partially recognized) as "firstcomers." This is ironic to the degree that there were nearly always previous inhabitants of frontier areas, with a better claim to having come first. In this context, historical memory developed in a particularly ambiguous way.

A radical remolding by each group of past events into a favorable form could not entirely mask the reality. One could not claim that people had "run away" at the time of occupation if they were in fact around and in strength. Nor could one deny the existence of the founders of the polity when everyone knew who they were. The present rulers, even while insisting on their role as firstcomers, co-opted their predecessors into political rituals precisely as predecessors—although of an inferior kind. And predecessors agreed to their formally subordinate ritual status precisely because their participation in ritual kept the memory of their original position publicly alive; someday, the ritual might become an argument for reviving their own now dormant claim to primacy. Throughout all this, different versions of the past were collectively suspended in the public arena in the interests of a modus vivendi.

The argument for being recognized as having come first rested upon an idiom common to much of Africa: namely, the power to promote the fertility of people, animals, and land in the area, often through sacrifices to ancestors. Commonly called divine kingship or sacred chiefship, this cultural theme—what I have called fertility fetishism in my analysis of

the Maale—existed in many African societies, whether or not they possessed chiefs. At bottom, the notion rested upon a particular construction of male gender that reproduction was fundamentally a male achievement. Like the claim to having arrived on the frontier first, this construction of masculinity was misleading to the degree that it was women who were, in fact, much more intimately involved in reproduction. The construction of maleness became, then, a labored explanation of why what seemed to be the case actually was not. Ritually elaborated and much insisted upon—but in that very insistence unpersuasive to some important degree—fertility fetishism motivated the power of husbands over wives.

The construction of gender provided, in turn, a template for understanding other forms of hierarchy: of chiefs and kings over commoners, of lineage heads over others, and generally of elders over juniors. Cultural hierarchies, even in those societies sometimes called "egalitarian," were in fact pervasive. In all these relationships, the "first" was thought to "beget" the second. And because the second owed his very existence to the first, he was obligated in some way, if only ritually, to serve the first. But this obligation, given the general availability of land in African societies and hence the ever-present possibility of immigrating to a new frontier, was one that had continually to be negotiated and sustained. It could not be assumed. Accumulating power on the frontier meant, then, a claim—and at least a temporary acquiescence to that claim by others—that one kin group "begot" the others.

This model makes it easier to understand, for example, the Maale myth of origin. I will not present the text of the myth in full because I have done so elsewhere (cf. Donham 1994, 22–23). But the story, well known among Maale even today, is that two clans in present-day Maale had originated as their founders had come up out of the ground in a streambed. After the second man came out (at no point are women mentioned), he pushed the earth back so that no more could come out. But these autochthons were uncivilized; they did not know how to use fire to cook their food.

One day a set of four brothers arrived from a group to the east, Bussa. The newcomers each attempted to make fire with a drill. But, in an inversion of the normal hierarchy, only the youngest brother managed to

do so. He, Maaleka—the name appears to be a generic abbreviation of "Maale" and *kati* or king—gave fire to the people living in Maale. But the latter were so unsophisticated that they hid coals from their first fires in the thatch of their houses, and the whole country was burned. Burning is, of course, the first step in cultivating a field in Maale. Henceforth, Maaleka's line furnished the ritual kings in Maale, the quintessential firstcomers—the ones who continued to bring fire and culture, good fortune, and fertility. The people who came with the first king became the *karazi* moiety (the word means approximately "the king's people" and may have been a literal contraction of *kati asi*, "*kati*'s person"). The autochthons became the *raggi* moiety.

Now, how does one understand the inversion in this story, that the youngest brother succeeds and becomes the ritual king? In structuralist method, such an inversion, well known from Lévi-Strauss's work, becomes an almost random working out of the play of the human mind, combining and recombining oppositions. But against the background of a model of the African frontier, this inversion (while it surely reflects the general properties of the human mind) takes on a more local significance, for it was precisely younger brothers or "seconds" who typically escaped, ran away from their eldest brothers when the latter grew too demanding. On the frontier, "seconds" became "firsts" or tried to do so.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Maale was composed of approximately 35 exogamous clans or "heads," *tooki*, almost all of which (with the exception of the two who had emerged from the earth) had traditions of origin outside Maale. The names of many foreign clans had a standard translation into Maale (for example, the Aman clan among the neighboring Baaka was and is known as Zage in Maale). Far from any "essentialist" notion of Maaleness, then, nearly everyone was in some sense a foreigner in Maale—even those who claimed to have come "first," the *kati*'s people.

Besides inversion, dual organization itself takes on a new significance when analyzed against the background of history on the African frontier. According to Lévi-Strauss, dual organizations are the simplest way to work out the principle of reciprocity. According to the Maale, each moiety, the *karazi* and the *raggi*, depended upon each other. *Karazi* were supposed to be buried by *raggi* and vice versa; *karazi* elders finished the

recitative prayers begun by *raggi* and vice versa; and most importantly, *karazi* were supposed to marry *raggi* and vice versa.

But something more than abstract reciprocity was being worked out here: newcomers were grafting themselves into a society in such a way that they placed themselves on top of a local hierarchy. *Karazi* was superior to *raggi*.

In a purely structuralist reading, the hierarchy in dual organizations remain in Lévi-Strauss's words "a mysterious phenomenon." In his 1956 article "Do Dual Organizations Exist?" Lévi-Strauss went to some scholastic effort to encompass the fact of hierarchy into his theory based on reciprocity (Lévi-Strauss 1963). But if one views dual organizations against the background of regional history, in southern Ethiopia at least, hierarchy becomes an essential trait. Dual organizations become the logically simplest way, not just of instituting reciprocity, but of newcomers on the frontier claiming "firstness" while integrating themselves into the upper echelons of local society.

The *kati* was not only conceptually associated with the meaning of the moiety division (the *kati*'s people versus others), he also had the power to decide the moiety membership of latecomers to Maale or to change the clan affiliations and hence the moiety affiliations of already-established Maale. Each clan was assigned to one of the moieties, and in the last century, there were approximately twice as many *raggi* clans as *karazi* ones, *raggi* clans tending to be smaller.

Marriage between *karazi* and *raggi* was perhaps the most crucial part of the historical process of amalgamation. By the late nineteenth century (and certainly today), marriage within the same moiety was not tabooed, but there was a belief that *karazi-raggi* marriages were more likely to be auspicious, to produce children and good fortune. The favored status of *karazi-raggi* marriages was emphasized in the Maale system of address. Men generally called any woman of the opposite moiety to which other ties could not be traced *aho*—a category, as we shall see below, that included both actual grandmothers and distant cross-cousins who were preferred spouses.

Once a *karazi-raggi* marriage had occurred, the local alliance between lineages was maintained by a complex system of later preferential cross-cousin marriages. According to the Maale way of thinking, marrying a

woman from the same lineage (and hence moiety) as one's grandmother or great-grandmother was particularly auspicious. For such a marriage, they did not even consult the intestine oracle (a routine matter for other marriages). Having already produced descendants, the original affinal link was obviously a fertile one, one that produced good fortune. Correspondingly, a marriage in the opposite direction, that is, sending one's sister to marry into the lineage of one's grandmother or great-grandmother, was strictly tabooed.

Following the complexities of cross-cousin marriage in the context of kinship terminology, the pattern of respect behavior amongst relatives, and the notion that "seniors" or "firsts" had the ability to curse "juniors" or "seconds," it becomes clear why close cross-cousins could not marry. As the Maale put it, they could not marry their own "seed." Let me explain what this means with a male ego and his mother's descendants.

The terminology is simple. All of the males of one's mother's patrilineage were one's *abo*, all the females one's *indo gero*, literally "mother's sister." It would have been unthinkable to marry one's own mother's brother's daughter, *indo gero*, for she had the power to curse. According to Maale, anyone whose blood and bones had gone into the making of another had the power to curse (a woman's menstrual blood was thought to combine with a man's semen—which came from his bones—to produce a child). Both *indo gero* and *abo*, like one's parents, had this power and had to be treated with respect. Marrying one's *indo gero*, then, would have upset the proper hierarchy between husbands and wives.

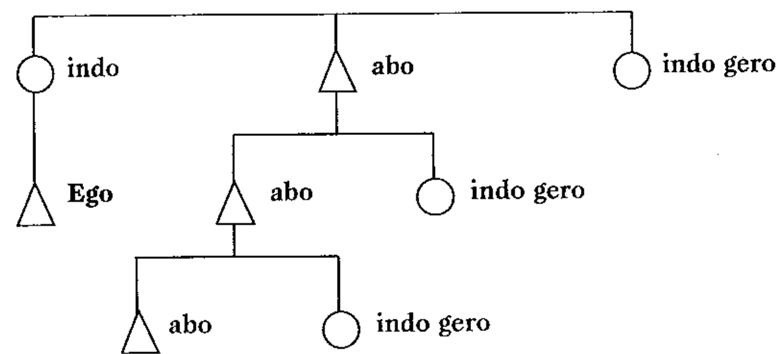

Figure 1

The wife would have had the superior position; she would have the power to curse her husband.

The terminology for cross-cousin one step removed is different and introduces the category of permitted spouses, *aho*, which may be inexactly translated as "grandmother." One played and joked with one's *aho*, often about marriage and, indirectly, about sex.

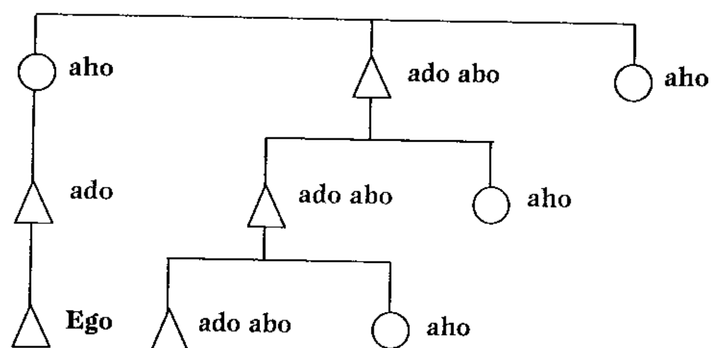

Figure 2

Again, a Maale could not marry his own seed (for example, his father's mother's sister), but he could marry his father's mother's brother's daughter, *provided* his father had died. While his father is still alive, the marriage is contradicted because the girl is the father's *indo gero* (as Figure 1 makes clear). The son would be bringing a woman into his father's house higher in status than his father, a woman with the ability to curse his father.

Finally, the terminology for cross-cousins one step further removed introduces the most favored type of marriage, that with the female descendants of the father's father's mother's brothers. Women in this category are addressed by both father and son as *aho*. A close *aho*, a "seed" *aho* has, of course, the ability to curse, but an *aho* further away (and this is how the Maale put it) does not if she is married.

As one Maale man put it to me, marrying a woman of his father's father's mother's patrilineage, a man "will have sons with white eyes," that is, he will have many forceful, active, intelligent sons.

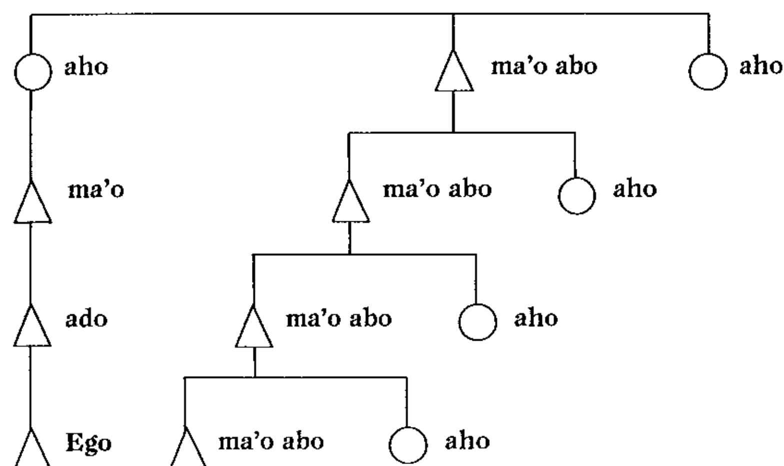

Figure 3

As Figure 3 illustrates, Maale cross-cousin marriage involves relationships over four generations. Affinal links contracted beyond that range were generally not remembered, and even if they were, descendants of such links were not viewed as relatives or *iginni*. Four generations was, then, a complete cycle in Maale kinship ideology. This idea recurred in the custom of recycling names within the patriline; sons, particularly first sons, were often given the names of their great-grandfathers. Cross-cousin marriage was a part of this notion of completing and hence beginning a new cycle. Sons should not only be given their great-grandfather's names, they should marry into the patrilineage of their great-grandmothers. In this way, time cycled back upon itself to become a constant.

The result of this system of marriage was to set up a series of relatively enduring hierarchical relations between local lineages—lineages typically in opposite moieties. Each marriage sets up links that lasted over at least four generations and, if renewed by cross-cousin marriage, these lasted forever. At any one point in time, the lineages that had "given" wives to one's fathers were higher in status and had the power to curse: the men of these lineages were one's *abo*, *ado abo*, and *ma'o abo*—literally "mother's brother," "father's mother's brother," and

"grandfather's mother's brother." In the Maale case—far from Radcliffe-Brown's examples of the mother's brother in South Africa—these men were not seen as warm, playful, or indulgent. Like one's parent, they had the power to curse, but this power was not inhibited or restrained by strong ties of affection (as in the case of one's parents). Hence, *abo* and especially *ado abo* and *ma'o abo* were seen as powerful and dangerous: like cobras, their curses struck one unexpectedly.

Inversely, at any one point in time, those lineages to which one's fathers had "given" wives were lower in status. These were the lineages that had taken one's father's sisters, grandfather's sisters, and great-grandfather's sisters. Descendants of these marriages are known collectively as *wuduri* and are addressed as *ta nai* or as *ta nazi nai* ("my child" or "my son's child"). Like one's own children and grandchildren, the issues of one's own blood and bones, they are subject to one's curse.

Let me bring this discussion of kinship terminology and marriage back to the issue of dual organization and its propensity to amalgamate groups on the frontier. Consider the example of a *karazi* man who married a *raggi* woman. Notice the status reversal that occurred locally. While the *karazi* moiety was generally higher in status than *raggi*, this particular *karazi* man was lower in status than his *raggi* in-laws, those who had "given" him a woman. This local reversal complicated and probably made more palatable the overall hierarchy between "firsts" and others.

The *kati* at the top of this hierarchy was protected from any such reversal in relation to his in-laws. To begin, no *raggi* man could enter the *kati*'s lion house. One explanation I received for this custom was that it prevented the king's affines from demanding gifts and generally lording it over the *kati* (as in-laws are wont to do). Perhaps for this reason also, the *kati* was encouraged to marry a woman from outside Maale, thus adding spatial to ritual distance. Often these long-distance matches were with daughters of surrounding kings and hence not with *raggi* women at all.

In conclusion, let me follow out a few speculative conclusions that this analysis of Maale suggests. First, the presence of strict exogamy in relation to moieties may in fact be an indicator of a relatively early stage in the successful process of forming a new frontier society. Certainly,

taking half of all the appropriately aged spouses out of contention for any adult man seems a relatively drastic measure, one that may indicate a high degree of pressure or of agreement. But after several generations of marriage, dual organizations have performed their function. They have knit together the social fabric, with "firsts" on top. It may be, therefore, that dual organizations have a half-life, a built-in propensity to decay. Certainly, by the end of the nineteenth century, Maale no longer had strict moiety exogamy (presuming that they ever did).

Secondly, I would like to consider very briefly the contrast between Omotic and Cushitic groups like the Oromo. There were, certainly, variations among Omotic-speaking peoples, but on the whole, they seem—once formed out of frontier processes—to have been relatively stable. The "first" became a divine king with actual political powers that varied from as little as that of the Gemu *kao* to the Maale *kati* finally to as much as that of the Kefa *tato*. The contrast with Cushitic groups, particularly the Oromo, is interesting. The idiom of power remains strikingly the same in Cushitic-speaking groups. The powerful control fertility. The equivalent of the Maale *kati* is found in the Borana *kallu* for example—except that now we have two *kallu*s, one for each moiety. But the *kallu* did not dominate Borana society; alongside the mostly ritual role of the *kallu* lay the *gaada* system. And what *gaada* did, at least in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was not to stabilize things but in fact to institutionalize the continual creation of new frontier societies: every eight years, young men, "seconds," of a certain age/grade carried out raids against neighbors ever further afield.

According to the monk Bahrey writing in the sixteenth century, the expanding Oromo made *gabare* of those they conquered. Mohammed Hassen (1990, 63) explains this term:

> The term *gabare* describes the obligatory relation between the conquerors and the conquered. The vanquished, still owners of their plot of land, became serfs or clients of the pastoral Oromo, who now demanded service and tribute from them. The Oromo term for the conquered people was *gabbaro* ("those who serve"). The Oromo adopted the *gabbaro en masse*, giving them clan genealogy, marrying their women and taking their young into service for herding.

As we know, the *gäbbar* system was a critical institution in the expansion of northern empires southward, a process that continued into the twentieth century. It is, then, especially interesting to discover that the Oromo had their own *gabbaro* institution. But I would suggest that the dynamics of its workings were probably closer to the Maale system of dual organization than to the northern version of "serfdom." The Oromo claimed "firstness" while eventually assimilating and integrating Semitic- and Omotic-speaking peoples into new frontier societies. No great differentials in power allowed the development of "serfdom." In fact, Mohammed describes a *gabbaro* rebellion in the early seventeenth century after the Oromo had apparently begun to behave too much like "masters." Rather than a hierarchy established in serfdom, the *gabbaro* system of the Oromo seem to have resembled the moiety system of the Maale—that is, a symbolic elaboration of the claim of "firstness" that was at its core deeply ironic and often reversed as two moieties were socially woven together on the frontier (see Alessandro Triulzi's thoughts [1996] on this process of "union in division").

Speculative history has had a bad name for some time, and we are all aware of the ways in which it can be misleading. But a resolute lack of concern for temporality also has its pitfalls. In this paper, I have attempted to present a model, simplified to be sure, of certain recurrent social processes and cultural themes in southern Ethiopian history—ones against which the analysis of recently obtained materials, both by me and by others, takes on increased texture and larger meaning.

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The Generation of Difference: Initiations in Gamo, Sidamo, and Borana (Oromo)

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Introduction

The people of the Gamo highlands are unusual in that they are the only Ometo-speaking people that carry out initiations. Moreover, initiatory systems are not found as part of the cultural fabric of any other highland Omotic-speaking people at all.[1] Where we do find initiatory systems, however, is amongst the Cushitic-speaking pastoralists who live in the lowland areas throughout much of south and southwest Ethiopia. How, then, can we explain the presence of initiatory systems among the farmers of the Gamo highlands?

At first sight the Gamo initiations look very different from the initiations of the Cushitic-speakers, and one might be tempted to argue that they are something quite different altogether. Indeed, previous scholars have treated them as entirely unrelated phenomena, writing about the Gamo "*halak'as*" on the one hand, and the lowland Cushitic "*Gaada* system" on the other. In this paper I argue that if we broaden our analytic gaze to consider the region in general, instead of focusing on individual groups, then we can clearly see that these cultural phenomena are variations of the same thing.

There is considerable variation in the form of the initiations throughout the Gamo highlands, and there is also considerable variation in the form of the initiations amongst the Cushitic-speakers. By analyzing the

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patterns in these variations, it is possible to see that the Gamo initiations fit neatly at one end of the spectrum of larger-scale variation across the whole region. Furthermore, it is my contention that this variation is the result of a historical transformation brought about by the events and movements of people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This paper thus highlights the interconnections between different peoples in southern Ethiopia and might call us to question the depth and importance of the current political focus on separate "ethnicities."

I will begin by briefly describing the form of the Gamo initiations. Since there is a great deal of variation between the form of the initiations in different parts of the highlands, I will give two specific examples from the northern part of the highlands where I carried out my fieldwork. Having outlined these versions of the Gamo initiations, I will then present a quick sketch of the Boran initiations, drawing on the detailed ethnography of Asmarom Legesse (1973). These initiations are right at the other end of the spectrum, but although there are significant differences it should be possible to see some continuities. These continuities, however, will become clearer when we add the case of the Sidamo, a Cushitic-speaking group who live between lowland and highland, and who practice both agriculture and pastoralism to significant degrees. Using the ethnographies of John Hamer (1970) and Jan Brøgger (1986), I will show that the form of their initiations will be seen to be mid-way between that of the Borana and that of the Gamo. Furthermore, if we add some more ethnography from other communities in the northern parts of the Gamo highlands, we can begin to fill out the picture even further, so that the pattern of variations from Borana to Sidamo to Gamo comes into relief. Having presented and analyzed all this ethnography, the paper will conclude with a short discussion of the historical events that most likely brought about this state of affairs.

Gamo Initiations

Throughout the Gamo highlands people live in scattered settlements and are organized into many different communities, known as *dere*. Each community has its own sacrificers (*ek'k'a*), its own initiates (*halak'a*), and its own assemblies and assembly places (*dubusha*), where disputes are solved and communal decisions are made. *Halak'as* are said

to "herd" the community (*dere hemo*). A *halak'a* who does this well is thought to cause the community (both the people and the land) to be fertile. If he has "good shoulders," the crops will grow, cows will calve, women will give birth, and people will live in peace and prosperity. *Halak'as*, however, do not herd by ruling or by imposing orders, but rather by observing a number of prohibitions themselves and by carrying out the will of the communal assembly. They are easily recognizable by their special garb and the ceremonial staff that they carry. They herd the community for a certain period of time, anywhere between a day and several years, and then leave office and become community fathers, or *dere ades*. As *dere ades* they are respected, and they will generally participate more actively in community politics and events.

A *halak'a* must wear his cloth shawl (*gabi*) wrapped to the right, whereas other men wear it wrapped to the left. Round his shoulders he wears a striped cotton cloth (*k'ole*)[2] and, instead of trousers, he wears a wrap-around loincloth (*assara*) tied with a cloth belt around his waist. He must not cut his hair, and the long hairstyle (*dishko*) with butter rubbed in marks him out from ordinary men. And he should carry his *horoso*, a ceremonial staff made with a wooden handle above an iron base and with brass twirls at the joint and on the top.

In theory any man can become *halak'a*. This is often emphasized by the people themselves, and the ideology of democratic equality pervades the institution. In practice, the percentage of men that actually become *halak'a* varies greatly from community to community, ranging between approximately 10 and 60 percent, depending on whether that community initiates one or several men at a time, and whether they initiate young boys or married men. Furthermore, it is also the case that one cannot get initiated before one's father and elder brothers.

The initiation itself takes the form of a series of rituals that can span between two months and two years, and include a series of feasts, for which the initiate must accumulate large amounts of resources. Beyond these general points, though, there is tremendous variation in the initiations from community to community. In what follows I will present a very quick sketch of the form of the initiations in two neighboring communities, Doko Gembela and Doko Masho. Later on in this paper I will also look at some other Gamo communities in the area.

Doko Gembela Initiations

The general form of the initiation in Doko Gembela proceeds as follows (see Figure 1 for a schematic representation). Only one *halak'a* is chosen at a time. A messenger is then sent to tell the *halak'a*-to-be that he has been chosen. This messenger is called an *u?e*, which is also the name of the little flies that buzz around piles of cow dung. The messenger goes to the house of the *halak'a*-to-be and adjusts his cloth shawl so that instead of wrapping it to the left, he now wraps it to the right. On this day the *halak'a* is said to be like a newborn baby. He enters a liminal state called *gach'ino* and from now on must do no work.

Figure 1. Initiations in Doko Gembela. Source: Freeman 2002

For the next seven days the *halak'a* remains in seclusion. Like a newborn baby, he is not yet a "person," not yet social. The seventh day is known as *Uts'uma*, and the community sacrificer comes to the house of the *halak'a* and puts some butter with *uts'uma* grass[3] on his head and blesses him to be prosperous and fertile. From now on he must not cut his hair. He spends the day eating with the neighbors and the sacrificer. Before leaving, the sacrificer presents the *halak'a* with the ceremonial staff, *horoso*, which he will carry from now on. The *halak'a*-as-youth now has his staff with which he will "herd" the community, as a youth herds his father's cattle.

From then on the *halak'a* must prepare for the feasts that he will provide on his Naming Day and *sofe*. From the morning onwards there will be a feast at the *halak'a*'s house, and then in the early afternoon boys from the neighborhood cut fresh bamboo and the poles are erected in the compound of the *halak'a*. These poles, known as *gazo*, are said to be symbols of maturity, and they indicate that the *halak'a*-as-youth has grown up to become *halak'a*-as-man. The ostrich feather that he wears on his head for the first time on this day is said to symbolize the same thing.

Once the boys have feasted, the *halak'a* proceeds to a special assembly place and waits outside while the previously initiated men take their places inside. A close kinsman then presents the assembled men with butter on behalf of the *halak'a*. If the amount of butter is accepted as sufficient, then the *halak'a* enters the assembly place and bows down before them. He promises to obey the will of the community, and is then blessed by the men. Meanwhile, the previous *halak'a* sits on the special *halak'a* stone at the front of the assembly place. The new *halak'a* comes beside him and they drink together from a gourd of wheat beer. Then the old *halak'a* gets up from the *halak'a*'s stone and the new *halak'a* sits down. Now he officially enters his ritually fertile state.

The men then spend the rest of the day, and some of the next few days, drinking the wheat beer that the *halak'a* provided. The initiated men are joined by the non-initiated men for this Beer Feast, although they often sit separately in different parts of the assembly place.

The next day is the *sofe*, a parade in the market place that publicly marks the *halak'a*'s change of status. As well as an ostrich feather, the *halak'a* sports a metal phallus on his forehead and he carries a spear. After this the *halak'a* ends his period of *gach'ino*, and can resume work. He is now symbolically a warrior, the ideal brave young man protecting his community. I was told that his maleness is shown by the metal phallus, his maturity by the ostrich feather, and his bravery by the spear.

Over the next few months the *halak'a* sacrifices a number of animals for the good of the community. Then, some time later, generally in May or June of the same or following year, the *halak'a* must feed the Seniors' Feast. This involves feasting all the initiated men on the best Gamo food for a number of days. This feast is a real test of the *halak'a*'s resources,

and once he has successfully provided it he has earned himself the title of *ade* ("father" or "senior"), and can eat at the Seniors' Feasts of *halak'as* in the following years. Some of the districts of Doko Gembela also feast the non-initiated men, or *k'ach'ina*. The feast for the *k'ach'ina* will be less elaborate and a lot shorter, and may even happen a year or two later, but it is significant that non-initiated men can participate in these feasts at all.

The *halak'a* will continue to "herd" the community until it is decided to change him, either because some problems have befallen the community, or simply because there is another man ready to become *halak'a*. The period that a *halak'a* should herd the community is not fixed in Doko Gembela, and can vary from a few days to several years. On the Naming Day of the new *halak'a*, the old *halak'a* gets up from the *halak'a* stone and lets the new *halak'a* sit down. After that he may cut his hair, put his shawl back to the left, and resume normal life as an initiated man, a *dere ade*.

The "story" of the Doko Gembela initiations, in this general form, is like this: before the process starts the man is *k'ach'ina*, a social child. He can still partake in the communal feasts, such as the Beer Feast and the Seniors' Feast of new *halak'as*, although only in a limited fashion. Then, when the messenger (*u?e*) comes to his house, he is symbolically reborn. As a baby he is initially asocial, not yet a member of any community, not yet a person. After the first seven days he has symbolically grown into a

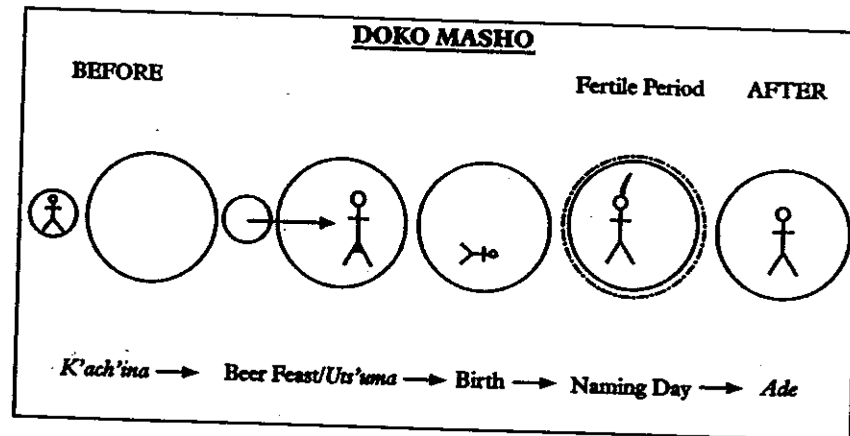

Figure 2. Initiations in Doko Masho. Source: Freeman 2002

young boy, active and helpful around the neighborhood. On the Naming Day he matures into a young man, obedient now to the whole community. And the next day this change of state is publicly marked by his *sofe* in the main assembly places of Doko Gembela. He is now the ideal young man, mature, virile, and brave. Thus he herds the community for a period of time. At some point he feeds the Seniors' Feast, proving that he too is worthy to be an *ade*. And then, when he hands over to a new *halak'a* and cuts his hair, he fully becomes a *dere ade*, a respected elder.

Doko Masho Initiations

In the communities of Doko Masho the initiation of *halak'as* follows a somewhat different pattern (see Figure 2). Any number of men can be chosen to become *halak'a*, from one to thirty or more. Just before the New Year (*Mesqalla*) a messenger goes and tells each man that he has been chosen. This messenger is not called an *u?e*, as in Doko Gembela, but a *lazantsa*, which is the same term used for the messenger who acts as intermediary between the houses of a prospective bride and groom. Assuming that the *halak'a*-to-be agrees, his name will be announced along with the other prospective *halak'as* during the New Year festivities.

After that the *halak'a*-to-be must prepare for the Beer Feast, which he must sponsor some months later, during March or April. On this day, the *halak'a*-to-be provides two separate feasts: a small feast in his compound for friends and neighbors, men and women, and a larger feast with huge quantities of wheat beer that takes place in a special assembly place and is only attended by the initiated men. In contrast to Doko Gembela, non-initiated men are never allowed to drink at the Beer Feast.

Early in the morning a certain senior person will come to the compound of the *halak'a*-to-be and put some butter and *uts'uma* grass on his head, while he sits by the center-post of the main house. After this he is forbidden to cut his hair. Later in the day, when the feasting is well under way in both the compound and the assembly place, the *lazantsa* will come and lead the *halak'a*-to-be from his compound to the assembly place. Like a new bride entering her husband's house, the *halak'a*-to-be steps into the assembly place and drinks three times from a gourd of

wheat beer. This drinking is called *kacha*, and the same term is used for the drinking that takes place when a new bride first enters her husband's house. The day of the Beer Feast in Doko Masho is structurally the same as that of a wedding day, and this is explicitly acknowledged by the participants.

After the Beer Feast the initiate is still not a *halak'a*. He continues with his normal life until the next New Year festival, when he symbolically gives birth and is born as a *halak'a*. The red feather he wears on his head throughout the day's festivities is said to be his *ch'e?o*, the first cry of a newborn baby. This feather is not worn in Doko Gembela, and the initiations in general are not linked to an annual cycle or to the New Years' festivities as they are in Doko Masho. For the next few months he will be in the state of *gach'ino*, like a post-parturient mother, and must do no work.

A week or so later it is the Naming Day. In the morning neighborhood boys go and cut bamboo poles and erect them in the compound of the *halak'a*. Then the *halak'a* goes to a certain assembly place, carrying a large bundle of butter. As in Doko Gembela, he waits outside while his butter is presented and distributed to the initiated men. Only then does he enter and bow down before the assembled men and promise to be obedient to the community. In contrast to the Doko Gembela form, in Doko Masho there is no special *halak'a* stone, and no overt marking of the take-over of the *halak'a*-ship from one initiate to another. Some time later he is presented with the ceremonial staff.

A week or two later is the day of the *sofe*. In the morning he provides a small feast for neighbors and kin, and in the afternoon the *halak'a* *sofe*s in the market place, wearing an ostrich feather on his head, but with no spear or metal phallus, as in Doko Gembela.

During the next few months the *halak'a* will perform a number of animal sacrifices for the good of the community. Then, towards the end of the year, during May or June, the *halak'a* is required to sponsor the Seniors' Feast, in which he must feast the initiated men for four days on the best Gamo food. As in Doko Gembela, this is a large feast that tests the *halak'a*'s resources, but unlike Doko Gembela, only initiated men are fed.

At the next New Year festival the *halak'a* wears an ostrich feather during the day's festivities, showing that he is exiting, while the next

batch of *halak'as* wear the small red feather showing that they are entering. The *halak'a* officially continues to herd the community until the Naming Day, when the new *halak'as* take over. Then he can cut his hair, put his shawl back to the left, and resume normal life as an initiated man, a *dere ade*. With his new status he will be able to sit in the assembly place during the Beer Feast of all subsequent *halak'as*, and to eat at the Seniors' Feast. Likewise, he will be able to eat at other communal feasts that are only open to initiated men, and he will have more say in any communal discussions that take place.

The "story" of the Doko Masho initiations, in this general form, is then rather different from those of the Doko Gembela initiations. Its basic outline is like this: Before the process starts the man is a *k'ach'ina*, a social child, not yet a full member of the community, and unable to eat at most communal feasts. The messenger (*lazantsa*) tells him of the community's intention, and on the day of the Beer Feast he enters the house of the community, as a bride enters her husband's house at marriage. Nine months later, at the next New Year, he symbolically gives birth and is born. He has now entered the community as a baby. The erection of bamboo poles (*gazo*) in his compound mark his maturity as a person, and he later kisses the ground in front of the community to show his obedience to them. His new status as *halak'a* is then publicly marked by his *sofe* in the market place. He is then presented with the ceremonial staff, and herds the community. Later he feeds the Seniors' Feast, proving that he is a provider, and thus he becomes an *ade*. At the next New Year he exits his ritual state, and becomes a fully initiated man, a *dere ade*, a full member of the community, able to partake in all the feasts.

We can see that even between two neighboring Gamo communities there is a high degree of variation in the form of their initiations, although there are obvious similarities and continuities. Before analyzing these initiations any further, I want to present some rather different ethnography from the Borana, a lowland group of Oromo pastoralists. Although the description of the initiations that I present here is less detailed and more generalized, it should still be clear that although there are very significant differences between these initiations and the Gamo ones, there are nonetheless some underlying continuities.

Borana Initiations

The initiatory system of the Borana has been extensively described and analyzed by Asmarom Legesse (1973). His fascinating analysis goes far beyond descriptive ethnography, but for now I simply draw from his description of the *Gaada* as it existed in the 1960s (1973, 50–117).[4] The Borana *Gaada* is perhaps one of the most complicated of all the initiatory systems in northeast Africa, and it consists of both age-sets (*hariyya*) and generation grades (*luba*), into which all Borana men are initiated. For our purposes here it will be sufficient to discuss only the generation grades.

There are eleven grades through which an individual (or an age-set) may pass. However, since individuals do not necessarily enter the first grade at birth, but rather the grade that is five grades behind their father, few men go through the entire cycle. Initiations into new statuses are organized such that every eight years there is a big transition where everyone moves up one grade. The eleven grades mark out four major statuses: juniors (*dabelle*, junior *gamme*, senior *gamme*), warriors (*chussa*, *raba*), adults (*gaada*, or, according to some informants, *gaagadada*), and elders (four grades called *yuba*, *gaada mojji*). Thus, although there are initiations between each grade, there are three major initiations that are the most important: junior to warrior (i.e., senior *gamme* to *chussa*), warrior to adult, and adult to elder.

The basic outline of the junior to warrior initiation is as follows. A red and white flag is hoisted up in the ceremonial camp and the mothers and fathers of the initiates face each other around this flag, while the fathers sing songs of praise to their wives. The fathers then shave the heads of their sons, and each family sacrifices one steer and makes a bracelet for the initiate from a strip of its hide. Then the initiates, wearing trousers, all come together and build a large enclosure, in which they are to remain secluded for four days. After that they participate in some general feasting, and then go into another four-day period of seclusion, this time at the back of their mothers' huts. The emergence of the initiates from this period of seclusion marks their entry into warriorhood, and is described as *ulma bati*, the same phrase used to refer to the emergence of a woman after her forty days of postpartum isolation.

The transition from warrior to adult is a more complicated and drawn out affair, and really consists of a number of different events. At some point towards the end of their time in the junior *raba* grade, men are supposed to organize war campaigns, known as *butta*. This is their occasion to prove their masculinity and strength, and to raid enemy territory and bring back the spoils of war.

The next important event is the fatherhood ceremony, known as *dannisa*. In the first stage of this ceremony the initiates are in a state of ritual purity and subject to certain prohibitions: they should not show pain, they should not kill or bring harm to either people or animals, they should not carry spears, they should not herd their animals, they should avoid obscene language, etc. During this period a ceremonial enclosure is built, and at the end cattle are sacrificed. In the second stage of the ceremony the initiates dress like women, wearing a large toga-like cloth wrapped around their bodies. While the leaders of the grade sit by a shrine and pray, the other initiates go out into the bush and bring back branches of the *dannisa* tree. At the end of the day all the initiates go back to their homes and fashion the branches into ceremonial staffs.[5] Then some cattle are sacrificed, and the initiates' heads are shaved into a new hairstyle. The final stage of the fatherhood ceremony is a mock marriage, where the initiates' wives return to their own moieties, and the marriage negotiations are briefly replayed.

The event that finally marks the transition to the full adult grade then takes place five years later. The adult, or *gaada*, grade is the grade during which its members, or more particularly its leaders, are in power. During this time they take most responsibility in the *Gaada* assembly, and they are considered to ensure the general fertility and well-being of the community. The event that finalizes the transition into this status is called "the exchange of scepters" (*balli walirrafudu*). This ceremony starts with the incoming *abba gaada*, the head of the *gaada* grade, going into the bush to collect ostrich feathers, which he will wear on his head during the rest of the ceremony. Then, while all the outgoing *gaada* grade members stay in their camp, the incoming *gaada* grade members approach this camp, blowing ceremonial horns to announce their arrival. The incoming *abba gaada* goes ahead and sits with the outgoing *abba gaada*. They drink milk together and exchange blessings. Then the

initiates return to their own camp, and remain in isolation for four days. When they emerge from this isolation, also described as a postpartum isolation, they are now *gaada*.

Because the "exchange of scepters" ceremony takes place only five years after the "fatherhood" ceremony, and therefore in the middle of the regular eight year transitions, it happens that when the *gaada* grade reach their third year all the other grades go through transition. At this point, a further important event takes place for the *gaada* grade: they have their ears pierced and they are circumcised. After this they remain indoors for a month while the wound heals, and eat only specially prepared food.

The transition from adult to elder takes place at the "exchange of scepters" ceremony, when the outgoing *gaada* grade hands over power to the incoming grade, and then retires gracefully into elderhood. They can still attend the assemblies, and may even serve on the council. They have both advisory authority and personal input into *Gaada* affairs. Only when they enter the final grade, *gaada mojji*, do men retreat from political affairs and enter a more spiritual and ritually elevated existence.

Although there are clearly very great differences between these initiations and those in the Gamo highlands, a number of common themes are nonetheless apparent: the transition from youth to "father" via a liminal state during which one is thought to influence the fertility and well-being of the community; the notion that real authority and political power are achieved after one has left this liminal state; the use of birth symbolism; the theme of the warrior; and the carrying of ceremonial staffs, to point to only the most obvious. Before taking the analysis any further, however, I want to present some ethnography from the Sidamo. As a midway case, this should help make the continuities more clear.

Sidamo Initiations

The Sidamo *Lua* system has been described by John Hamer (1970) and Jan Brøgger (1986). Like the Borana *Gaada* system, the Sidamo *Lua* is a grading system through which every man passes. However, in contrast to the *Gaada* system where men pass through a series of differently named grades, in the *Lua* system men are initiated into a certain named

class, in which they remain throughout their life. Those initiated into one class are known as the "fathers" of those initiated into the next class, and "sons" of those initiated into the class before them. Also, whereas the *Gaada* system is closely tied up with marriage and procreation (for example, a Borana man cannot get married until *raba*, or have sons until after the "fatherhood" ceremony, etc.), such linkages are not present in the Sidamo *Lua*. The central features are the two initiations that all men go through: from junior to initiated member of their named *Lua* class, and then into circumcised elderhood.

The first initiation takes place over a two-month period, and is organized by the clan, rather than the local community. The first event is the blessing of the initiates by the sacrificer, or *morte*, followed by the sacrifice of three bulls. Then the initiates carve two ceremonial staffs, known as *loloko*. One of these must remain in the initiate's home, while the other is carried with him during the two-month initiation period. In the second major event of the initiation the initiates are fed by their "fathers" (i.e., those in the class above them), who each provide a bull for the feasting. There are several periods of ritual feasting, which culminate in a final two-day period of feasting and sacrifice. On the first day the members of the preceding class sacrifice a bull to mark their exiting from power, and on the second day the new class sacrifices a bull to mark their uptake of power. Then the two classes engage in a mock battle, which is kept in order by other senior men. After this formal part of the initiation, the new class receives some instruction in military tactics and horse riding, and some clans then present gifts of milk and butter to the sacrificer. Once initiated, the new class is considered to be responsible for the fertility and well-being of the tribe.

Twenty-eight years later a new class is initiated, and members of the preceding class can be initiated into elderhood. Although this must take place during a certain seven-year interval, the date is not fixed and individual men, or small groups of men, go through it when they are ready. These rites are the most lengthy and expensive in the Sidamo ritual calendar, and men must spend considerable time accumulating resources, both from their own production and through a series of exchanges with kin, affines, and neighbors. When the man is ready, he organizes the building of a seclusion hut, to which he will retire after his circumcision.

A few days before the circumcision, the initiate dresses up in traditional dress (*gonfa*), anoints himself with butter, and, carrying a spear, parades around the village inviting everyone to his circumcision. The night before the event, young men and women sing and dance in his compound, and just before daybreak the initiate gives large amounts of butter to the now-assembled elders. A sheep is killed, and some of the blood is smeared on people's foreheads. The circumcision itself takes place at sunrise. Straight afterwards another sheep is slaughtered, and then the initiate is escorted into his seclusion hut. Then there is a huge feast in the initiate's compound; Brøgger estimates that 250 people were present at one such feast he attended. Such feasting requires huge amounts of the best Sidamo food, and is a real test of the initiate's resources.

After this the initiate remains in seclusion for several months. As his period of seclusion draws to an end the young men of his lineage will go out hunting for birds with particularly colorful feathers. When they return from their hunt, they enter the compound of the initiate, singing a special chant. The initiate hears them coming and leaves his seclusion hut to meet them, and they then put the feathers on his head. A day or two later the initiate formally comes out of seclusion, and is taken to wash in a local spring. Then there is a final feast, in which the initiate sits together with the elders, marking his new status as an elder himself. As an elder he now has increased decision-making responsibilities, and commands the respect of younger men.

We can see that there are significant differences between these initiations and those of the Borana. Not only are the number of grades different, but so is their significance, their organization, and their connections to other elements of cultural life. However, notwithstanding all the differences, it is possible to recognize them as forms of the same general kind of system. Those initiated into "adulthood" are considered to be in power and to have some mystical control over the fertility and well-being of the community, while those initiated into "elderhood" remain involved in political life and have an advisory role. And indeed this is similar to the distinction between *halak'a* and *dere ade* in the Gamo highlands.

Comparison

The task of analyzing the variations between these different forms of initiation is a daunting one, given the breadth and detail involved. A full analysis is perhaps beyond the scope of this paper, but some continuities can be pointed out, their context explained, and their implications followed through.

For example, the entry into elderhood marked by circumcision is a shared feature for both the Borana and Sidamo initiations, but is not part of any Gamo initiations that I know of, although the seven day period of seclusion in the Doko Gembela initiations takes on new significance in light of the Sidamo circumcisions. Interestingly, groups of men used to be circumcised in Doko every eight years (the same period of the Oromo grade transitions, and thus their circumcisions), and much of the ritual surrounding the circumcisions is similar to that in Sidamo (noticeably in that hunting birds is central in each case).

There are also many continuities in the symbols used in the *halak'a* initiations and in the Borana *Gaada* or the Sidamo *Lua*. These symbols are objects or activities associated with the lowlands and pastoral life, and seem somewhat out of place amongst the highland agricultural Gamo. Initiates in many communities in the northern parts of the highlands wear an ostrich feather on their heads during certain ceremonies, although ostriches are lowland creatures. *Halak'as* are commonly said to "herd" their communities (*dere hemo*), even though highland people are predominantly farmers and keep only two or three heads of cattle. Similarly, the ritual importance of butter suggests some association with a more pastoral set of values.

On a more structural level the resonances between the lowland initiations and the Doko Gembela initiations are clear, with the stress on masculinity and warriorhood. And the importance of feasting to attain elderhood in Sidamo is clearly similar to the importance of the Seniors' Feast throughout Doko.

The most significant difference between the lowland forms and those found in the Gamo highlands, or at least in Doko, is that the Gamo versions seem to have only one stage of initiation, whereas in the lowland

versions there are several. However, if we look at some other Gamo communities to the north of Doko, such as Ochollo, Chencha, Sull?a, Kogo, Ezzo, Doina, and Birbira, we find two-stage initiations, where initiates move through three statuses.[6]

Two-Stage Initiations in the Gamo Highlands

In most of these communities the two stages are known as *atuma* (or *aduma*) and *bitane*. The etymology of these words is unclear, but it is possible to note a number of resonances. Most obviously, "*atuma*" means "male" in the (northern) Gamo language. The associations of "*bitane*" are more complicated. "*Bita*" means "land," and in the Ochollo dialect "*bitante*" refers to a district of a community. In Oyda, over in the Gofa highlands, "*bitante*" is the name given to a ritual leader responsible for the fertility of the land, second only in rank to the senior sacrificer (Dereje 1997, 25–6). In Oromo "*bittaani*" means "to buy" (Gufu 1996, 127 fn. 19), and the economic burdens of becoming *bitane* suggest that this connection may be more than one of coincidence.

In any case, in Ochollo, Chencha, Kogo, and several other northern Gamo communities, *atuma* and *bitane* refer to two different kinds of *halak'a*. In Chencha, the *atuma* and *bitane* are rather like two different stages that a *halak'a* must past through. First he becomes *atuma*, then he becomes *bitane*, and finally he exits and becomes a *dere ade*. The *atuma* is considered to be senior, and it is he who sacrifices for the community and is thought to be good for its fertility. The *bitane*, his messenger, is the intermediary between him and the community. However, the expensive feasts are required in the transition to *bitane*, and not to *atuma*. While the *atuma* has greater ritual significance, the *bitane* has greater economic significance.

In Ochollo there are also *atuma* and *bitane halak'as*. Again, the *atuma* is the ritual senior even though the initiation to *bitane halak'a* requires far greater feasting. However, in Ochollo the two types of *halak'a* are not necessarily sequential stages of the initiation to *dere ade*. A man can stop after becoming *atuma*, or choose to go on to become *bitane halak'a*. Alternatively, a man may follow a different route and become a simple *bitane* before becoming *bitane halak'a* (Abélès 1983, 61–113). Marc Abélès has described the Ochollo initiations in great detail, and it is

worthwhile here to reproduce a brief sketch of them so that some of the similarities become clear.

Ochollo Aduma Halak'a

The community meets at the assembly place and chooses who should be made *aduma*.[7] They then call the initiate-to-be and tell him, and the initiate then returns home with the *lazantsa*. Shortly afterwards, the initiate goes to the sacrificer's house and gives him a full pot of beer, known as *kumets*. Some time later the initiate's lineage head puts *uts'uma* grass on the center-post of the initiate's house and blesses him to be well. After that, when the initiate has prepared, he feeds all the initiated men (*ades*) in his district on barley and beer in a feast known as *ade gado*. Then, a week before *Mesqalla*, there is the first *sofe*. Men and women, kin and neighbors are invited to feast at the initiate's house. The initiate must give a large lump of butter to the *bitane halak'a*, which is then distributed amongst all the *ades*. Then the crowds accompany the initiate to the assembly place where he drinks some wheat beer together with the *bitane halak'a*. At *Mesqalla* there is more feasting at home, and then a second *sofe* in the market, after which he has now fully become *aduma*.

Ochollo *Bitane Halak'a*

The process of becoming *bitane halak'a* is both lengthier and more expensive. The first few stages are the same as for the *aduma*, up to and including the *ade gado* feast. At the first *sofe* things begin to go differently. Community men rush to the initiate's house and seize him "like a bride" and carry him to the assembly place. After parading him around, they put him down on the special place of the *bitane halak'a*. Then everyone rushes and tries to pull a thread from the cloth that he is wearing. This is reminiscent, says Abélès, of two things: one is a kind of sacrifice where everyone rushes to cut some flesh of the animal, and the other is the fate of a bride on her wedding night.

Later in the day the initiate must give a second gift of *kumets* to the sacrificers. This time they come to his house, and eat and drink, and receive gifts of butter and money. After that commences a period of seclusion, where the initiate must remain in his house and be fed good food. Continuing one of the themes of the first *sofe*, the Ochollo liken

this to the period of seclusion of a new bride. During this period, however, the initiate's house is a hub of social activity, and he must provide a number of feasts, first for young girls, then for married women, then for the low-status craft workers. Then there are two big feasts for the *ades* and their wives, during which the initiate must also give them large quantities of butter, honey, and tobacco.

Finally, at the end of the seclusion period, the initiate takes a third gift of *kumets* to the sacrificer and then goes to the assembly place for the second *sofe*. Dressed in his best traditional clothes, and with a copious amount of butter on his head, the initiate parades around the assembly place and then sits on the special *bitane halak'a* stone. When the festivities are over everyone returns to the initiate's house and there is a final huge feast. A bull is killed and the meat is eaten. Now the initiate can sit with his guests, and not in seclusion, and is finally a full *bitane halak'a*. All that remains is to *sofe* one final time at the next *Mesqalla* celebrations.

Now what is most striking about these events is the long seclusion period that the *bitane halak'a* must go through. It seems remarkably similar to the postcircumcision period among the Sidamo, where the house is the center of activity during the seclusion and the where the initiate comes out of seclusion and sits with the elders at the final feast. All that is missing is the actual circumcision. But the Ochollo liken it instead to the period of postmarital seclusion, although the name for all these periods of seclusion is the same: *gach'ino*.

It would seem that what we find in Ochollo is a version of the initiations that is somewhere between that of the Sidamo and that of Doko Gembela, and that likewise the Sidamo initiations are somewhere between those of Ochollo and those of the Borana. With even this most sketchy of ethnography it is possible to see a pattern. That this pattern represents a series of temporal transformations in synchronic variation can be adduced by looking a little closer at some Doko ethnography. Although the accounts of the Doko *halak'a* initiations were fairly thorough, there were some details that were left out. Some of these are clearly "leftovers" from how things were done in the past, and when considered in the context of Ochollo ethnography, suggest that there may once have been two-stage *atuma/bitane* initiations in Doko. If this

is so, then this would indeed support the hypothesis that the current synchronic variation is a result of temporal transformation.

Two-Stage Initiations in Doko

Firstly, the terms *atuma* and *bitane* do actually crop up in Doko. In one particular district of Doko Masho, there are in fact two *halak'as* each year, one of whom is called *atuma* and one of whom is called *bitane*. The *atuma* sacrifices for the community and carries out the role of the *halak'as* in the other parts of Doko Masho, but the *bitane* is considered to be more important. Here, *atuma* and *bitane* are not sequential roles passed through by one person, they simply exist alongside each other.

In one district of Doko Gembela, although there is no reference to *bitane*, the *halak'a* is known as *gondale atuma*, where *gondale* refers to the special shield that the *halak'a* in that district keeps while he is herding the community. And although *atuma* and *bitane* are not currently found in any of the other districts of Doko, the fact that the large *sofe* where all the *halak'as* of Doko Masho parade together in the market place is generally referred to as *atuma atso*, or "making the *atuma*," rather suggests that this was not always the case.

Furthermore, by comparing the basic form of the Doko initiations with those in neighboring communities, it is possible to suggest that what is now the Seniors' Feast may possibly have marked the transition from *atuma* to *bitane* in the past. In Chencha and Ochollo there is the basic rule in the *halak'a* initiations that every large feast is followed by a *sofe*—a status-changing event. Where there is one feast there is one *sofe*; where there are three feasts there are three *sofes*. In Doko Masho, and most of Doko Gembela, the position of the Seniors' Feast is thus anomalous. It is the largest feast that the *halak'a* must give, and yet it is not followed by any *sofe* or change of status. The *sofe*-less Seniors' Feast suggests that there used to be a *sofe* and a change of status that took place after the Seniors' Feast, and this has been dropped.[8]

By looking at some small variations in the Seniors' Feasts in different districts of Doko Gembela, we find that *halak'as* in one district in Doko actually do change status at the Seniors' Feast, and that in at least one other district there is evidence that this used to happen in the past. In most of the districts of Doko Gembela, the changeover of *halak'as*,

where the new *halak'a* takes his place on the *halak'a* stone and officially starts to herd the community, takes place on the Naming Day, and shortly afterwards the new *halak'a* blesses the community for the first time. However, in one district the *halak'a* changeover and first blessing take place at the Seniors' Feast. And in another district, although the *halak'a* changeover takes place on the Naming Day, the first blessing takes place at the Seniors' Feast.

Combining all these odd fragments of data, and placing them in the wider context of the Ochollo initiations, it does seem plausible to suggest that some time in the past the herding *halak'as* in Doko were considered to be *atuma halak'a*, and that the Seniors' Feast once marked the transition from *atuma* to *bitane halak'a*. If this is correct, it implies there has been considerable temporal transformation in Doko initiations. It also suggests that the larger scale transformation from the Borana form of the initiations to the forms found in Sidamo, Ochollo, Doko, and elsewhere in the Gamo highlands may well have some historical basis. This is further supported if we consider the history of the area during the last few centuries.

Southern Ethiopia since the Sixteenth Century

One of the most important events in Ethiopia's history was the Oromo expansion of the sixteenth century. In what historian Bahru Zewde has described as "the most significant population movement in the country's recent history" (Bahru 1991, 9), the Oromo expanded out from their territory somewhere to the east of the Gamo highlands, and moved first northwards and then westwards across the region, probably driven by their system of *butta* warfare. Little could be done to stop the "steam-roller of the steadily enlarging Oromo nation" (Braukämper 1980, 431), and by the seventeenth century the Oromo occupied much of central Ethiopia.

The Oromo warriors appear to have reached right up into the Gamo highlands (Bahrey 1954), but since the area did not subsequently become "Oromo," as did much else of southern Ethiopia, it seems fair to assume that this invasion was not as devastating or as large-scale as some of their other campaigns. It is possible that just as the Gamo absorbed other people into their clan system, so they also may have absorbed some of these Oromo.

However, in other areas the turbulent years of the Oromo expansion were marked by massive population movements, as people in the path of the Oromo had to decide between fight or flight. Whilst many peoples were absorbed into the Oromo, others moved away into safer areas. Thus there was a great moving and mixing of peoples during this time. In this context of mass population movement, it seems likely that some people moved from the lowlands into the relatively secure area of the Gamo highlands. Many Gamo clans claim an origin outside of the highlands (Bureau 1981, 28), and it seems quite possible that the Gamo highlands absorbed thousands, if not tens of thousands, of people during this period.

Coming from a more pastoral existence in the lowlands, and possibly heavily influenced by the Oromo, these people would have brought with them their initiations. For reasons beyond the scope of this paper it seems that there was something about these initiations that appealed to the Gamo highlanders and they were gradually adopted into the cultural fabric. In the process they evolved and adapted to fit the local context and environment, becoming quite different from their original lowland form but nonetheless retaining many continuities.[9]

Conclusion

Looking at cultural variation inevitably leads one to consider temporal transformation and historical process. By expanding the traditional ethnographic gaze from one community to several, comparative study enables us to put the particular into context and to consider process and change. In this way I have argued that the Gamo *halak'a* initiations are a variant of the initiations found amongst lowland Cushitic-speakers, and that they first came to the highlands along with lowlanders fleeing into the highlands during and after the Oromo expansion. They then transformed and adapted to their local environment, as they did in Sidamo and elsewhere, leading to the synchronic set of structural variants that we now find.

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Notes

1. There are some south Omotic language speakers who do have initiatory systems, but these people, such as the Hor, are lowland pastoralists (see Tadesse Wolde's paper below).
2. The *k'ole* is a new innovation. In the past a black sheepskin, known as *zito*, was worn over the shoulders. Nowadays people in Doko prefer cloth to skins, and thus the *k'ole* has replaced the *zito*. In many other *deres* the *zito* is still worn.
3. *Stellaria Media*, a common grass known for its abilities to grow well anywhere.
4. However, it is relevant to note that Bahrey's *History of the Galla* suggests that the basic characteristics of the *Gaada* system were the same in the sixteenth century as they are in the twentieth century (Asmarom 1973, 127).
5. Asmarom does not tell us what these staffs are called, but amongst the Guji Oromo they are called *ororo*. This is not dissimilar from the Gamo *horoso*.
6. Also, although I was not able to pursue it in detail, there is some suggestion that in some of these *deres* there are intergenerational rules, such that if a father takes one title (say, *hudhugha*) then his son must take a different one (say, *atuma/bitane*), and then his grandson will take the same one again (*hudhugha*), and so on. This, however, requires further investigation.
7. The *aduma* spelling reflects the Ochollo dialect of *atuma*. -*Ed.*
8. Alternatively, the feast itself could be a new innovation. But comparing with other *deres* suggests that this is unlikely.
9. See Freeman (1999, 223–87) for a discussion of the micromechanisms that bring about this change.

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The Similarities of Difference: Symbolic Reversals among East Africa's Gabra and Their Neighbors

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Introduction

This article grew out of the 1999 Oxford seminar on interethnic relations in southern Ethiopia. One aim of that meeting was to discuss regional similarities among different societies on the periphery of the Ethiopian state. I was staggered by the complexity of making claims, any claims, about similarities across ethnic boundaries. I had seen these sorts of similarity in my own fieldwork. But what could one say about them? They seemed more easily noted than understood. When we see a similar element or practice shared by different ethnic groups, how do we know whether it is an accident? A coincidence? An epiphenomenon? An imitation? How do we know whether it is an importation of a cultural form by people who have migrated across an ethnic boundary? A common influence from some third source? A consequence, like pidgin, of interaction: we the X trade coffee for meat with you the Y and, by the way, share other things as well?

I assume that interest in interethnic similarities stems from a prior interest in interethnic *relations*, however direct or oblique, even gazes from afar. The sorts of similarity that arise accidentally from common ecological or economic adaptations are set aside for this paper. Here I am interested in symbolic, or communicative, similarities. These similarities are interesting because they do work: they facilitate or impede, mark or

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distinguish, separate or connect. People say about such things: "We do it this way, and they do too, but those across the river, they don't." Even difference may signal relation. Gabra, for instance, share with Rendille, their southern neighbors and sometime enemies, the use of woven mats in the construction of nomadic tents. With Borana, their northern neighbors and sometime allies, Gabra "share" a difference: Borana make their houses from grass instead of mats. Gabra and Rendille are *wora dasse*, people of matted tents, while Borana are *wora buyo*, people of grass houses. "They," the people across an immediate ethnic divide, are Georg Simmel's strangers: familiar others, about whom one must know something, otherwise one would not know what "they do" or "they don't do"; if they weren't somewhat familiar in the first place, they wouldn't fall into a category as strangers (Simmel 1950, 402–8). A lack of similarity in these cases becomes a strategic sign of relation. We who are interested in interethnic relations ought to pay as much attention to difference as similarity.

It is one thing to ask people *within* a given society about common practices, for they may agree that they do the same things for the same reasons. Within a particular society one can at least ask. It is quite another matter to ask people in different societies about common, or similar, practices. The very idea of similarity across a divide, a difference, is a puzzle: what does it mean to be similar and different? They may not see their practices as similar. They may not see their differences as related. They may not see similarities as related, or even relevant. They may do different things for related reasons. They may do the same things for different reasons. And different *motives*, more than similar activities, may indicate the relevant relation between them: imitation being asymmetrical. I am thinking here of Okiek hunters in Kenya copying Maasai pastoralists' costumes in such a way that Okiek adornment is at once Maasai and Okiek, same and distinct, identical and imitative (Klumpp and Kratz 1993).

Thinking about interethnic similarities and differences puts us immediately into a methodological thicket. We get tangled up in relations that maintain differences, or differences that maintain relations, or similarities that call attention to differences. These verbal tangles

are not surprising, if one considers that when people negotiate similarity and difference across cultural divides they manage the real but paradoxical problem of maintaining relation, if not similarity, and difference *at the same time*. Similarities and differences of this sort hold open a contradiction. They keep the borders between people meaningful, not arbitrary or accidental. They connect and distance at once.

In this paper I want to look at "similar differences" or "different similarities" across three ethnic boundaries: Gabra-Rendille, Gabra-Konso, and Gabra-Borana. My analysis is structuralist because structuralism has an interpretive vocabulary of opposition, reversal, and inversion processes that I am arguing occur across the boundaries between these neighboring groups. Structuralism also insists that we pay attention to *relations* between parts rather than parts themselves. I posit that certain cross-cultural similarities and differences should be read as symbolic relations: they are best understood within the wider field of interaction. Structuralism has the unfortunate reputation for being top heavy—placing too much emphasis on a priori patterns and not enough on actors. The structures here, however, are not passively enacted by Gabra and their neighbors but arise as cultural models from ordinary practices (Bourdieu 1977): the dynamics of nomadic pastoralism in a particular place and time.

Structuralists, or their precursors, such as Simmel and Marcel Mauss, have been keen to unpack the problem of "the other." Claude Lévi-Strauss, for instance, sought to understand the problematic relation between human beings and nature, which are separate and related, different but also the same. Simmel's essay on the stranger called attention to the stranger's necessary *familiarity* to whom he is strange. Mauss (1967) in his famous essay on gift-giving argued that the three obligations surrounding gifts (to give, to receive, to repay) create attachments at the same time that they establish separations. There is something inherently asymmetrical about giving a gift. The gift creates a difference between giver and receiver: a barrier, a debt, a motivation to overcome the barrier with a reciprocal gift. An outcome of shared (or strategically dissimilar) elements and practices across ethnic groups is much the same as giving gifts: the creation and maintenance of a category of *familiar others*.

Interstitial Identities

Before trying to understand how ethnic groups make sense of others, we ought first to look at how they make sense of themselves. The camel-herding Gabra of east Africa's Chalbi Desert region have lived for as long as they can remember at the interstices of other ethnicities. They speak the language of Borana, who are highland cattle-keeping neighbors to the north, and share with them a similar social organization. They share a material and ritual culture with Somali and Rendille camel keepers to their east and south. Gabra stories of origin cast them variously as fallen Borana, lost Somali, former Waata hunter-gatherers, or immigrant Rendille. In the past one hundred years or so, Gabra have found themselves straddling an international border between Ethiopia and Kenya, which makes them alternatively Ethiopian or Kenyan. But because they inhabit land at the very margins of both states, most are not fully identified by others or themselves as full members of either nation. Gabra have constructed a distinct ethnic identity whose center of gravity, so to speak, is perpetually at some other identity's margins.

The problem of marginality is indeed one of the central concerns of Gabra society. As pastoral nomads in a sparse uncertain environment, Gabra must form close, long-lasting attachments to other Gabra, but they must also separate from others during dry seasons, which comprise most of the year, in the interests of their livestock. They—particularly men, but also women—find themselves quite often *at the margins of being Gabra*. They must somehow negotiate competing imperatives. They have to maintain contact with the center, with the political and ritual business of Gabra society. But they also have to follow their animals, whose needs often draw their owners and managers away from the center to the dangerous and distant margins. What I argue here and elsewhere (Wood 1999) is that Gabra draw on understandings of these contradictory imperatives in their nomadic lives to understand their history, their ethnic identity in a neighborhood of other identities, and increasingly their position within nation states.

Ethnic identity is complex under any circumstance (Barth 1969). At some level, however, having an ethnic identity means belonging to a group of people, being "inside" a community. "Inside" is my metaphor—

what linguist George Lakoff (1987) might call a "container" model of ethnicity. It is also a Gabra metaphor. A central theme of Gabra evaluations of themselves is the distinction between *olla* and *ala*, inside and outside (see Kassam and Megerssa 1994; Wood 1999). *Olla* is the main camp, the location of nomadic tents. Women and children and old people are its primary residents. Because it is defined by matted tents, which are owned by women, the main camp is identified with femininity. It is also identified with ritual and morality. Only at tents do Gabra practice the defining rituals that distinguish them from others in the region. *Ala*, on the other hand, is away from tents, outside, beyond the reach of the moral center. The satellite camps (*fora*), composed mainly of young men and any livestock not at main camp, are outside. For Gabra the inside-outside distinction is complex: the outside is often also the location of "inside," having a certain sort of moral centrality. Taking care of animals, however far away from main camps and ritual grounds, places the husbandman at the moral center of Gabra society. Animals are the central concern of most rituals. Moreover, inside is also outside, for main camps are pitched in the inhospitable distances away from fixed ritual centers and wells that are respectively the moral and literal fountains of Gabra life. Gabra forge a life out of social interstitiality. The experience of interstitiality, which emerges from the need always to toggle between pastoral centers and margins, insides and outsides, serves as a template for a broader understanding of self, a sense of being inside and outside one's group, central and marginal, all at once.

Gabra Circumstance

Gabra dwell in an arid and semi-arid land of rolling stone-strewn plains, volcanic craters, and far-flung oases that spans the Ethiopia-Kenya border. They number more than 35,000, but live in small, highly mobile communities, or camps, called *olla*, consisting of anywhere from ten to one-hundred persons. The camps are nomadic, as opposed to transhumant, shifting often and opportunistically with news of rain or better pastures. A quirk of geography has separated water from pasture. Where there is reliable grass and bush for animals to eat, there is no permanent drinking water. Where there is dependable water at wells and

springs, there is little for animals to graze. When rain falls it drains quickly in the loose soil, or flows along seasonal riverbeds, much of it filling a vast aquifer below the Chalbi Desert (Bake 1991, 54–5). Here where nothing grows for the salt deposits on its surface (and the more intensive grazing that the wells attract), there is reliable water beneath. For Gabra, grazing tends to be better north while wells and springs tend to lie south.[1]

The division of two essentials, water and pasture, means that during dry seasons—which comprise most of the year—herders and stock must separate into small, highly mobile camps and toggle back and forth between pastures and wells. The enterprise of watering stock involves crushing labor: it is not unusual for herders to march forty or fifty miles with camels to water, and after they have drunk their fill, to march the forty or fifty miles back to pasture, just to repeat the trek a week later, and so on. The exigencies of the camel economy in this environment divide social groups and keep them moving. The need to shift between grass and water shapes social organization and, as I shall show, informs ideas about space.[2] As I've said, so sparse and variable are pastures usually that communities spend much of the year divided between main and satellite camps. Gabra explain this partly as a function of distributing risks, partly as a matter of what any one pasture will bear, and partly as a recognition that different livestock eat different types of forage and benefit from different pastures (see Dahl and Hjort 1976).

Main camps (*olla*) include tents, women, children, older men, and most of the milking stock. They move every month or so, loading tents, and water and milk containers, on the backs of camels. Tents, the defining features of main camps, are domes made with an armature of wooden poles covered with woven mats, skins, and cloths (Prussin 1995). The smaller satellite camps (*fora*) include younger men and older boys, who tend remaining herds in the relatively more remote distances, generally farther away from permanent water than the main camps.[3] Satellite camps shift weekly, if not daily. There are no tents in *fora*. At each camp, men build new corrals out of thorn bush and stones; they sleep under stars upon the bare ground beside their animals.

Inside and Outside Ethnic Groups and Boundaries

By definition, ideas of centrality and seniority have extension, degree. For Gabra, the logic of these extensions is scalar, like a piano keyboard. Piano keys read from left to right, from low notes to high notes, but they repeat the same scale over and over. Notes change, but remain the same. The relations at high octaves are structurally identical to relations at low octaves. Identity structure on the Gabra keyboard is not about key, pitch, or tone, but relations between inside and outside, near and far, center and margin: differences that are contained by a common logic.

Gabra extend these inside-outside relations beyond themselves to encompass their neighbors as ethnic others. In a region where recent literature suggests that ethnic borders are porous, where people have historically crossed and re-crossed the divides between groups (see Sobania 1979, 1980, 1988, 1991, 1993; Spear 1981; Waller 1985; Schlee 1989, 1994; Spear and Waller 1993; Waller and Sobania 1994), concepts such as inside and outside, central and marginal—concepts that admit the possibility of inversion—are particularly useful. Take, for example, the Borana, Somali, and Rendille, Gabra neighbors to the north, east, and south respectively. Not long ago, Gabra were thought to be a lowland camel-herding branch of upland, cattle-herding Borana. Their language and dress are much the same. Gabra sometimes call themselves Borana. They tell a story, no doubt modified from Islamic and Christian sources, about a Borana father and three sons. The old man fell and his cloth dropped and exposed his naked body. One son rushed forward to cover his father, another covered his eyes, the third laughed. The father declared that the son who had covered him would be Borana; the son who laughed would become Waata, a hunter-gatherer (see Kassam 1986); and the son who averted his eyes, who was quiet and respectful, would become Gabra.[4] Similar accounts of difference and relation are familiar throughout Africa (Kopytoff 1987). Some Gabra lineages, particularly among Alganna and Sharbanna phratries, trace their origins to Borana. Gabra follow a variation of a generation-set age-grade system, called *gaada*, which is common among Oromo speaking people, such as Borana (see Legesse 1973; Torry 1973, 1978; Baxter and Almagor 1978). At transition rites, some Gabra make offerings to the Borana

qallu, a hereditary high priest or ritual king (Baxter 1954; Legesse 1973, 1989).

But just as some Gabra exchange livestock for Borana blessings at transition ceremonies, others exchange camels with a particular Somali family for special cloth used to make turbans for their own high priests, the *d'abella*, an exchange thought by Gabra to suggest their Somali origins. In fact, some Gabra speak of their ancestors as having started out as Somalis, who shifted as a *fora* camp away from Somali and into Gabra areas and got lost from their forebears, eventually taking on a new ethnic identity. Gabra more closely resemble Rendille and Somali: they share a common material culture, centered around camels, as opposed to Borana, who mainly keep cattle. Indeed, Schlee (1989) argues that Gabra emerged from a "proto-Rendille-Somali" (PRS) society that, centuries ago, populated the arid lowlands of what is now southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya. Part of the PRS society fell under Borana hegemony some time after its sixteenth-century expansion, adopted the Borana language and some of its political institutions, but retained many camel-centered symbolic and ritual forms.[5] Schlee compares family and clan names across a number of regional ethnic groups and concludes that Gabra origins lie among ancestors of present-day Rendille and Somali. He brings to this argument a number of supporting myths and ritual forms, shared by these groups, that suggest a common set of interests and values, if not also a common origin.

These theories—that Gabra are a branch of Borana or that they are a Borana-dominated splinter of a proto-Rendille-Somali culture—suggest the ethnic flux and identity switching that has characterized the region's history. Many of my Gabra friends could name their fathers back ten or fifteen generations. Often the names became recognizably Rendille, or Somali, or even Maa-speaking Samburu. But they were often Borana-Gabra all the way back. No doubt there were poly-ethnic ancestries among these other ethnic groups. People in Africa as elsewhere have been known to invent lineal relations (see Evans-Pritchard 1940; Kopytoff 1987; and for discussion of ethnic boundary crossings see Spencer 1973; Sobania 1979, 1980; Hultin 1982; Donham and James 1986; Schlee 1989; Fratkin 1992b; Spear and Waller 1993; Waller and Sobania 1994). There are doubtless overarching patterns and biases in the flux of interethnic relations: Borana did wage a campaign of expansion that lasted several centuries and probably did come to dominate the PRS people in the Chalbi region. For present purposes the actual history is less important than the fact Gabra understand themselves to be at once distinct from their neighbors yet also related to them. Their identity is expressly derivative, amalgamated, unlike Borana or Somali, who regard themselves as original. Gabra have the cultural means at hand to play up different or common origins as the need arises.

The Borana-centered Oromo movement in Ethiopia has sought to recruit Gabra under the banner of a common Oromo identity, but so far without much success. The Gabra I know have been unconvinced that a Borana-Oromo identity was in their best interests. On the other hand, Borana and Gabra have joined forces to raid Rendille livestock to the south, and Gabra have succored Borana fleeing north to Ethiopia from those raids (Legesse 1989; Shongolo 1994b). Gabra have justified these alliances by saying that "Borana are our brothers. We are one." Legesse (1989), Schlee (1989), and Shongolo (1994b) describe long-standing partnerships between Gabra and Borana, in which Gabra have aided Borana and Borana have aided Gabra when they lost stock to disease, droughts, and raids. At the same time, Gabra and Borana have disputed access to ritual grounds in Ethiopia (Schlee 1990). Borana and Gabra have also clashed, with several fatalities, over possession of a son born of a failed Borana-Gabra marriage. In 1995 Gabra refused to join Borana in clashes with Burji at Marsabit Mountain. And in 1999 and early 2000 Gabra and Borana at Marsabit clashed over local politics with several murders. Their loyalties to each other are split and contested.

Relations between Gabra and Rendille oscillate between friendship and enmity as well. My assistant Yara Gollo Kalacha's great-grandfather was a Rendille who became Gabra. I met countless Gabra with similar histories. Several Gabra clans identify themselves as Rendille clans. The *d'abella* institution, universal among Gabra, is shared by one Rendille clan, the Odola, the name of one of the five Gabra phratries. Odola of both Gabra and Rendille recognize a mutual kinship. Nevertheless, in recent years Gabra and Rendille have fought and killed one another, sometimes with automatic weapons, over livestock (Fratkin 1992a). I knew Gabra camps, some of them Odola, that shifted near the settlements of Maikona and Kalacha, because they feared Rendille attacks. Word was Rendille did the same at Kargi for fear of Gabra.

Overlying these interethnic complexities are the international complexities of dwelling across a border. Gabra occupy space that is marginal, both literally and economically, from the standpoints of Ethiopia's and Kenya's centers. As Schlee (1989) and others have observed, this land between nations has been important to either state only in so far as it served as a buffer against the other. Gabra complain that neither Ethiopia nor Kenya has much interest in them.[6] They have ambivalent feelings about both: on the one hand, governments offer police protection (somewhat unevenly) in times of conflict, which is valued; on the other, they periodically demand livestock payments (to generate cash for a new district officer's house and office at Maikona, for instance) or make restrictions on movements, which are resented. Abdullahi Shongolo, a Moyale researcher, has reported transborder "forum shopping" by Borana and Gabra, who look for sympathetic governmental institutions (1994a and personal communication). Gabra are generally ambivalent about state governments: they want the state to protect them from livestock raiding; they want the state to develop fair markets for their animals; they want the state to develop water and veterinary resources; they complain of the state's indifference or interference.

In the next part of the paper, I elaborate several cases of interethnic relations that suggest how relationships of similarity and difference have been symbolically managed.

Gabra-Rendille

Gabra and Rendille seem to be opposed hands of the same body, different and yet same. Even their respective landscapes mirror each other. Picture a huge basin nearly three hundred miles across, with ritually important highlands rising far to the north (the Mega Escarpment) and far to the south (the Nyiro and Ndoto mountains). In the middle, a true desert, the Chalbi Desert, where nothing grows for the salt on its crusty surface, but where there is reliable water. Nowadays, anyway, Gabra dwell mostly north of the Chalbi, Rendille mostly south. Gabra have relations with Borana cattle herders to their north; Rendille have similar relations with Samburu cattle herders to their south (Fratkin 1998). They have complex relations with each other.[7]

Gabra regard North as right, masculine, and senior; and South, toward the wells, as left, feminine, and junior. Rendille, on the other hand, regard South as masculine, and North, toward the wells, as feminine (Spencer 1973; Beaman 1981; Fratkin personal communication; Schlee personal communication). In a Gabra tent, a woman kindles her cooking fire on the left, or south, side, and the husband's bed is on the right, or north, side. A Rendille tent is just the opposite: the woman's fire is on the north side, and her husband's bed is on the south side. When a Rendille woman pitches her tent among Gabra, north of the Chalbi, the pattern endures: her fire is on the north side of her tent.

As I said, Gabra and Rendille are both *wora dasse*, people of matted tents, but the tents not only link them, they also divide them, for aside from the use of similarly constructed mats, the tents are in fact quite different. A Rendille tent has a flat front where the door is, and the whole structure seems to lean back from the door. A Gabra tent, on the other hand, is a symmetric dome, a hemisphere. For all their general similarity, there is no mistaking a Gabra tent for a Rendille tent. There are even distinctions in the way Gabra and Rendille women load a tent on pack animals for moving. Gabra women bundle the curved poles together and place them on the camels' back so they stick up, like a mast over a ship. Rendille women bundle their poles as well, but place these bundles on both sides of the animal so they extend back behind rather than above the camel, or with many Rendille, the donkey. Thus, a moving Gabra camp cuts a different profile from a Rendille camp—one easily distinguished from great distance.

There is thus the sense that Gabra, in close relation with Rendille, have fashioned themselves into an antithesis of Rendille, but a mirrored antithesis, one that looks enough like the other to make the other intelligible, one of Simmel's familiar strangers. The two groups ride an ethnic seesaw: opposed when one side is up, the other is down. Yet, by virtue of being on the same board, pivoting on a common fulcrum, they are related, bound by their structurally similar differences.

Gabra-Konso

Another sort of fulcrum seems to inform relations between Gabra and Konso. Konso are agriculturalists and artisans living mainly northwest of

Gabra in the southern Ethiopian highlands. They have, as near as I can tell, little contact with one another, except trade: Konso blacksmiths make and sell metal jewelry, tools, and spears that Gabra, who prohibit such labor among themselves, buy. The Konso I knew were itinerant smiths who had set up their goatskin bellows at Maikona and Kalacha, settlements near wells on the southern fringe of Gabra land. There was usually a coterie of hangers-on keeping the smith and his family company. I made no study of this, but my sense was that those people were either impoverished Gabra or Waata, vestige members of an autochthonous hunting and gathering population with close ties to Gabra and Borana.[8] I also knew several Waata artisans, who were sandal makers. Sometimes, when Gabra youth organized dances, one of the Konso smith's I knew would show up to dance. Gabra liked to watch him dance. His dancing was flamboyant and phallic: he held his staff while he danced so it rose like an especially long erect penis. The only men I ever saw dance with him were Waata. They regarded the few Konso I knew among Gabra as less than proper individuals. They were, Gabra said, thieves and cutthroats, not to be trusted, amusing but mainly avoided. Their skills were essential, however, and Gabra spoke of their necessity in the same way they spoke of the ritual necessity of Waata, whose blessings were sought at important occasions such as weddings and births. Konso to Gabra were unmistakably "other." There was no confusing one for the other. The Konso language, though related, was not intelligible to Gabra; the smiths I knew spoke *afan Borana*, the region's lingua franca. Konso were others, but they were *needed others*, and therefore familiar, for their skills were necessary.

Differences between Gabra and Konso are marked by symbolic reversals of number and color. For Gabra, even numbers are auspicious, especially two and four, while odd numbers are generally associated with death, misfortune, and error. When Gabra pray, they take pains to repeat the prayer an even number of times, which they understand as multiples of pairs; they explain that pairs are ideal and suggest unity: "lami toko" (two are one) is a common saying. When they walk to a funeral, where a grave will be piled high with stones, they carry three stones for the grave, not two or four. For Konso, it is almost the reverse (Hallpike 1972, 271–9). Gabra and Konso share cognate number

terms.[9] Konso regard odd numbers as generally auspicious and even numbers as either vague and unimportant or dangerous. Specifically, one, three, five, six, and nine are especially important (though six and nine for negative reasons, associated with death), while two, four, seven, and eight are unimportant or bad (two is "indifferent to poor" [1972, 277]). Similarly, according to Hallpike, "White, in Konso thought, is explicitly said to be bad because it is the colour of cotton, which ripens in the dry months when the earth is parched, and the water in the streams and wells begins to fail" (1972, 280). White for Konso is the color of death. For Gabra, white is the color of life, and white mud (*shila*) is painted on faces at life-affirming moments of the new moon and other holidays. White connotes images of milk and fertility. *D'abella*, the ritual priests of Gabra, are clad in white and wear brilliant white turbans to distinguish themselves and their interests in peace and life. There are, of course, complexities. White in Konso can apparently be used to ward off an "evil eye," much as a controlled burn can head off a forest fire. It can be a good thing. White in Gabra is also associated with mourning and therefore death. But generally, as Hallpike wrote, Konso think, or once thought, white is bad and linked to death, while, according to my Gabra informants, white is good and linked to life. Anyone who has worked in the area knows that numbers and colors are prominent symbols in daily ritual performances, symbols that mark, in the case of Gabra, a certain ethnic identity: Gabra men generally wear white and see white as a pleasant, even beautiful color. I do not have sufficient data to argue that there is a systematic interrelation between Gabra and Konso number and color semantics. But they do share common symbolic systems that are, in telling ways, reversed. They are intelligibly different, and this means they are similar and different.

Hallpike noted that some Konso regarded even numbers as good and odd numbers as bad, but dismissed this as an influence of Amhara overlords (1972, 273). Such is the nature of neighbors that their symbolic associations rub off on each other. But the possibility of Amhara influence on a symbolic system confirms the historical and social processes of symbolic meanings; it suggests how people might use symbols to establish links and cleavages between themselves.

Gabra-Borana

Relations between Gabra and Borana are particularly problematic because the two groups are explicitly different from one another and yet, in some contexts, just as explicitly the same. Not long ago, scholars regarded Gabra as a lowland camel-herding branch of the upland, cattle-herding Borana. Their language (*afan Borana*) is the same. Their dress is much the same. Gabra have called themselves Borana (although this relation is asymmetric; I never heard Borana calling themselves Gabra). They tell stories of common origin. Many Gabra, particularly among Alganna and Sharbanna phratries, trace their ancestry to Borana. At transition rites, certain Gabra make offerings to the Borana *qallu*, a hereditary high priest, or ritual king (Baxter 1954; Legesse 1973, 1989). Gabra practice a generation-set system called *gaada* that is loosely similar to the *gaada* practiced by Borana and other lowland Cushitic-speaking groups. Gabra and Borana regard the Borana *gaada* as original. The Borana-centered Oromo movement in Ethiopia has sought rather unsuccessfully to recruit Gabra under the banner of a common Oromo identity. Their loyalties to each other are split and contested. In some sense, Gabra are clients to Borana. The name "Gabra" may derive from the Borana term, *gabaro*, for "conquered people," who are embraced but also distinguished and kept separate. Gabra, in this sense, are not-quite-Borana.

Their sameness-in-difference can be seen, I think, in the respective *gaada* systems. *Gaada* is a generation-set, age-grade system in which men belonging to groups organized according to generation—the sons of men in one group constitute a subsequent group in the system—rotate through different grades of status and responsibility. The Gabra system, called either *luba* or *gaada* by Gabra, is less well-known than the Borana system (see especially Baxter 1954; Legesse 1973; Baxter and Almagor 1978; Hinnant 1978, 1989), though aspects of it have been described by Torry (1978), Robinson (1985), Kassam (1986), Schlee (1990), Tablino (1998), and others. Gabra *gaada* is less elaborate than Borana, but there are clear family resemblances. Both consist of distinct, generationally organized sets of men who pass through successive grades that emphasize different political, social, or ritual responsibilities.

In the Borana system, there are seven grades (Legesse 1973; Baxter 1978): *daballe, gamme, chussa, raba, gaada, yuba, gaada mojji.* Gabra vary from phratry to phratry, but there are usually three active grades: *qommicha, yuba, d'abella*. Borana sets move up a grade every eight years (sets remain in some grades longer than eight years but always multiples of eight) so that an exemplary boy entering the system at birth would spend eighty-eight years in the system before retirement, an entire lifetime. Gabra youth do not enter the *luba* system until they are already men and sets do not move up grades except every fourteen or twenty-one years (always multiples of seven, though tellingly Gabra speak of them as multiples of eight). A prototypical man would retire from the system in old age: until the last transition in April 2000, there were few retired *d'abella* alive. Both systems impose an order on a man's life from violent and aggressive youth, through sober and reflective political elderhood, to ritualistic and prayerful old age. Of course, since the systems are based on generation, not age, and since a man may have sons over many years, there is inevitably a range of ages within each set. The range is corrected somewhat by excluding men of inappropriate ages or, in Gabra, placing an especially young man in a subsequent set.

I want here to call attention to the opposition between *d'abella* elders of Gabra and *daballe* juniors of Borana. The terms, though not identical, are recognized as similar by Gabra and Borana informants. The variation may be analogous to variations in terms like *kalicha* and *kalacha,* or *kallu* and *qallu*, or *gabra* and *gabara*, which have a certain currency across certain Cushitic-speaking groups.

Though the Gabra *d'abella* and the Borana *daballe* are at opposite ends of the life course, the differences essentially end there: they are structurally the same. Gabra *d'abella* are men who are regarded as women. They play a central role in rituals, prayers, and blessings. Their presence confers legitimacy and auspiciousness to an event. They are expected to remain near main camps with women and children. People visit them with troubles, and their blessing is thought to ensure fertility. They are sanctuaries: the touch of a *d'abella*'s cloth is enough to protect someone from attack by his enemies. Borana *daballe*, though they are boys and not old men, are the same as Gabra *d'abella*. *Daballe* are regarded as girls and, like Gabra *d'abella*, should not wear pants. They are the "principal mediators between man and God" (Legesse 1973, 53). Just as one should never strike a *d'abella*, one should not strike a *daballe*.

A *daballe*'s mother shares in her son's ritual grace, as does a *d'abella*'s wife. *Daballe* let their hair grow and decorate it with cowry shells; *d'abella* do not normally grow long hair, but they do wear a special white turban, associated, like the *daballe*'s long hair, with femininity. Both are venerated and debased: *d'abella* are most senior but also old and frail, with "nothing left" for society but prayers; *daballe* are treasured but, to make them less attractive to the evil eye, are regarded as girls and sometimes smeared with cow manure to make them less interesting to enemies.

It is significant, I think, that the two grades occur at opposite ends of an idealized cycle that is, as a cycle, repetitive: the old man becomes a child again, or if not a child, returns to a similar state of innocence and grace. *Daballe* are grandsons of the men in the *gaada mojji* grade, the oldest in the *gaada* system, the grade parallel to the Gabra *d'abella* grade, and the *gaada mojji* are similarly associated with blessings and oversight of rituals. The apparent reversal of *d'abella*-old man and *daballe*-young boy connects, and symbolically unifies, grandfathers and grandsons, a common association in many societies. As boys are linked with old men in an inversion of seniority, Gabra are linked with Borana through a curious inversion of their *gaada* institutions. For Gabra, it is venerated old men who are feminine; for Borana it is young boys. The oppositions youth and old age and masculinity and femininity are complexly related. Gabra mark old age as feminine (they do the same albeit less formally for childhood); Borana mark childhood as feminine (and do the same less formally for old age). The differences, which are poles apart, share common axes. It is reversal along a common axis that represents both their relation *and* separation, sameness *and* difference.

Discussion

What interests me is how Gabra position themselves both *inside* and *outside* the Borana moral universe or, in other exchanges, that of Rendille or Konso, or for that matter, increasingly with Kenyan or Ethiopian states. Gabra are quick, in a pinch, to run to Borana for help, as they did a century ago in the time of the Laikipiak wars (Schlee 1989; Sobania 1993), and as they did again more recently in fights with Rendille over stolen livestock (Fratkin 1992a; see also Legesse 1989).

They are beholden to offer Borana sanctuary when Borana run from drought, famine, or Ethiopian soldiers. On the other hand, they are just as quick to position themselves outside, unbeholden to the more numerous and powerful Borana (Wood 1997). Similarly, Gabra appeal to Kenya or Ethiopia when there is relief food being handed out or when they perceive that they might gain some advantage in livestock disputes against neighboring Rendille or Somali (Shongolo 1994a). Gabra are at some level, and like all of us, opportunists: there are times when their spheres of ethnic identity and loyalty grow and times when they shrink. We know from the history of the region that this sort of behavior is common.[10] We know that Gabra and Samburu and Dassanetch and Somali and Borana and Rendille, in no particular order, have been alternately fighting and assimilating with each other for centuries.

What I have sketched, in a preliminary way, is how Gabra identities vis-à-vis others are marked in symbolic practice, in the dynamic tension between moral and geographic insides and outsides. These cultural geographies provide a framework for understanding the identities of others as more or less the same and conversely different. Clearly one of the ways people perform this sort of boundary maintenance is by taking up or laying down elements of culture and sociality, the markers that signal one's affiliations, what Galaty calls "shifters" (1993), which seem to serve in these cases to maintain a difference at the same time they serve as bridges to others, who may pick them up or lay them down themselves. Markers, or shifters, are analogous to building materials, slabs and trusses and joists, boards and nails; they do not by themselves suggest the models, understandings, or principles that organize their use and placement. Naomi Quinn (1991) makes a related point in her discussion of metaphors, which she argues do not in themselves organize our understandings (as George Lakoff has argued [1987]), but which are instead organized by what she calls "models," higher-order concepts, that serve to judge the appropriateness of one metaphor over another. While I am aware of the brevity of what I am presenting here, I do think it suggests an overarching organizational logic—in Quinn's term, "model"—a logic of opposition and reversal, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion that enables movement to and fro. Such a model allows suitably informed individuals to pick up and lay down various

elements of their ethnicity, to understand themselves as stepping out from under one rubric, across an ethnic boundary, if only for a short time, all the while preserving the possibility of return. If elements change, the structure is the same: they know how to go and they know how to go back.

In the Gabra case, the model seems to emerge from ordinary experiences of pastoral life: the constant alternation between moments of outside (*ala*), where men especially are relatively free from the moral center of gravity of main camps, and inside (*olla*), where Gabra identity is renewed and reinscribed. As I suggested at the start of this discussion, Gabra find themselves often at the margins of being Gabra, and this idea of going outside in the service of inside offers Gabra an experiential template, emerging as a structure from the quotidian practices of pastoralism, for leaving Gabra without really leaving Gabra, for going outside but preserving the possibility, if not the certainty, of return. Certainly this logic applies in the stories Gabra tell each other about their origins, for example, the story of the Somali satellite camp that got lost from its center and became Gabra.

If movement *across* ethnic boundaries is organized by logics of movement across social space *within* ethnic boundaries, as the Gabra materials at least suggest that it is, then might movement between ethnic and national identities be organized in similar ways, according to similar models of self and other, membership in groups, participation in institutions? Close analysis of the symbolic practices of identity marking—the similarities and differences across boundaries—might offer important insights to how ethnicity is negotiated. Gabra, especially those marginalized for lack of livestock from the nomadic communities, talk about the trajectory of their lives taking them "outside" Gabra. A Gabra man I know in Nairobi—Adele Tura, who is deputy human resources manager for the Nation Media Group—speaks quite seriously of a Gabra "diaspora." He expects his life to look quite different from his father's. He envisions spending his retirement playing golf: the last time we met he wore a necktie that featured an alligator swinging a golf club. This interest makes it unlikely that he will ever return to live in Gabra areas, for

there are no golf courses on the desert. Yet Adele anticipates marrying according to Gabra custom, so as to ensure his status "within"—his world—the nomadic community.[11] Even an individual who pursues a career "outside" pastoral areas seeks to maintain his status "inside," by marrying in recognizably Gabra ways and returning periodically for other Gabra rituals. Adele's strategy reconfigures but does not disturb the ordinary practice of going and coming, of alternating between outside and inside, in ways that nevertheless allow him to remain Gabra, albeit at the margins of ordinary Gabra life.

Conclusion

The symbolic reversals I have described for Gabra-Rendille, Gabra-Konso, and Gabra-Borana suggest the diversity, as well as the remarkable resemblances, among ethnic groups in northeast Africa (Spear and Waller 1993). It is as if they have all, at some time, been each other, or want to preserve that fiction as a precautionary possibility. Some Gabra believe they descend from lost Somalis. Others speak of a prodigal Borana son leaving father and brother to tend wild camels in the bush, thereby becoming Gabra. Rendille include among their numbers "lost" Gabra; and Gabra, "lost" Rendille. It is a pastoral idiom, this tension between "us" and "them," "inside" and "outside." Perhaps this is why the Gabra-Konso examples are more ambiguous than others; Konso aren't pastoralists. Among nomads, everywhere "outside" is potentially "inside," every "domestic" space, when abandoned, "wild," every "them" potentially "us." I used the image of a seesaw above to describe opposites. Being either up or down on a seesaw is nevertheless bound up in the seesaw itself, each position implies its opposite, has no meaning without its opposite: there cannot be only a down position on anything but a broken seesaw. This is the way of oppositions. Each pole derives meaning in contrast with the other. Each is different from its opposite but is also related, similar through this shared property: a common axis, a single fulcrum. There are many ways to be different. There are many ways to be similar. Gabra and some of their neighbors have found ways to be both.

Notes

1. This generalization is historically and locally contingent. The Gabra range has varied in the past 150 years. In precolonial times it seems to have been concentrated farther north of the current range (Sobania 1980; but see Schlee 1989, who argues that Gabra came from the Chalbi lowlands originally). During the British "peace," Gabra expanded their range as far south as the Ewaso Ng'iro River. Shortly after independence in 1963, the Somali or so-called *shifta* (bandit) rebellion occurred in eastern Kenya, and its violence drove Gabra north and west. A similar conflict between Borana and Laikipiak Maasai probably had similar effect in the late 1800s (Sobania 1993; and see Galgalo Shonka's story in Wood 1997, 1999). Nowadays, Gabra of Alganna and Sharbanna phratries in the western part of the region articulate with Lake Turkana and follow a slightly different axis from the Galbo, Gara, and Odola of the center and east of the region. Regardless of the location of wells, the dynamic of alternating between water and pasture remains essentially the same.
2. The environment narrows the range of options available to Gabra but by no means determines outcomes. Rendille and Somali live in similar conditions with similar economies but have different herding strategies, social organizations, and worldviews (Lewis 1961; Torry 1973; O'Leary 1985; Schlee 1989).
3. There are also *arjalla* satellite camps for small stock, sheep and goats, which include women. The "ideal type" satellite camp, at least in the eyes of men, is *fora*; it is the social opposite of the main camp, or *olla*, or more specifically, of the family homestead within the main camp, called *wara*.
4. Another story has a Borana son domesticating "wild" camels, an act that resulted in his father banishing him and his generations to the arid Golbo plains below the Mega Escarpment.
5. One of Schlee's informants suggests that the name "Gabra" may be derived from a Borana word for slave or vassal: *gabar* (1989, 98; see also Maud 1904). Lambert Bartels notes that Matcha Oromo, far to the north in Ethiopia, use the word *gabaro*, or *gabare*, to refer to Oromo clans that do not descend directly from Borana (1983; see also Hultin 1982; Kassam 1986, 55; Hassen 1990, 63 ff; Blackhurst 1996, 246; Baxter, Hultin, and Triulzi 1996). Borana use the word *gabara* to mean "become a Gabra" (Leus 1995, 318). Gabra who know Amharic said the cognate Amhara word *gäbbar*, for one who gives tribute, may have some relation to the name "Gabra." It could be "Gabra" is derived from one or the other of these terms, but this is highly speculative. Even if true, it would not be at all clear what it meant historically.
6. Nevertheless, the Gabra representative in Kenya's parliament, Dr. Bonaya Adhi Godana, was Kenya's Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time of this writing and therefore a strong representative of Gabra interests in Nairobi.
7. Schlee (1997) discusses a case of crosscutting clan ties between Gabra and Rendille that shape conflicts between the two ethnic groups.

8. Indeed, Waata call themselves Gabra (or Borana) depending upon whom they happen to be living with. The similarities and differences between Gabra and Waata deserves more study (see Kassam 1986).
9. Numbers one to five in Gabra are *toko, lama, sadi, afura, shen*; and in Konso are *toka, laki, sessa, afur, chien*.
10. See Schlee's *Identities on the Move* (1989). See also the essays in Spear and Waller (1993), as well as any of the articles cited in the bibliography by Neal Sobania, whose historical work is directly relevant to the Gabra materials. And see Kopytoff (1987) for a pan-African perspective on shifting ethnic boundaries.
11. Adele has married by elopement, but he and the respective in-laws planned to legitimate the couple's marriage with a traditional Gabra wedding.

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The Genius Loci *of Hamar*

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Theory

A Phenomenology of the Genius Loci

This paper is inspired by the work of Christian Norberg-Schulz who has brought back the ancient notion of the *genius loci* or "spirit of place" into architecture. In his earlier works *Intentions in Architecture* (1963) and *Existence, Space, and Architecture* (1971), Norberg-Schulz had already thought and written about experiential and psychic notions such as "existential foothold" and "existential space," but it was not until 1979 that he began to make use of the notion *genius loci*. As I will try to show below, this concept is not only relevant for architecture but for ethnography and anthropological theory as well. But first let me recapitulate the ideas outlined in *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (Norberg-Schulz 1980).

People strive to create meaningful existential spaces where they can get a foothold, where they can dwell. Norberg-Schulz has taken the concept of "dwelling" from Heidegger's essay "Building Dwelling Thinking" (1971) and has related it to the concept of *genius loci* as follows: "Man dwells when he can orientate himself within and identify himself with an environment, or, in short, when he experiences the environment as meaningful. Dwelling therefore implies something more than 'shelter.' It implies that the spaces where life occurs are 'places,' in the true sense of the word. A place is a space which has character. Since ancient times the *genius loci*, or 'spirit of place' has been recognized as the concrete reality man has to face and come to terms with in his daily life" (Norberg-Schulz 1980, 5).

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Places are qualitative totalities where events "take place," where the different components relate to each other in a meaningful Gestalt, and where the whole is experienced as more than its constituent parts: "A place is therefore a qualitative, 'total' phenomenon, which we cannot reduce to any of its properties, such as spatial relationships, without losing its concrete nature out of sight" (1980, 8).

From here follows an interesting turn towards anthropology and a break with functionalism and international style in architecture: "'Taking place' is usually understood in a quantitative, 'functional' sense, with implications such as spatial distribution and dimensioning. But are not 'functions' inter-human and similar everywhere? Evidently not. 'Similar' functions, even the most basic ones such as sleeping and eating, take place in very different ways, and demand places with different properties, in accordance with different cultural traditions and different environmental conditions. The functional approach therefore left out the place as a concrete 'here' having its particular identity" (1980, 8).

The "here" where people "dwell" goes beyond the house, and comprises the whole world they inhabit. Again Norberg-Schulz turns to Heidegger who has defined "dwelling" as: "The way in which you are and I am, the way in which we humans 'are' on earth, is dwelling . . . the world is the house where the mortals dwell" (Norberg-Schulz 1980, 10). To this he adds: "In other words, when man is capable of dwelling the world becomes an 'inside.' In general, nature forms an extended comprehensive totality, a 'place' that according to local circumstances has a particular identity" (1980, 10).

This identity is meant by the *genius loci* or, less evocative, by the notion of "character." All places have character, that is, distinctive features, for example, "festive," "solemn," or "protective" for buildings, or "barren," "fertile," "threatening," etc., for landscapes. Character also emerges from modes of construction or, as anthropologists would say, from modes of production and consumption, which in turn may change in time (1980, 14–15).

People perceive the characteristics of their environment as a kind of "environmental image" that provides them with an orientation and a sense of security. Following Lynch (1960), Norberg-Schulz therefore

argues that "all cultures have developed systems of orientation, . . . spatial structures which facilitate the development of a good environmental image" (1980, 19). To a large extent orientation is based on or derived from given natural features, and, as Norberg-Schulz suggests, "in primitive societies we find that even the smallest environmental details are known and meaningful" (1980, 20).

Thus, orientation and identification establish a kind of friendship, or at least a meaningful relationship between people and the world they inhabit: "Nordic man has to be friend with fog, ice, and cold winds; he has to enjoy the creaking sound of snow under the feet when he walks around, he has to experience the poetical value of being immersed in fog. . . . The Arab, instead has to be a friend of the infinitely extended sandy desert and the burning sun. This does not mean that his settlements should not protect him against the natural 'forces'; a desert settlement in fact primarily aims at the exclusion of sand and sun and therefore complements the natural situation. But it implies that the environment is experienced as 'meaningful'" (Norberg-Schulz 1980, 21).

Genius Loci and Anthropological Theory

Browsing through the rich and growing anthropological literature on architecture, landscape, place, space, locality, "nature," ecology, geomancy, identity, and belonging I could not find a single reference to the concept of *genius loci*. Some texts come close to it however, for example Fumagalli's *Landscapes of Fear* which examines how in the Middle Ages "nature was regarded as a reflection of humanity, as people recognized themselves in a landscape" (1994, 1); or Tilley's *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, which, like Norberg-Schulz, builds on Heidegger and explores the proposition that "subjectivity and objectivity connect in a dialectic producing a 'place' for Being in which the topography and physiography of the land and thought remain distinct but play into each other as an 'intelligible landscape,' a spatialization of Being" (1994, 14). Also, other anthropological studies would merit mentioning, like the essays collected in Nadia Lovell's *Locality and Belonging* (1998), but none of them has come closer to the topic of *genius loci* than the chapters by Caroline Humphrey and Alfred Gell in Hirsch and O'Hanlon's *The Anthropology of Landscape* (1995).

In her chapter "Chiefly and Shamanist Landscapes" Humphrey has painted an intriguing picture where "the Mongolian landscape seethes with entities which are attributed with anything from a hazy idea of energy to clearly visualized and named spirits" (1995, 141), and where nomadic life generates a kind of mystical relationship between people and their environment which closely resembles what Norberg-Schulz has called the *genius loci.*

Mongolian social power and hierarchy are embodied in the "chiefly landscape" by a metaphorical "mapping of parts of the body on to the land" in such a way that "land-entities are seen as 'wholes,' or 'bodies,' centred on mountains," which may have a nape, spine, vertebra, cheeks, cheek bones, nose, mouth, forehead, brows, shoulders, ribs, and even a liver (1995, 144). While the surface features of mountains are characteristic of the "chiefly landscape," the "shamanic landscape" pertains to "the earth as a whole, with its subterranean depths" (1995, 149). And while the former centers its ritual activities on the tops of mountains, the latter chooses the cave as the place for its cults, the cave as entrance into the interior of the earth, as a point of departure of the "ways" and "paths" on which the shaman will travel.

Alfred Gell's chapter on "The Language of the Forest: Landscape and Phonological Iconism in Umeda" is especially interesting because it shows that the "spirit" of a place emerges from an interaction of the environment and the human sensorium in such a way that not only seeing but also the other senses, like hearing and smelling, have a role to play. In Umeda, which lies in the dense jungle of New Guinea, "one sees the hamlet one happens to be in, not the 'village' as a whole. Looking out, one sees the tops of nearby trees, but not the gardens, paths, streams, hunting tracts, sago stands, and so on which really constitute the 'the bush'; these are hidden below. . . . There is nothing to bind all this together, no privileged 'domain-viewing' point, like the view from the keep of the castle. But bound together it is, though, but in a quite different way. Lacking a visual landscape what the Umeda have instead, I would say, is a 'landscape of articulation,' a landscape which is accessible, primordially, in the acoustic modality" (Gell 1995, 239–40).

No doubt, this "acoustic modality" characterizes the *genius loci* of Umeda, and one could imagine how it manifests itself in general ideas and particular metaphors, like in the Mongolian case, except that the ideas and metaphors would not be based on vision but on hearing. However, Gell goes further than this and suggests that the prevalence of hearing (rather than seeing) in Umeda has asserted itself even on the most basic level of language, that is, in phonology, and has led to the production of what he calls "phonological iconism."

He theorizes that "there may be, indeed, an intimate relationship between the cultural factors shaping the phonology of certain natural languages, and the particularities of the landscape setting within which the speakers of these languages live" (Gell 1995, 232). Thus, phonological iconism flourishes in a world of heightened auditory perceptiveness like that of the Umeda. It "corresponds to certain forest habitats and lifestyles which privilege audition and olfaction and which de-emphasize vision, especially long range vision" (1995, 235). Refusing to accept the Saussurean theory of the arbitrariness of linguistic signs, he then goes on to say that while in English "there is no basis for linking the concept 'mountain' to the specific speech sounds which have to be enunciated in order to say the word 'mountain'"; among the Umeda things are otherwise, for in Umeda "the word for 'mountain' . . . should be understood precisely as 'the sound that a mountain makes,' or more precisely, 'the shape in articulatory/acoustic space' made by a mountain" (1995, 232).

To bring out fully this extraordinary example of a *genius loci* embedded and expressed in phonological iconism let me quote Gell again at length:

> I said, at the outset, that there was no culturally obvious way in which "mountain" in English could be phonologically motivated. English mountains are silent and immobile, and it is hard to image that there could be any one vocal "gesture" which would communicate the essence of mountainhood better than any other. In Umeda, things are otherwise, though it requires a cultural interpretation to bring this out. The Umeda word for mountain is "sis." Umeda "mountains" are really ridges, with sharp tops, and they define the boundaries of territories, particularly to the north and west, where the major enemies of the Umeda reside. The sibilant

"s" is uniformly associated with (a) male power and (b) with sharp, narrow things like pointed sticks. . . . Male power comes from the coconut "sa," and the ancestors "sa-tod" (village/male/central). Sharp things like bamboo knives are "sai," "sa" plus the constricted, "narrow" vowel "i". "Sis," a symmetrical arrangement of sibilants and the narrow "i," is very appropriate for an Umeda "mountain," that is, a narrow ridge, associated with masculine pursuits, danger, etc. As a ridge it is opposed to "kebe" a flat-topped knoll of the kind Umeda hamlets are built on, which combines the hardness-implying "k" sound with "ebe" (bilabial) meaning "fat" (prosperous). (Gell 1995, 242)

As I have said, these are the examples I have found in current anthropology which come closest to the concept of *genius loci* and the kind of research it implies. But there are also older texts in anthropology, which, although in a more general way, are of interest to *genius loci* theory. Here I can only briefly draw attention to three of them, that is, to texts from Malinowski, Benedict, and Vico.

The question of "existential foothold" which is central to *genius loci* theory has always been prominent in ethnography and anthropology. In fact, it has motivated many a fieldworker, for example, Malinowski, who in his introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* wrote that the ethnographer's dearest goals were "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life" and "study what concerns him most ultimately" (1922, 25). These "points of view," "relations to life," and "concerns" are aspects of the "existential foothold" which people have in their respective cultural habitats, and it would be interesting to re-read Malinowski's ethnographies on the "kula ring" and the coral gardens and their magic in terms of *genius loci* theory. This would be especially promising as Malinowski was not only concerned with people as agents (people holding the world) but also as patients (people held by the world), for he wanted to know "the hold which life has" on people: how their social institutions, values and aims, codes of law and morality, etc. structure their expectations (1922, 25). Here we are back to the two basic elements of *genius loci* theory: identification and orientation as basic human needs and dispositions.

The idea that each culture has its own "spirit" has only been implicit in some anthropological theories, such as Ruth Benedict's theory of the "patterns" of culture (1989). Although Ruth Benedict did not use the term, she was concerned with the "genius" of culture, as Franz Boas made explicit already in his introduction to the first edition of *Patterns of Culture* (1989). She envisaged culture as an artistic structure; a building where experience takes place, be it excessive (Dionysian), measured (Apollonian), or any other kind (1989, 79). Taking her primary model from architecture she explained the emerging character of culture as follows:

Gothic architecture, beginning in what was hardly more than a preference for altitude and light, became, by the operation of some canon of taste that developed within this technique, the unique and homogeneous art of the thirteenth century. It discarded elements that were incongruous, modified others to its purposes, and invented others that accorded with its taste. . . . When we describe the process historically, we inevitably use animistic forms of expression as if there were choice and purpose in the growth of this art-form. But this is due to the difficulty in our language-forms. There was no conscious choice, and no purpose. What was at first no more than a slight bias in local forms and techniques expressed itself more and more forcibly, integrated itself in more and more definite standards, and eventuated in Gothic art. What has happened in the great art styles happens also in cultures as a whole. (1989, 48)

As this text shows, there is a close affinity between Christian Norberg-Schulz and Ruth Benedict. Both have a similar Gestalt in mind: a comprehensive, emerging, and synergetic totality in which people are both agents and patients and where the whole is experienced as mysterious or "unspeakable" (see below).

Finally, let us remember Giambattista Vico, the founding father of cultural anthropology, who more than 250 years ago conjured the creative and poetic disposition that enables people to gain an existential foothold and dwell in meaningful existential spaces. No one has ever

surpassed the vivid imaginations of his *New Science* (1961) where he has provided us with an insight into the analogical thinking that is the basis of poetics, culture, and, I would say, the *genius loci*. I quote here from paragraph 540 in the chapter on "Poetic Economy":

> And, in other metaphors both beautiful and necessary, they (the ancient Greeks, I.S.) imagined the earth in the aspect of a great dragon, covered with scales and spines (the thorns and briers), bearing wings (for the lands belonged to the heroes), always awake and vigilant (thickly grown in every direction). . . . Under another aspect they imagined the earth as hydra . . . which, when any of its heads were cut off, always grew others in their place. It was the three alternating colors: black (the burned-over land), green (the leaf), and gold (the ripe grain). These are the three colors of the serpent's skin, which, when it grows old, is sloughed off for a fresh one. Finally, under the aspect of its fierceness in resisting cultivation, the earth was also imagined as a most powerful beast, the nemean lion (whence later the name lion was given to the most powerful of the animals), which philologists hold to have been a monstrous serpent. All the beasts vomit forth fire, which is the fire set to the forests by Hercules. (1961, 146)

If one compares this with the Mongolian "metaphorical mapping" of body and terrain, chiefs and mountains, shamans and subterranean depths, etc., as described so well by Caroline Humphrey one immediately recognizes how relevant Vico still is today for an understanding of the role of tropes in the creation of a *genius loci*.

There is no room here to explore the relationship between anthropology and *genius loci* theory any further, but I hope that my short survey has at least indicated the way in which this theory resonates with some of the central ideas and concerns in past and present anthropology.

Genius Loci and the Unspeakable

It was Stephen Tyler who brought into current anthropology a new awareness of the unsaid and unspeakable in language and culture. In *The Said and the Unsaid*, he proposed "a new linguistics which teaches

us to appreciate language as indirect discourse and to use it effectively without pining for the false and unachievable explicitness of mathematics" (Tyler 1978, 159).

Natural language necessitates indirect discourse because the matching of words and things is incomplete, for "even when we use words to describe, the words we use refer either to an undifferentiated whole or to one of its parts . . . we most often refer and describe indexically—a part stands for the whole, or the whole for its parts. The match between words and things then is hardly complete or total; nor is it analytic, the combination of atomic elements into larger entities. It is instead indexical, analogical, and inferential—a creative accommodation of words and things" (1978, 181). Thus meanings in language are "intersubjective accomplishments that speakers and hearers negotiate, amend, and reaffirm by communicating with one another" (1978, 147), and language becomes a means by which we "nudge" each other into recognizing our respective intentions (176).

In a formidable instance of lucid criticism, Tyler has drawn attention to the way in which a refusal to acknowledge this incomplete, provisional, and inferential nature of discourse leads to obstruction and paralysis rather than to better understanding:

> Literalness in all its forms is reprehensible, but it is most odious in conversation, for its effect is obstructionist and is usually so intended. There is a certain "looseness" about all of our conversational rules and our rules of social life generally, so that anyone who follows the rules literally, destroys the normative character of interaction and induces social paralysis. To ask for mathematical exactitude in our everyday rules and use of rules is to ask for disaster, the very destruction of the form sought rather than its fulfillment. Rigid rule-following is, of course, a highly effective method for obstructing interaction and discourse. (1978, 396)

What Tyler has pointed out here has important implications not only for our everyday conversations but also for scientific discourse in general, and for the role we might be willing to allow notions like *genius loci* to play in ethnography and anthropology. Nothing would be easier than

to put Norberg-Schulz down, asking him what he literally means by *genius loci* and to define precisely, possibly even in mathematical terms, the "spirit" of a particular place. Yet this would be nothing but the "odious" tactic pointed up by Tyler above. The communicative intentions of Norberg-Schulz would be obstructed and his potentially fruitful ideas would be lost.

If, however, one accepts Norberg-Schulz's use of the notion of *genius loci* as a "creative accommodation of words and things" and a way of "nudging" us to recognize certain intentions, then the notion of *genius loci* might still have an important role to play. Remember that Norberg-Schulz introduced it in order to address the fact that people often experience places as comprehensive totalities where various elements interact with one another and create a Gestalt, an "atmosphere," a "sense," or "spirit" which cannot be reduced to any of its properties. But, paraphrasing Tyler, we could now add that although a *genius loci* cannot be reduced to any of its properties, it can be nevertheless evoked by them.

In *The Unspeakable*, Tyler outlined this creative role of evocation, its power to conjure "a fantasy whole abducted from fragments" and to make "available through absence what can be conceived but not presented" (1987, 199, 202). In order to understand his theory of evocation let us listen here to Tyler at some length. First, as he criticizes naturalistic realism:

> The whole point of "evoking" rather than "representing" is that it frees ethnography from mimesis and that inappropriate mode of scientific rhetoric which entails "objects," "facts," "descriptions," "inductions," "generalizations," "verification," "experiment," "truth" and like concepts which, except as empty invocations, have no parallels either in the experience of ethnographic field work or in the writing of ethnographies. The urge to conform to the canons of scientific rhetoric has made the easy realism of natural history the dominant mode of ethnographic prose, but it has been an illusory realism, promoting, on one hand, the absurdity of "describing" nonentities like "culture" or "society" as if they were fully observable, though somewhat ungainly, bugs, and on the other, the equally ridiculous behaviorist pretense of "describing" repetitive patterns of action in isolation from the discourse that actors use in constituting and situating their action, and all the simple-minded surety that the observer's grounding discourse was itself an objective form sufficient to the task of describing acts. (1987, 207)

Then, as he reminds us of the fragmentary nature of fieldwork:

> Life in the field is itself fragmentary, not at all organized around familiar ethnological categories like kinship, economy, and religion, and except for unusual informants like Ogotemmeli, the natives seem to lack communicable visions of a shared, integrated whole; nor do particular experiences present themselves, even to the most hardened sociologist, as conveniently labeled synecdoches, microcosms, or allegories of wholes, whether cultural or theoretical. At best, we make do with a collection of indexical anecdotes or telling particulars with which to portend that larger unity beyond explicit textualization. (1987, 208)

And finally, as he develops his view of an emergent ethnography based on evocation which:

> Accomplishes a cognitive utopia not of the author's subjectivity nor of the reader's, but of the author-text-reader, an emergent mind which has no individual locus, being instead an infinity of possible loci. Here then is a new holism, one that is emergent rather than given, and one that emerges through the reflexivity of text-author-reader and which privileges no member of this trinity as the exclusive locus or means of the whole. (1987, 209)

Genius Loci and Cultural Comparison

I think that from the theoretical perspectives considered above it follows that *genius loci* theory may provide a fruitful approach to the study of cultural diversity in general and regional variation of culture in southern Ethiopia in particular. Surely, it would be interesting to compare the *genius loci* of Hamar (characterized by its dry impenetrable mountains)

with the *genius loci* of Aari (characterized by even higher mountains than those of Hamar and an abundance of rain and lush vegetation) and that of Arbore (at the fringe of the salty plains of Chew Bahir where the sun is so hot that most social life begins only with the relief of night) and of Dassanetch (in the ever-changing, promising, and threatening river delta of the Lower Omo), and so on.

In his essay on "The Language of the Forest" Gell has proclaimed that "cultural theories ought to be anchored in the specifics of physical localities, technologies, lifestyles, rather than seeking to appeal to absolutes and essences" (1995, 252). This echoes Tyler's critique of the simple-minded surety of the observer's discourse, and it encourages us, I think, to first pay due attention to the "comprehensive totality of places" as Norberg-Schulz has called it, and explore their characteristics and the "existential foothold" which they provide for the people who live in them. Once this has been achieved, or perhaps in the very process of achieving this, all the many comparative interests which are so dear to our anthropological hearts (comparison of kinship categories, political structures, religious beliefs, and the like) as well as questions of cultural contact and change will also find plenty of opportunity to get satisfied.

Baldambe Explains as Source for the *Genius Loci* of Hamar

In 1979 Jean Lydall and I published *The Hamar of Southern Ethiopia*, vol. 2, *Baldambe Explains*. The plan for the book had already emerged in the field when we began to appreciate the great expressive power of our host, friend, and ethnographic mentor Baldambe ("Father of the Brown Cow"). On 18 September 1971 I noted in my diary: "In the evening, as Baldambe and I talk and I record his narratives, the project of our first possible Hamar book takes shape in my head: Baldambe describing his people, his family, his father, and himself. There is so much poetry and expression in his descriptions. These and rhythm of his speech should be reproduced in a book: the fast passages and interludes, the accelerations, the lingering of his voice. What a job it would be to translate such tapes! But if we were able to manage the translation without losing the quality of the actual speech, then something beautiful could result" (1979b, vi).

I need not recall the labor and vicissitudes under which *Baldambe Explains* eventually came about. They have been told in our *Work Journal* (Lydall and Strecker 1979a) and in the introduction to *Baldambe Explains* (Lydall and Strecker 1979b), but what I want to mention here is that I invited Baldambe with the following words to provide an account of life in Hamar:

> We have seen how you Hamar live and what you do. For many months we talked with you about Hamar customs. Yet our eyes don't see and our ears don't hear. We feel as if we have been handling separate pieces of wood, poles and beams. You know how the poles and beams fit together. Please take them and reconstruct for us the house to which they belong. (Lydall and Strecker 1979b, x)

Note how close this imagery is to Heidegger's notion of the "world as the house where the mortals dwell," which Norberg-Schulz took up in order to develop his theory of orientation and identification as basic necessities of human life and therefore also for architecture. What I did without knowing was to invite Baldambe to tell us how the Hamar dwell, how, in Heidegger's words, the Hamar "'are' on earth." No wonder then that he provided us with a formidable evocation of the *genius loci* of Hamar. This *genius loci* is a rhetorical construction, saturated with history, meaningful places, dramatic events, a host of "dramatis personae" and countless dialogues, proverbs, songs, blessings, and curses.

In what follows I will give a number of examples which show how Baldambe "nudges" us into understanding the *genius loci* of Hamar, how he evokes its "unspeakable" totality by means which come close to the "future ethnography" divined by Stephen Tyler. That is, by:

> A text of the physical, the spoken, and the performed, an evocation of quotidian experience, a palpable reality that uses everyday speech to suggest what is ineffable, not through abstraction, but by means of the concrete. It will be a text to read not with the eyes alone, but with the ears in order to hear "the voices of the pages. . . ." (Tyler 1987, 213)

Ethnography

Rooks in the Mountains

One passage of *Baldambe Explains*, which Jean Lydall and I have given the title "In the Fields" (chapter 6), begins as follows:

> Hamar country is dry, its people are rooks, they are tough. Living between the rocks, and drying up, they dig fields and make beehives. That's Hamar. The *maz* used to strum the lyre together with the elders:
>
> "Our father's land,
> *Bitta*, Banki Maro's land,
> When rain will fail is not told.
> Our father's land has no enemy,
> Only the *wombo* tree is our enemy."
>
> So the lyre used to be strummed "*kurr, kurr, kurr!*" The sorghum may get lost, but the Borana don't climb up the mountains. The Korre will kill men at Sambala, they kill down at Kaeske. The Male kill men in the open plains. They kill men at Sabin Turrin. They kill men at Bapho. They kill men over at Dimeka. No one climbs into the mountains. No one climbs into the mountains to kill. In the mountains, however, there is a tree called *wombo* which has a trunk which reaches high up. When the fruits ripen at the top, when one's stomach is grabbed with hunger, then one climbs up the ripe tree. Having climbed up one eats, eats, eats, eats, eats, eats, until one is swollen with food, and one's arms and legs are shortened. The way down is lost. So one sits in the branches and sleeps, and as one sleeps one falls—*wurrp! dosh!* one is dead. "Our father's land, you have no enemies, only the *wombo* tree is your enemy." (1979b, 157–58)

I like to draw attention to the laconic way in which Baldambe sums up the existence of Hamar. Such short, even abrupt statements, which nevertheless are full of tropes like in this case metaphor, irony, and hyperbole, are typical for Hamar. They are part of the "dryness" of the

country and the "toughness" of its inhabitants (people and goats alike). The Hamar proudly play on this and mockingly and ironically say that they dry up between the rocks. But even though they are only skin and bones they work hard, digging fields, and making beehives. Metaphorically they refer to themselves as "rooks." This image condenses a whole lot of attributes: Hamar nest like rooks inaccessibly high between the rocks; they never seem to need water like the rooks; they look thin, craggy, and black like rooks perched on a tree; they are strong and playful like rooks whirling around in the turbulent air above the mountain tops; and, above all, like the rooks they have sharp eyes and are ever ready to rush down from high up and pick up from the ground what has been left unguarded (i.e., the goats, cattle, and sheep of the surrounding neighbors in the lowlands).

The dry, laconic summary is counterpoised with a lush, allegorical episode using a song and its exegesis. The initiates (*maz*) strum the lyre and sing that, after all, Hamar country is not too bad, because even though it may be terribly dry at times, no one fears that the rain will ever fail completely. So the Hamar in their mountains are safe, safe from hunger and from enemies. But no, they are not, because there is this deadly *wombo* tree that makes one swell with food, and one's arms and legs shortened so that one falls and dies. Here all the laughter comes in which is so typical of Hamar, laughter about oneself and others, laughter that expresses what cannot be said and answers the many polarities and contradictions of existence.

Once Baldambe has provided an image of the old secure "existential foothold" of the Hamar with its associated "orientation" (note the deictic framework of time, place, and action) and "identification" (note how the Hamar identify with their "tough" situation), he goes on to contrast it with the present-day situation. Here a lamentation begins that is typical for Hamar and its *genius loci*. Things are experienced as getting worse rather than better:

> Our father's land, Sabo's land, Elto's land, Banki Maro's land, Kotsa's land. In Garsho's land, rain never used to fail. Our *bitta* never told of its failure. Our grandfathers did not tell, our forefathers did not tell. There was rain. Nowadays the months when you

> fail are many. In the month of *kilekila* you left us dry, in the month of *dalba* you left us dry, in the two months of *mingi* you left us dry, in the two months of *shulal* you left us dry. Altogether that's seven months when you left us dry. Then in *barre* you made us crazy and drove men to Ari, and drove men to Ulde. *Barre* means being crazy. Men getting crazy are lost. (Lydall and Strecker 1979b, 158)

Note how in order to emphasize the initially secure grounding of Hamar life, the ritual leaders of several generations are invoked first. Implicit in this is the understanding that it was the ability of the forefathers to bless successfully which brought good fortune (*barjo*) to the country and that the ritual leaders of today are no good. After this, Baldambe gives a dismal picture where all the months are named when the rain is failing Hamar today. The climax of disorientation is the "mad" month where people despair, become crazy, and are lost. But having conjured this devastation, Baldambe immediately swings back into a hopeful mood. In fact, he retracts from his lamentation and then goes on to speak about the seasons and months of Hamar:

> It was not told that you would pass by our fatherland. You will come. So in the month of "surr" it rains a little. Down at the borders there are rains, *kurr*, *kurr*, *kurr!* It rains just for the gazelle, just for the oryx, just for the gerenuk, just for the zebra, just for the buffalo, it rains just for the wart-hog, the father of the tusk bracelet.
>
> "Let us plant! When will you fall? Come to plant our sorghum! Plant it!" Saying which, the rain comes and plants the sorghum into the ground. The wet season. Then when it has rained in that month there comes the month of "puta" when the sorghum flowers. When "puta" finishes there comes *zako*. Then the country is held by cloud, the blanketing cloud and the black clouds which bring no rain, and the clouds which drizzle. It is simply cold everywhere. There is no cloth, so having put on skin capes, everyone sits at the fire and shivers. *zako* means hugging the fire thus, that's the month of *zako*. The clouds are all clouds, the sun is not seen. The rain drip drip dripping brings only sickness. Hugging, hugging, hugging the fire your thighs get cooked and blotched like the spotted leopard. While you hug the fire the baboons eat the field clean. The pigeons eat the sorghum clean. That's *zako*. After *zako* come two months of *alati* when the country dries, the plants turn yellow, some ripen, and the grass dies off; "kai," and "naja" and "gorrin" are the first plants to lose their leaves. One month of *alati* is *karna-agai* when the sorghum down in the lowlands is ripe, up in the mountains it has yet to ripen. In the next month, *agai-phana*, the sorghum is ripe in the mountains. Then again come the months of no rain, *shulal*, *mingi*, *dalba*, *kilekila,* and *barre.* These are the Hamar months. (Lydall and Strecker 1979b, 158–59)

While the short account of the various months is meant to show the change of the seasons, the longer, especially evocative descriptions of *barre* and *zako* characterize the two climatic poles of the year: heat and dryness associated with social dispersion, and cold and wetness associated with social immobility. In both these extreme situations people become somewhat crazy, get themselves lost, or lose their possessions. Again one can hear Baldambe laugh, as he conjures the picture of people getting blotched like the spotted leopard while the baboons eat their fields clean.

A Fire in the Mountains

In his talk, Baldambe first establishes the identity of Hamar through an account of its mythical origins:

> Long ago, in the time of the ancestors, the Hamar had two *bitta* (ritual leaders). One was Banki Maro, one was Elto. The first ancestor of Banki Maro came from Ari and settled in Hamar in the mountains. He, the *bitta*, made fire, and seeing this fire people came, many from Ari, others from Male, others from Tsamai, others from Konso, others from Kara, others from Bume and others from Ale which lies beyond Konso. Many came from Ale. The *bitta* was the first to make fire in Hamar and said: "I am the *bitta*, the owner of the land am I, the first to take hold of the land. Now may you become my subjects, may you become my dependents, may you become the ones I command." (Lydall and Strecker 1979b, 2)

This mythical scene combines topological features (the mountains) and archetypical activities (making fire) in order to back up and strengthen the usurpation of power by the *bitta*. The mountains and his visibility evoke height, control, and centrality. He is both the "first" in time and the "first" in the social order. People are attracted to him, and Hamar becomes a place where people meet coming from all directions. They do not only come from different territories but belong also from different clans:

> Now all the Hamar, Hamar, Hamar, Hamar, Hamar, Hamar, Hamar, Hamar, Hamar, Hamar arrived, BA, LAWAN, GASI . . . GASI came the Tsamai way, LAWAN the Birale way, Misha the Tsamai way, RACH the Tsamai way, BUCHA the Konso way. Many came from the Male, Ari and Konso ways, one BABATU, one GASI, one WORLA, one BA. They all came from where the sun rises. The clans that came from where the sun goes down, from Bume and Kara, were only four. (Lydall and Strecker 1979b, 3–4)

However, the fire not only evokes social visibility and centrality but also creative power. An active, imaginative, and creative person is called *edi nu* (person fire). Fire also signals a new beginning. Just like after death the fires of a settlement are extinguished and newly kindled in conjunction with blessings, and just like every year after the harvest all fires are put out only to be kindled anew, the *bitta*'s fire in the mountains means a new beginning of human habitation in Hamar.

Customs Appropriate for the Place

As the "first" to arrive in Hamar, the *bitta* was the one who knew which rules and customs would be appropriate for the place. Baldambe has vividly recalled the people's original appeals and the help and advice which the *bitta* gave them on matters like collecting and sharing livestock, bride price, divorce, initiation, and so on. To a large extent, the *genius loci* of Hamar is reflected in these exchanges between the people and their *bitta*. Baldambe begins with the question of how to share livestock equally among all the Hamar so that no one will remain poor:

> Banki Maro said:
>
> "Let these people be mine. Your *bitta* am I. Herd cattle for me, herd goats for me."
>
> "*Bitta*!"
>
> "Woi!"
>
> "We don't have any cattle, only a few clans have cattle, only a few men have some. What shall we do?"
>
> "You have no cows?"
>
> "We have no cows."
>
> "You have no goats?"
>
> "Only one or two men have goats. Most of us are poor."
>
> "If you are poor collect loan cattle and cultivate your fields so that you can bring sorghum to those who own cattle. Herding these cows, drink their milk . . ."
>
> So then the people began to collect cattle. One man bought cows for goats, one went raiding and returned driving cattle, others came carrying goats. The people said to each other:
>
> "The poor should not go down to the waterhole with nothing. The *bitta* told us that those who have cattle should share some of them, calling those to whom they give cattle *bel*."
>
> "Whose cattle are these?"
>
> "These are the cattle of so-and-so."
>
> "And yours?"
>
> "I have a cow from a *bel*, an arrow from which I drink."
>
> A cow from a *bel* is called "arrow" because one takes a bloodletting arrow to draw blood from the jugular vein of the cow, and mixing four cups of blood with one cup of fresh milk, one feeds the children. (Lydall and Strecker 1979b, 4–5)

Then Baldambe goes on to tell how the question of marriage payment was raised once the people had collected some but not very many cattle:

> When cattle had been collected in this way the elders called upon the *bitta*:
>
> "*Bitta!*"
>
> "Woi!"
>
> "The people are all poor, they have no cows, they have no goats. It would be bad if one had to give much to get married. Tell us what to do."
>
> "Do you ask me as the *bitta*?"
>
> "We have asked you."
>
> "Eh-eh. My country has mountains only. Over there Irgil Ba!a, here Mama Dunta and up there Bala Kuntume. Give twenty-eight goats plus one male goat and one female goat."
>
> "Good. What about the cattle?"
>
> The *bitta* said:
>
> "Both rich and poor should give the same: eighteen head of cattle, plus one 'stone cow' and one 'cloth bull' which makes twenty altogether." (Lydall and Strecker 1979b, 5–6)

Note that the people use hyperbole exaggerating their poverty. They have, in fact, collected cattle. This is why the question of bride wealth has arisen. The *bitta* accepts their plea for a low bride price justifying it using a similar form of exaggeration. That is, he says that Hamar has "only" mountains, implying that the whole country is poor.

In order to fully understand the sentence "Over there Irgil Bala, here Mama Dunta and up there Bala Kuntume," one has to know that Mama Dunta, the mountain where the *bitta* dwelt and spoke to the elders, lies almost in the center of Hamar territory. Far to the south, marking the southern border of Hamar, rises the high mountain called Irgil Bala, and

to the north, bordering Tsamai territory, rises the even higher mountain called Bala Kuntume. Furthermore, the main vertical posts of a house (which, like Irgil and Kuntume, have a fork at the top) are also called *bala*. This likens Hamar country to a house and echoes Heidegger's view of the world as "the house where the mortals dwell."

Having settled the matter of marriage payment, the question arises whether marriage should be permanent or whether there could be also divorce:

> "Some men are bad and troublesome, always beating their wives and then abandoning them. *Bitta*, tell us the rituals to do."
>
> The *bitta* replied:
>
> "A man of GULET should become a 'butter man.' When the country is dry and there is no butter, cow dung and the dung of sheep shall become butter. Give gifts to the 'butter man.'"
>
> So they gave beads, iron rings, and feathers, and the *bitta* put them on the "butter man." A cattle gateway was erected for him and they handed him a big right-handed food bowl:
>
> "Here is the bowl, if a *maz* (initiate) comes to you rub him with butter. Before this, the girl should take the dead-dress of the *maz* and throw it into a 'giri' tree and the *maz* should lap milk from a cow's udder saying: 'From now on I will never again lap milk from a cow's udder.' Then they should come to the 'butter man' and put four sorghum rolls in his bowl. Let the girl bite the sorghum first and you, the *maz*, bite second. Next, butter shall be put on the hands of the girl and the boy and they shall rub each other's hands. After this the girl shall take the belt (made from dick-dick skin) from the waist of the boy and he shall take the stringskirt from the girl and they shall put them into the bowl. Finally the boy shall take the stringskirt and the girl, the belt and they shall return home. From now on for good or bad they will never leave each other. There will be no divorce, it is forbidden. Whether they bear children or not they will always remain together until the grave."

"Who brought for this custom?"

"It was the *bitta*."

"Which *bitta*?"

"It was Garsho."

"Which 'bitta'?"

"It was Ulawa."

"Eh!" (Lydall and Strecker 1979b, 6–7)

How to Get a Foothold in the Place

Put in *genius loci* terminology, the *bitta* also advised people how to "get a foothold" in Hamar. Or rather, one should say he told them to take courage and do for example such unthinkable things as to eat sorghum:

> Dig fields. When you have done that, here is the sorghum. *Barjo* (luck, fortune, creation) has given us sorghum. Sorghum is Man's grass. As cows eat grass so shall man eat sorghum. *Barjo* gave us the meat and milk of cattle and goats long ago, saying: "Drink the milk of cattle and goats and eat their meat. Cattle and goats shall chew leaves from the bushes and cattle shall graze grass. Put fences around your homesteads so that hyenas, jackals, and hunting dogs cannot enter. The one who enters is man. You have hands. Dig fields and when the sorghum is ripe bring some to the cattle owners, your *bel* (bond friend), bring some to the goat owners, your goat *bel*." (Lydall and Strecker 1979b, 7)

He also tells them to keep bees. First he instructs them how to make beehives and then, in order to encourage them, he explains how the bees will come from trees growing in the surroundings of Hamar and how he will bless them and keep away sickness:

> Make beehives taking the bark of the "donkala" tree and binding the "arra" grass around it with the "kale" creeper and smearing the inside with cow dung. Place the beehives well in the forks of trees. The bees will come to you from Ari country. Up in the Ari mountains is a dark tree where there are bees. From there the bees will come. Down in Galeba country by the river and the lake grows the *shapi* tree from which bees will come. From the *shapi* tree of Ulde bees will come. From inside the "dongo," the big dark tree which grows down in Kara, the bees will come. When the bees have come the honey will ripen. When it is ripe, bring honey to the *bitta* so that he may call forth the *barjo* of your cattle and the *barjo* of your goats and that he may get rid of sickness for you. (Lydall and Strecker 1979b, 7–8)

A Protected Place

Once one has gained a foothold in a place and has found means of subsistence, there arises the need for protection, especially against diseases and enemies. Baldambe relates how first the people came to consult the *bitta* and how subsequently the *bitta* on his own accord added a further form of protection:

"Eh, *bitta!*"

"Woi!"

"Sickness has come to the cattle, sickness has come to the children. What would be good to do?"

"Isn't there a man of BA?"

"There is."

"This man should go down to every waterhole and anoint everything with the fat from the sheep's tail."

So the man from BA went all round the country, anointing the grass, the water, the earth, and the hearts of children.

"The Bume are our enemies, the Galeba are our enemies, the Korre are our enemies, the Borana are our enemies, we are surrounded by them. *Bitta*, tell us what to do."

"Is there not MISHA?"

"There is MISHA."

"A man from MISHA should take two dry flower stalks of the *wolkanti* cactus and going to the border of the country there he should hit them together: '*dak-dak-dak-dak-dak-dak-dak*-ka-da-*dak*!' Then he should break them and throw them towards the countries of Borana and Korre. Then he should take a sheep skin and flip it towards the enemy county." . . .

Further the *bitta* said:

"Our country has borders. Ulde and Galeba and Bume and Ari and Kara and Banna and Tsamai, all are at our borders, aren't they? A bull of mine should go around-round-round-round-round-round the country. As he goes round, whenever the bull urinates, collect the urine in a gourd, whenever he defecates, collect the dung. The bull should follow the course of the Kaeska. He should not cross into Baldo but go to Bala, down to Maen, over Golla and up to Kadja, Dongalta, and Tsagamar. Going round these he should go up to Wareta, Edis, Segerenbaino, then down to Seleabaino and finally along Selleabaino up to the home of the *bitta*."

"Has the bull encircled the country?"

"He has gone around the country."

"From then on there won't be any sickness of the cattle and there won't be any enemies.

The sorghum will ripen, the cows will be rich with milk, the honey will be plentiful." (Lydall and Strecker 1979b, 10–12; for further notes on the Hamar sense of security see Strecker 1999)

This is the Hamar custom for protecting their borders from enemies according to the word of the *bitta*.

A Blessed Place

Blessings resound in Hamar country. In fact, according to Hamar philosophy, they create it. The Hamar say "apho *barjo* ne," the word is *barjo*:

creation, power of life, fate, fortune, luck. This is why at innumerable occasions they get together for a *barjo aela* where they jointly call forth *barjo* (for a more detailed analysis of the notion of *barjo* see Strecker 1988a; and for a recording of a *barjo aela* hear the double album *Music of the Hamar*; Strecker 1979b).

Every elder (*donza*) has the power to lead a *barjo aela*, that is, chant the invocation while others repeat his last words in a chorus, but at public occasions the lead is taken according to circumstances either by an *ayo* (political spokesman), a *kogo* (man ritually responsible for a particular grazing area), a *gudili* (man responsible for a settlement and its cultivation area), or a *bitta* (man ritually responsible for one of the two halves of Hamar territory).

The *barjo aela* turns the world into what it should be. Without calling forth *barjo* the world could not be well, could not even exist. The rains would fail, the grass would wither, the cattle would die, the people would perish. Only by repeatedly and insistently calling forth the desired state of "Being" can people and their habitat exist.

This ontology goes well with Heidegger's philosophy of "Being" and Norberg-Schulz's theory of "existential space," which is created by projection and involves the human faculty of orientation and identification.

Let us listen to Baldambe and other voices from Hamar, which he recalls as they evoke the setting and the performance of a major *barjo aela*, which both mirrors and creates the *genius loci* of Hamar.

The *bitta* has decided that it is time to bless the country again. So he sends empty gourds to the low-lying, distant grazing areas where the gourds are filled. They then are brought to the permanent settlements in the Hamar mountains where they are blessed and then sent on to the *bitta*. He receives the milk, calls forth *barjo*, puts cleansing plants into the empty milk containers, and sends them back to where they have come from:

"Let the milk containers come! Where are the herds?"

"The herds are down at Roto."

"Where are the herds?"

"The herds are down at Golla."

"Where are the herds?"

"The herds are down at Worsat."

"Where are the herds?"

"The herds are down at Mello."

"May these get milked to fill the gourds."

.....

"The *bittas*' gourds have arrived!"

"From where have they come?"

"They have come from Kena."

"From where come the *bittas*' gourds?"

"They come from Lala."

"Whose gourds are they?"

"They are Elto's (name of a *bitta*)."

"Whose gourds are they?"

"They are the gourds of Sabo's son."

"What has happened?"

"The distant cattle's gourds are being milked."

Then in the evening, when they come from the distant cattle land, the people are called:

"Hai-hai-hai-hai-, 'kambalo' (people), everyone listen!"

"Children listen! Women listen! Elders listen! The *bittas*' gourd has come. Command a child, don't rest, tomorrow the gourd must go. Those who cry that they have no milk should hang up the (empty) gourd. Milk all the four teats of the cow, don't milk teats that are spoiled, don't milk cows whose calves have died, don't

milk cows of people who have killed Hamar. Milk cows that are well. It is the *bittas*' milk container."

Then . . . down in Kizo, in Dunkan, in Omalle, in Saunabaino all the herds of each lineage are milked. Then all the gourds are brought to the *boakas*. People gather at the homesteads of the *gudili*. There the gourd of the *bitta* is filled. The elders consume what milk is left. The *bittas*' gourd is carried to settlements like Lodjera, like Wonyarki, like Medalla, like Atana, like Dunia, like Turmi, like Dambaiti. When it comes:

"Has the gourd come?"

"It has come."

"Collect the goats."

A young female goat is collected from RACH and a male goat is collected from BA BALAMBALA. Both goats are brought with the gourd to the *bitta*.

"May the master come forth from the house, may he come out. The gourd has come. Sweep the gateway."

The *bittas*' wife puts on her headdress, her goat skin cape and her cowrie-shell belt, and sweeps the entrance to the cattle kraal. After this the *bitta* comes and stands by the gateway:

"Come, all you elders."

Now an uninitiated boy of the Binnas moiety (moiety to which all *bitta* belong), WORLA, BA or WARRAN, gives the milk container up to the *bitta*; married men don't give it. The *bitta* removes the "baraza" leaves which close the gourd and holding the mouth of the gourd he begins to chant and the elders answer in refrain:

> "Eh-eh! The herds are carrying sickness
> May the sickness go beyond Labur,
> (distant mountain in the West) may it go,
> May the sickness go beyond Topos

(distant mountains in the West)	may it go,
Cattle owners you have enemies down there the Korre	
May the Korre who looks at your cattle, die	die,
May his eyes fail,	fail,
May his heart get speared,	speared,
May they disperse like doves,	disperse,
May they get up like birds and leave,	leave,
May you put on his sandals,	put on,
May we cut his heart,	cut,
May his skin shiver as from cold water,	shiver,
May his bones be bound up,	bound up,
May his eyes get lost,	get lost,
Sickness, sickness, *wollall* (away),	*wollall*,
Sickness, *wollall*,	
Eh-eh!	
My herds which are at Mello,	
Which are in the open grass lands,	
May my herds come lowing,	come,
May my herds come lowing,	come,
Grazing the grass may they come,	come,
Having eaten may the calves come,	come,
Leading their kids may the goats come,	come,
Well may they come,	come.
There are boys among the herds,	
Killing the black ostrich, with its plume	
May they come,	come,
Dressing themselves with feathers,	
May they come,	come,
Killing the lion may they come,	come,
Killing the elephant may they come,	come,
Killing the rhino may they come,	come,
Killing the leopard may they come,	come . . ."

Like this the *bitta* calls *barjo*, the cattle *barjo*. Then the goats are given to him, and the milk container is given to him. He, the *bitta*, does not drink the milk but puts it into the sour-milk pot. Then he goes into the bush and pulls up four *karko* plants and four *gali* plants. He puts all eight plants into the milk container:

"Go!"

These are the cleansing plants of Hamar, the *karko* and the *gali*, which are taken to every cattle kraal throughout the *bittas*' country. From *gudili* to *gudili* to *gudili* Kadja (a territorial segment) is completed. From *gudili* to *gudili* to *gudili* Marla is completed. From *gudili* to *gudili* to *gudili* Arkala is completed. From *gudili* to *gudili* to *gudili* and Dambaiti is finished. From *gudili* to *gudili* and Lodgera is finished. From *gudili* to *gudili* to *gudili* and Dunia is finished. From *gudili* to *gudili* to *gudili* and Omalle is completed. From *gudili* to *gudili* to *gudili*, from fire-man (*kogo* ritually responsible for grazing areas, see above) to fire-man and Dunka is completed. Fire-men only all the way to Kizo.

In this way the milk container is brought down crossing one settlement after another and at each place it crosses the *karko* and *gali* plants are taken out and new ones put back. This is the milk container of Elto, it comes from Kadja, from Simbale and Gulaba. The milk container of Banki Maro comes from Altera, from Macho, from Galepha, from Assile, from Wungabaino, from Mirsha, from Angude. (Lydall and Strecker 1979b, 12–16)

Conclusion

As I have said above, all of *Baldambe Explains* could be read as an evocation of the *genius loci* of Hamar. The six examples from his text that I have presented could well be multiplied and my analyses extended, but I think that for the purpose of this paper the examples were sufficient. The purpose, as outlined in the theoretical part, was to show how *genius loci* theory may be helpful for the study of regional variations of culture and to emphasize, as Alfred Gell has done, that cultural comparison and the analysis of contact phenomena should be anchored in the specifics of localities.

What Baldambe evoked was a *genius loci* of the past, a *genius loci* that he and his parents and grandparents remembered, re-created, and passed

on to subsequent generations. He neither thought that the *genius loci* of Hamar would always last, nor did he believe that it would ever vanish. Getting distraught about the present and the future he would lament as follows:

> These were the customs of our ancestors. Nowadays they are neglected. When enemies come the people don't call *barjo* because they have become feeble. Now the country is exhausted. The sorghum burns up and doesn't ripen. Diseases don't leave the cattle, which die. The pox of the goats does not leave and so they die. In olden days there were no pox. There was no rinderpest among the cattle. There was no pneumonia. In olden days when the elders called *barjo*, when the man of BA went and put sheep's fat into the grass and the waterhole, when the man of BUCHA shot pebbles at the enemy, when the man of WORLA brought fat to the homestead, then the milk of the cows was abundant! That's how it was in olden times. (Lydall and Strecker 1979b, 18–19)

But then a goat would sneeze and Baldambe would laugh and say, "Have you heard what the goat has told? It told us, 'it is all not true what you are saying, people are really not feeble, the country is not exhausted, and the diseases will leave eventually'" (see also Strecker 1979a and 1988b).

I wrote the main part of this paper more than a year ago, and now, as the special issue is going into print, I have come across further anthropological studies of landscape, place, and space, and even soundscape and ethnoscape which all have a close affinity to *genius loci* theory. Perhaps the most intriguing monograph about the *genius loci* of a single culture is James Weiner's *The Empty Place: Poetry, Space, and Being among the Foi of Papua New Guinea* (1991), which, like the work of Christian Norberg-Schulz, explores the implications of Heidegger's thoughts about dwelling, being, and language. According to Weiner, the Foi create and re-create the (unspeakable) spirit of their locality and of their life discursively. Poetically they "preserve the sense of life's encompassing flow" and in their songs "construct a map" of the hills, streams, gardens, and forests among which they live. Note how close this is to

Baldambe's account where the *genius loci* of Hamar emerges from and is contained in conversations, songs, blessings, curses, admonitions, lamentations, and the like.

The fact that the spirit of a place is partly created discursively or, as I would say, rhetorically, also comes out very strongly in the special issue on "Place and Voice in Anthropological Theory" in *Cultural Anthropology*, edited by Arjun Appadurai (1988); in *Senses of Place*, edited by Steven Feld and Keith Basso (1996); and in *The Poetic Power of Place: Comparative Perspectives on Austronesian Ideas of Locality*, edited by James Fox (1997). The latter is particularly relevant and may act as an exemplar for our future comparative studies of localities in southern Ethiopia.

Narrowly defined, the studies presented in *The Poetic Power of Place* are about "topogeny," the "recitation of an ordered sequence of place names," but as the title says already, the contributions to the book are above all about the rhetorical energy that goes into topogenies and, more generally, into the creation of localities. In ways reminiscent of Vico's account of the metaphoric nature of culture, Austronesian topogenies are metaphorically grounded using "topoi" that are "variously referred to as 'nodes,' 'points,' or junctures—using the metaphor of the growth of a plant or tree—or 'gates,' 'halting places,' or 'meeting points'—using the metaphor of a journey" (1997, 13).

The topoi offer the "possibility for an elaboration of knowledge" and in this way resemble the mnemonic devices of classic Western rhetoric. Fox draws attention to Aristotle's famous explanation of the relationship between spatial and mental orientation (topoi and memory) and adds that topoi are not only means for cognition but also serve as sources and targets of emotion. In other words, topogenies constitute or represent a particular form of "persuasive style" (Bailey 1983) that involves both reason and passion and in this way is able to create a strong "sense of place," a feeling of belonging and of individual and cultural identity. Here we are, it seems, right in the midst of *genius loci* theory that says that people strive to create meaningful existential spaces and in doing so creates a "spirit of place" that cannot be fully described but only evoked rhetorically.

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Entering Cattle Gates: Trade, Bond Friendship, and Group Interdependence

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Introduction

This paper is based on data collected among the Hor, a pastoral group in southwest Ethiopia. The focus is mainly on economic interdependence between various groups in southwestern Ethiopia and the paper explores the practices and major current impediments to the traditional practice of trade and ongoing exchange partnerships. Both traditional caravan routes and routes with "modern" road transport are used to affect trade and exchange in the region. The users of caravan routes depend on indigenous institutions of member groups for the protection of their life and property. Meanwhile, modern modes of transport are under the control of the police who are seen as having excessive power in blocking roads, searching for commodities, using the threat of force, and even confiscating goods or demanding bribes.[1]

Ethiopia's southwest can be seen as a web of trade and exchange routes. A visible interdependence between various groups and autonomous units of groups has been established by the networks of caravan routes that crisscross through the territories. These networks connect regional groups into major open markets that operate according to recognized rules and trade practices and can assure the safe passage of goods and traders.[2]

Trade networks between the groups follow connections variously known in the region as *jala*, *lagge*, or *belle*. These are ties of enduring

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friendship, which are ritually and individually established between members of different groups and within the same group. These relations of friendship serve as conduits for networks of trade and exchange as they exist primarily between the various groups.[3]

The argument of this paper is that although there is much talk about cultural variation in the region, there is on the other hand also a deep interdependence and an indispensability of the other (group) for the existence of the self. From data on the Hor (and Gamo) it is possible to conclude that the peoples of the region live within networks of multiple interdependencies in major areas such as religion, economy, politics, and warfare. Focusing mainly on trade and exchange, the paper describes its operation and examines the role of indigenous and state institutions in its facilitation.

The Hor occupy the most fertile delta of the Lake Stephanie watershed where they cultivate sorghum on the plots inundated by the flooding of the Limo River biannually. They also herd cattle in the pastures along the foot of the Borana and Hamar mountains and fish seasonally. The Hor have established a wide network of trade and exchange partnerships with people of various neighboring groups; travelers' accounts from the late nineteenth century and more recent studies describe Hor trade connections with the Somali coast and regional trade networks (Vannutelli and Citerni 1899, 354–55; Smith 1969, 262; Sobania 1991).

In the region around the Hor the various groups belonging to the network tend to place a balanced emphasis on age and kinship. These groups are highly patriarchal, making issues of power, property ownership, and control of resources mainly the concern of males, as are issues of clan and age leadership. Religious and ritual leadership exercised by individual leaders goes way beyond the confines of what is usually assumed to be a group's territory. For example, the influence of the senior Hor Qawot goes beyond the limits of ethnic boundaries and hence allegiances to Hor Qawots are drawn from far away. Therefore, allegiances to ritual leaders exist simultaneously within a group but also bridge ethnic boundaries such that people may be loyal to both a leader from their own group as well as one from outside.

Within trade and exchange networks, local group institutions that deal with law and order are also used as institutions of the network.

This is a marginalized region in Ethiopia's south, where after over a century of incorporation into the state system there are still no financial institutions and taxes are frequently collected on animals sold by tax collectors who retain the difference between the tax owed and the price obtained for themselves. Ammunition of various types is the predominant currency used to buy essential services like drinks and small items from shops. In the open markets, traders barter things based on evaluations that do not fluctuate very much. Durables are not brought to markets but are exchanged in the settlements or in the bush or are carried on to other group territories where, using the line of individual friends, they are traded for cattle, goats, or honey. Cash is sometimes used by urban traders and civil servants to buy goats and honey. One group, usually the Konso, is paid to carry loads on the desert caravan routes.

The Hor also rely heavily on capturing fertility from the outside for the reproduction of their culture and society and that of their neighbors by killing men of these specific groups and sometimes severing their genitals.[4] The Hor not only depend on specific outsiders as sources for accessing fertility, wives, and raided animals, they also depend on them for essential tools of production and for ritual items. From other groups they require neither wives nor raided animals, but simply establish *jalluma* friendships for trade and exchange.

The cultural logic behind establishing friendships—the practice of interethnic trade and exchange following the lines of *jalla*, *belle*, and *lagge* friendships—appears to be based on religious and moral lines. (Neither the Hor nor their neighbors in the network profess any world religion.) The idea of *ch'ubbu*, the performance of improper evil on others, has a prominent place within the Hor system of beliefs. *Ch'ubbu* includes the taking of other persons' cattle without their consent, refusal to pay debts, injuring other people by insult, causing death to one's people and to others with whom Hor are known to be on good terms, spilling the blood of groups Hor should not, etc. Bad luck can befall the perpetrator of *ch'ubbu*. While strict observance of not performing *ch'ubbu* is a means of self-protection, there is at the victim's disposal a power that can cause much personal damage to the perpetrator's wealth, children, and personal well-being. This is the power formerly brought from a specific source outside that is believed to benefit the cultural and

social reproduction of the group. It can be used negatively and can cause misfortune if the victim appropriates this power from its owner in a socially accepted manner. The outside element is crucial for the reproduction of the group and is fundamental in the operation of economic networks just as it is in other aspects of Hor life.

In their daily life, Hor villagers live largely undisturbed by the institutions of the state and they do not allow visitors other than their bond friends[5] from other groups and those traders who take traditional trade routes to come to their villages without the prior knowledge and agreement of their leaders.

Hor and Outsiders in Hor Country

The Hor keep outsiders at a distance. They suffered a heavy loss of life and animals when they went to war with Donaldson Smith, the first European to reach Hor country at the close of the nineteenth century. Soon afterwards, the conquering Abyssinian forces dealt the Hor a heavy blow that resulted in a serious destruction of life and wealth and forced them into exile. During the brief Italian occupation of Ethiopia, they again suffered killing and raiding from both the Italians and the Ethiopian partisans. After the Ethiopian Revolution in 1974, the senior Hor Qawot suffered humiliation and imprisonment. This, the Hor believe, has affected the social and natural order. As a result the Hor keep outsiders and the state at a safe distance at a location the Hor call Tabya.

Tabya

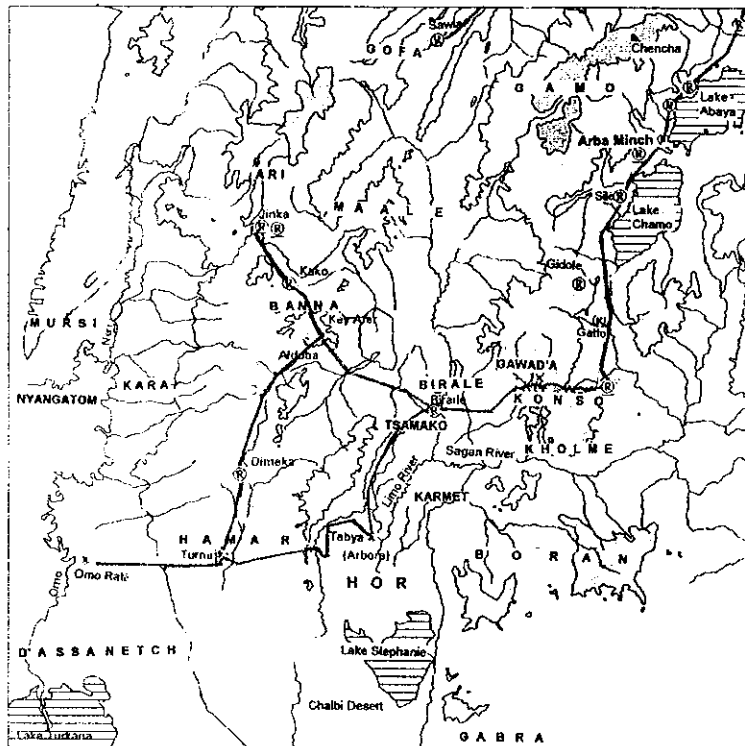
Tabya, which in Amharic literally means station, is a settlement the Hor have allocated to outsiders as a place of residence. Those associated with the state, traders based in Hor country groups they refer to as non-herders, that is, people who consume animals without the pain of herding them, reside in Tabya. Among those who live at Tabya are the Konso who do not raise cattle, whose women are not circumcised, and who accumulate wealth in cash like civil servants. Konso as a group do not have a history of conflict with the Hor. The Hor do not take wives from them because their women are not circumcised. The Konso in Tabya owe allegiance to the Hor Qawots. They seek blessings from the Hor

Qawots for fertility, for protection against evil that may affect their lives, for their property, and for the protection of their respective villages back in Konso from the evil activities of members of other Konso villages.[6]

A second group who live in Tabya are the Karmet. The Hor consider the Karmet to be non-cattle herders who reproduce at a fast rate. Because they do not raise cattle and usually do not identify as Hor, they mainly stay in Tabya and only a few live in Hor villages. The Karmet (also known as Wata by others) show allegiance to Hor Qawots and it is rumored in Hor that if a Qawot marries after becoming Qawot, a Karmet man should have sexual intercourse with the Qawot's bride during the marriage. At the installation of a Qawot, it is said that a Karmet elder takes with him young male virgin Hor boys to the banks of the Limo River to find a long straight *med'erte* stick. This stick becomes the insignia of the Qawot and is mainly used for prayers and blessings during sacrifices and for cursing. Like the Qawot this stick is anointed with butter during wedding prayers and blessings. Of all the other groups the Karmet are the closest in physical proximity to Hor land and they have the closest ties and allegiance to Hor Qawots. The biological fathers of Konso Ali, and of his younger brother Gumadi, are both Karmet. They were lovers of Qawot Oto Ali's wife after his death. Hor do not marry Karmet women as the latter are considered to be dangerous to the family of the Hor man and to the domestic animals of his *wori*. In practice, however, a few Hor men have recently begun to marry Karmet women. The explanation for this is the rather low cost of bride-wealth involved compared to that paid for Hor brides. Hor girls who become pregnant before marriage take refuge in Karmet land. They marry Karmet men and become Karmet. Hor men and women have Karmet lovers and talk a lot about the handsomeness of Karmet men and the beauty of their women.

Hor cooperate with Karmet for economic purposes. They use the pastures around Karmet settlements and set up cattle camps there. They offer sorghum plots and residence to Karmet in the Marle section and the village of Kulama in the Arbore section. In temporary settlements Karmet share residence with the Hor. A large number of Karmet outside Karmet country reside in Tabya. The Hor do not go to war with the Karmet as this is believed to cause disaster to life and property. Hor give the same explanation for not marrying Karmet women. In reality, how-

Map 1. The Hor and their neighbors



Source: Tactical Pilotage Chart, TPC L-5B, St. Louis, Missouri. CAD and Layout: Dipl. Geogr. Anne Mense. Map modified and additional data added by W. G. Tadesse.

ever, some prominent Hor of Gandaraba are married to Karmet women. Surra Ghino of the retired Otgalcha generation is married to one and has three little children but is cattleless at present, confirming the Hor belief

about marrying Karmet women. Another Hor man, Ghino Miri, has been married to his Karmet wife only for one year and the Hor are waiting to see what happens to his wealth because of the marriage.

The third group is the Tsamako. In addition to the other villages in their country, they have two villages (Kuile and Garsante Durba) inside Hor territory. Kuile, one of the Tsamako villages, is less than a kilometer away from Tabya (see Map 1) and the villagers share the same water source as the people of Tabya. Since mythical times the Hor have provided the Tsamako with a Qawot ritual leader and this seems to be the main reason why they have two settlements inside Hor territory. The Hor say that they do not marry the Tsamako and the explanation they give is the same as that given for not marrying the Karmet. But while Karmet women are circumcised during their early teens, Tsamako, like Konso and Hamar women, are normally not circumcised at all. The Qawot of the Tsamako and his sub-clan, Olmoque Wori Asaso, who are said to be Hor, marry uncircumcised women from Tsamako and give their daughters to the Hor who circumcise and marry them. Because the Qawot of Tsamako is Hor and his daughters are too, the Hor say they do not marry Tsamako at all. Tsamako provide Hor with access to their pastures and, like Konso and Karmet, show their allegiance to Hor Qawots by entering their cattle gates for prayer and blessings. In their turn the Hor provide the Tsamako with access to the Limo valley trees for placing their beehives.

The fourth group that lives in Tabya consists of civil servants: policemen, schoolteachers, a clinic staff, and a veterinary assistant. The civil servants have an ambiguous allegiance. They appear to be dependent on the state and on Ethiopian law for everything. Most of them profess Christianity and speak negatively of Hor religious practices. On the other hand, they keep close contact with the Qawots and other older Hor out of fear of mystical attack and for protection. The veterinary assistant and two of the schoolteachers run restaurants in Tabya and own bars that sell alcoholic drinks. The veterinary assistant visited the Qawot of Tsamako with a gift of drinks for his blessing, for protection against mystical attack by other Hor, and for help to become wealthy. Because of their involvement in the hotel business and in selling drinks, civil servants compete with the Konso traders in Tabya. Some of them buy and

sell goats for profit after keeping them with Hor friends until the goats gain some weight.

Tabya, State Institutions, the Hor, and Others

From the Hor point of view, Tabya can be seen as a terrible place. It is where the police station is situated and a place where Hor and their neighbors cannot walk about with their rifles. The police threaten to confiscate the firearms of Hor and members of other groups who come to attend the Saturday market.

The police very well know that in and around Hor an unarmed person can easily be killed by Borana and even by Hamar and that cattle can be raided at any time, making it essential to carry firearms. Some policemen of Tabya who are of Hor and Konso origin are firearms traders and trade ammunition for cash. Two of them were imprisoned in Jinka for selling government ammunition. There are occasional beatings by the police of Hor and herdsmen of other groups who come for drinks on weekdays and for the market on Saturdays. In one incident in 1996, eight policemen together beat Ufo Hanqe of Kulama who refused to be taken to the police station. He was in bed for three months recovering from the effects of the beating.

The elders of the Hor age organization do not like the accumulation of unlimited power in the hands of the police. Together with Konso and other elders of Tabya, they review the activities of the police and report them to higher officials whenever they have opportunities to do so.

Tabya bars that sell drinks generally attempt to demand unreasonably high prices from Hor and their neighbors, many of whom are unfamiliar with the use of cash. They sometimes refuse to pay these inflated prices and argument breaks out. In such cases the police may intervene and take sides with the bar owners. The Hor and their neighbors may be accused of being cheats and may be subjected to abuse because of their style of life.

Most bars and the three restaurants that belong to civil servants take bullets as a form of payment from herdsmen and give money in change. Others take Kalashnikovs, cloths, or headrests as a guarantee of delayed payment. Sometimes policemen lend ammunition to their Hor and non-Hor friends in exchange for a promise of a goat or sheep.

Most Hor think of the school in Tabya as a place where Hor children are taught to dislike goats and other animals. Students, Hor say, dislike animals and the Hor way of life. They instead like being dressed up and hanging about without anything to do. They become Sidama, central Ethiopians, and are like civil servants, people who do not like raising animals, but buy animals for cash to consume them.

Photographs 1, 2, and 3. Tabya Market

On the other hand, Tabya is also seen as a good place to socialize with friends and to drink. It is the venue of the Saturday market (see Photographs 1, 2, and 3), where herders can sell their small stock or exchange them for requirements such as ammunition, honey, coffee, tobacco, toilet soaps for scenting girls' bodies, chains for the necks, and beads. In the markets Hor wives sell butter and sorghum and socialize with their men or lovers in one of the many houses that are converted into drinking places for the market day. Tabya is where the sick come for medical treatment at the small clinic and where the Hor and their neighbors can purchase medicine and, especially, antibiotic capsules for themselves and for their sick animals. Tabya is where many groups come together for markets and then separate until the following market day. It is a place where new things come on trucks, *babura konso,* and cars, *babura farangi.*

Photograph 4. Road block and road sign at Tabya

Every Friday evening on the eve of the market day, or on Saturday mornings, private, state-owned, or NGO trucks that are on their way to or from Arba Minch arrive loaded with goods for Tabya, Turmi (Hamar), and Omo Rate' in D'assanetch country on the Omo River.[7] When they reach Tabya, a notice on the main road instructs all vehicles to "Enter the Arbore police station" to unload in a wooden enclosure in front of the police station under the flag mast (see Photograph 4). Things unloaded on such occasions include such items as *araki* spirits, unhusked coffee beans, coffee husks, *chat* leaves, cotton blankets, beads, salt, *shelegda* leaves, key chains, razor blades, hoe blades, ankle rings, cotton and nylon fabrics for head scarfs, loincloths, beer, liquors, and soft drinks mainly from the provincial capital Arba Minch and partly from Purqud'a in Konso.

An intensive search of the loads on the trucks begins at the police station and continues until the owners of the goods contribute money and hand it to the policeman on duty. This is later shared out by the police. The police also demand a bonus of packs of cigarettes and *chat* leaves to make the search session short and to let the crew, the passengers, and the load continue to their destinations before the desert sun gets hotter. Whenever trucks arrive, policemen who are not on duty rush to the station to check on the money and other gifts received. All coffee brought to Hor for wedding rituals is usually held as contraband and Hor have to negotiate with the police for its release, which entails more payments of money.

The Hor were beginning to bring goods from *jalas* in Kholme and D'assanetch by truck, which was easier than using other means of transport. However, the unrestricted power of the police to delay, search, and arrest passengers falsely accused of loading contraband goods, together with the insatiable appetite for bribes and the threat of confiscation of goods by the police, means that traditional routes and means of transport are still preferred.

On Sundays and Mondays the trucks arrive back to continue in the reverse direction. They normally carry Hor passengers from Omo and Tourmi and other traders who continue further north to the Kholme and Purqud'a markets and to Arba Minch. The trucks from Omo and Tourmi come loaded with empty *araki* jerrycans, Omo sorghum, Hamar goats, honey, goatskins, and some contraband textiles, laundry, and toilet soaps from Kenya that are brought in exchange for *araki*, which is traded for these goods from across the frontier. What is interesting is that at Tabya when the trucks arrive everything is held by the police as contraband. The things labeled contraband include goods of Kenyan origin already taxed at Omo Rate' and all the rest bought within Ethiopia and of Ethiopian origin. The traders contribute money and clear the trucks out of the wooden police bars that resemble Hor cattle enclosures.

Before goods of Hor origin are loaded, they also have to enter the enclosure and the police again have to receive money. When they are not given enough money to let the items be loaded on the trucks, they accuse the owners of the goods of attempting to bring contraband into the country. These are items that are transported north from Hor and include sheep and goats, sheep- and goatskins, honey, butter, game skins, and sorghum.

The power the police have over the movement of people and goods is so great that individuals may become helpless before the might of this institution. Police practices of this sort, which are quite common on the main routes in this part of the country, are the cause of suffering for hundreds of passengers and traders.[8] Trucks are forced to start their journeys from police stations and to stop again at police stations in the middle of the day or when they reach their destinations. In one morning alone trucks may be stopped and checked at Omo-Rate', Tourmi, Tabya, and at a recently established police station on the Birale plantation before they are again stopped at Baqaule, Konso, for the fifth such search in a day. A sack of sorghum will in most cases be unloaded five times and then opened, searched, and paid for as many times. One only needs to imagine the inconvenience this causes in the transport of people and goods.[9] In some instances there is disagreement between policemen over the amount of money to be paid, which results in the trucks being held overnight disrupting the whole journey. In other instances conflicts arise between the police in Hor and a Ministry of Finance taxman over how much money each of them should take. Sometimes the truck drivers and some of the passengers have to act as go-betweens to settle disputes between these powerful civil servants. The intervention of Tabya elders may even be requested by the police and the taxman. Recently, a third body, the Hor Dwellers' Association at Tabya, has been pushing itself onto the scene to share power and to benefit from the illicit control of trucks. In almost no instance does the state get any income from this area. The money collected goes into private pockets.

The reason why I am discussing modern routes, the modern transport system, and state involvement in movement and trade in this area is simple. My aim is to give a rough picture of the obstacles that have to be overcome before passengers and goods such as a sack of sorghum, a

sheep or goat skin, or an empty *araki* jerrycan can reach a destination as close as three hundred kilometers away in a day or two. This background information I feel is essential in order to understand and appreciate the working of bond friendship and trade, which use other routes and which are the subject of this paper. Traditional bond friendship and trade use routes away from the roads where the state has no influence over the transport of goods, over the security of goods, or over the well-being of traders.

The Traditional Routes

These routes are known as *gor* in the Hor language. They are used by the neighbors of the Hor to come to the Hor Qawots with gifts for peace, blessings, and prayer. Such visits benefit both the Hor and their neighbors, particularly the Borana. They result in intermarriage, the exchange and sharing of pastures and other resources, and they build mutual trust across the boundary between the outside and inside for the duration of peaceful relations. They imply a healthy movement of cattle between pastures, water wells, and cattle camps of the groups. Keeping these routes open allows movement of people, animals, goods, and knowledge, and the formation of bond friendships. Such mutual relationships are viewed as beneficial and in keeping with the natural order as well with social harmony and order. They create a favorable situation for the circulation of much needed produce such as *ruf*,[10] bracelets, beads, cotton head-scarves, coffee, tobacco, salt, ritual herbs, cowries, metal anklets, hoe blades, clay, and firearms. The Hor's eastern neighbors, the Borana, rely for their blessings and prayers on entering the cattle gates of the Hor Qawots. The Hor depend on them and other outsiders for essential items for the performance of rituals. The Borana Qallus ritual leaders send symbolic axes during the installation of Hor Qawots. I think that it is because of this crucial interdependence that the Hor make prayers for Waq to keep these routes open. "Gorti Dandan Waq bane!" (Let Waq open the Dandan path), is a very important element in Hor Qawots' prayers. The Qawots regularly pray for Waq to blind the Borana, to make their arms that handle firearms weak, and to make the bullets that come out of their rifles as light as dry rushes. This prayer performed by the Qawots is done so that the enemy group keeps coming along the Dandan

path with the traditional heifer and bull gifts to the senior and junior Qawots of the Hor in submission to their superior mystical powers. The Borana would otherwise come to fight the Hor. The Hor wish to make their hearts desire conflict less. In a similar manner, prayer is sometimes made for other paths to remain forever shut. This is because these paths were in the past used by invaders, first the Samburu and later the Hamar, to attack the Hor.[11] Gorti Wanki, southwest of Hor land and to the east of the mouth of the Mino River, is one such path that brings death and suffering and must be condemned during prayers.

The traditional routes bond friends use to travel from Hor to Hamar, to D'assanetch, to Karmet country, to Kholme, to Borana, to Kara, to Nyangatom are various. The Nyangatom route goes through Hamar and Kara and Hor are relayed along the route by their Hamar and Kara bond friends. The D'assanetch route is the worst of all in terms of hardships that have to be encountered. The Chalbi desert of the dry Lake Stephanie surface is without any water until its southeastern edge is reached where there is a hot spring and other springs named T'abala, Qofa, and Gum. There is sometimes a danger of fighting and death when these water points are occupied by Borana or any other group with whom the Hor are on bad terms. Since 1991 this has continuously been a dangerous place for the Hor due to worsened Hor-Borana relations that began as a result of the death of over four hundred Borana who were killed as they attempted to wipe out the Hor villages of Egude and Murale. Hor travelers and members of hunting expeditions send scouts and double-check for the presence of members of hostile groups before they start using the water or resting.

But before Hor, together with their D'assanetch bond friends and other travelers and traders who accompany them, set out for the trip they enter through the cattle gate of the Marle Qawot. After receiving his approval and his blessings they leave through the cattle gate for their journey. The Marle Qawot controls the whole desert and he says that he is its owner. His blessings and permission to cross the desert are believed to protect travelers against enemies, snakes, scorpions, and thorns.

The well-being of Hor travelers is guaranteed by a range of other means. The senior Qawots' dawn and dusk prayers to Waq, the blessings they give for the protection of their people, and the curses they make

against Hor enemies are important for the safety and well-being of travelers. The prayers of the head of a clan and of the head of the *wori* all affect the safety of travelers. The cowrie belt the wife of a Qawot wears—that of the wife of the clan head, that of the wife of the head of the *wori*, that of a man's mother and of his wife—protects men in dangerous space such as the Chalbi desert. As soon as a son or a husband sets out on such journeys, his mother and wives start wearing their cowrie belts to protect him. The trip to D'assanetch can be more dangerous if relations with the Hamar are bad. Not only are relations between the Hor and the Hamar important to guarantee safe passage, but also relations between the Hamar and the D'assanetch. In the summer of 1995 when D'assanetch and Hamar fought, the Hor were not allowed to go to D'assanetch land over Hamar territory. Animals Hor were driving over Hamar land towards Hor country were taken by force by the Hamar. Konso bond friends of the Hor lost many animals only some of which were later retrieved.

The routes to the east (to Karmet and Borana country) are not as dangerous, but the procedure of entering and leaving the cattle gate of a Qawot is done for journeys to Borana. The route to Karmet country, because of its proximity and because it is where Hor cattle camps of the Marle are set up, is not considered dangerous but some precautions are still taken. Journeys to Tsamako in the north are treated in the same way as journeys to Karmet country. The route to Kholme, the route that Hor take to Konso to visit bond friends and to attend the Thursday Kholme market, is one of the major trade routes that extends from D'assanetch. The route from Hor country to Kholme is secure as it is away from the main road and government authority and is inhabited first by the Karmet and then by the Kholme both of whom have good relations with the Hor.

Modern and traditional routes for the journeys of bond friends and traders cross and intersect in Hor country. An old Italian road that went across Hor land from east to west currently is not used as a road but remains important as a path. It was based on an old path used as a trade route and is part of the Dandan path. The main road connecting Omo Rate' to Arba Minch goes across Hor land north to south but is in very poor condition due to lack of maintenance. A traditional path that

connects Nyangatom to Hor exists that passes through the mountains of Hamar and Kara. This extends east towards Tartalle and Yaballo in Borana country and on to the Somali. The desert route takes Hor to their D'assanetch bond friends across the Chalbi Desert.

Hor country was and is a crucial central intersection point for the network of both traditional and modern routes. At the close of the last century Donaldson Smith noted how the products of ports on the Somali coast reached the Hor through Borana country.[12] Rein provides a map (Rein 1919, following 358) showing Hor country as the terminal point of a good caravan route from the Gulf of Aden to Addis Ababa and continuing south until it reaches Konso country and eventually Hor country. This route joins an East-West caravan route linking what was then Italian Somaliland with Borana country and eventually with Hor country and Lake Rudolf (Lake Turkana). What is particularly striking is that the junction of the North-South route and the East-West route is in the area of Hor country where major villages are located. Whereas the Hor and their neighbors see modern transport as revolutionary and as making life much easier compared to traditional pack-animal transport, in reality they find it expensive both in terms of fares and the bribes involved. Traditional routes are much preferred as there is no state presence. This reduces the cost and increases the security of goods and of individual travelers. In all cases, but particularly in the desert, the Qawots, together with women's cowrie belts, guarantee individual safety. And as we shall see later, the wealth that travels along such routes also has the protection of the Fund'o.

What Makes the Traditional Routes Safe and Secure

Users of the traditional routes all owe allegiance to the *Fund'o* institution, the duty of which is to help traders and their activities. A *Fund'o* council exists in Tabya in Hor country, which makes sure that trade between Hor country and other places operates smoothly and without hindrance. Traders are obliged to follow certain codes of behavior while traveling. According to the rules, a team of bond friends and traders or other persons handling property, whether animals or other goods, are expected to care for and to support each other on journeys along the routes. They are obliged to participate together in the search for lost

animals and not to continue with their journey until the searching team finds the lost animals. The Fund'o imposes fines on those accused of failure to fulfill these obligations while traveling and makes arrangements with local chiefs to search for and hand over lost animals and to obtain evidence of any loss caused by wild animals.

If bandits attack peaceful traders and take their property, the group in whose territory the attack occurs is held responsible and is made to pay compensation. Failure to comply would cause the *Fund'o* to withdraw all assistance to the group and its members and all trade with them would be banned.

The Fund'o in Hor works in harmony with the Hor Jald'aba[13] so that both the Hor and the traders benefit. Decisions of the Fund'o are observed by the Hor and whenever the Hor have problems with traders they try to arrange for sanctions against them through the Fund'o. The Hor's Fund'o representative is a non-Hor man and is also the spokesman of the Konso and Sidama residents, including civil servants. He settles financial and other disputes between Konso in Tabya and between Konso and other people according to Korata rules—Konso rules for settling disputes. He is also responsible for the self-help saving society, Ik'ub, and its weekly sessions are held in his compound. He keeps its documents and financial reports on members. The Fund'o, Korata, and Ik'ub executives consist of Konso and Hor men and have their center in Tabya. Civil servants also participate in the saving and in the management of Ik'ub. The Fund'o in Hor uses writing in its work as it communicates with other Fund'o bodies in the region. The leaders and executives of the Tabya Fund'o usually cooperate with the Hor Jald'aba in their efforts to contain the state in Tabya. The Hor Jald'aba understands well the central place of their land in regional trade activities and the fact that the Fund'o depends on them and on their land for the success of its work. Working with the Hor is to the advantage of the Fund'o and Korata practitioners. The Hor allow them to live on Hor land, to grow sorghum, and to practice their own customs. The traders also benefit from membership of the network of the Hor's bond friends in the whole region. One joins the Fund'o by personally going to Purqud'a in Konso country and paying Birr 30.00 (£3.00 or $4.00). Mihiret, a northern Ethiopian woman who is the wife of Asaminew and a school

teacher, went to Purqud'a and became a *birricha* (an acknowledged trader, meat seller, craftsman). She says that this membership gives her protection against those who may take her money and fail to return it. The Hor tell of many cases in which Konso men whom they have trusted and have asked to sell rifles on their behalf, have failed to return either the rifles or cash. Only after the Hor have appealed to the *Fund'o* were they able to retrieve their rifle or their money including per diems and the cost of transport they had paid. In some cases the *Fund'o* was able to force the sale of Konso property to pay back debts owed to the Hor.

But what is the Fund'o? The Fund'o is an institution responsible for the safe passage and the security of traders and goods and acts as guarantor of debt payment. Each group's current customary law operates regarding disputes arising between members of the same group. However, when a dispute involves members of two different groups, the council of Fund'o in Hor applies the customary law of the disputing members to discipline them. When a case involves a Konso resident of Hor and a Hor resident of Hor, if the Hor is found guilty his case will be directed to the Jald'aba of his own village. The offender may be flogged or fined. If the Konso man is found guilty, his case will be directed to Konso elder residents who will punish him according to Konso custom.

This institution works more efficiently than the many police stations, courts, and other state institutions that operate in the proximity of Hor, Konso, and Hamar. Members of groups of the region who wish to become traders affiliate themselves to the Fund'o as they begin to trade actively. The Fund'o recruits its members who represent it in the different groups by carefully selecting influential personalities who can take care of the interests of different groups in the region. The Fund'o of Hor were appointed after sending a list of candidates from both Hor and non-Hor residents in Hor land (mainly Konso and people of Borana origin) to the Fund'o in Purqud'a. Once the list was approved, the Fund'o team started functioning.

The Hor Fund'o was supervised until late 1998 by Lemma, who speaks for the Konso residents of Hor and who is a literate person able to correspond with other Fund'o offices in the region (see Photograph 5). The members include its head, two elders each from Hor and Konso who reside in Hor, and two young Konso men referred to as *helita*, messengers

Photograph 5. The Fund'o in session in Tabya

who carry out errands and assist the council in the execution of its tasks. The council employs the customary practices of sanctioning used by each disputant's group in executing its decisions and does not impose the practice of the office of the Fund'o or that of the Konso, which is exercised in the base area. In other words, it uses the range of legal structures and customary laws of groups which are found in the region and which the network covers.

The weakness of the state institutions of law enforcement in protecting the lives and the property of citizens of the region, together with the continued marginalization of pastoral peoples of the Ethio-Kenyan border, is evidence of neglect by regional as well as central political authorities. While the picture looks gloomy, it is important to be aware that alternative traditional institutions such as the Fund'o do keep some regions going. This was evident during the fall of the military government in 1991 and the ascendancy of the present regime. The rural south was generally peaceful and the local markets ran well; there was neither looting nor genocide. This was not due to fear or to the strength of the government then on its way to power, but was due to the fact that institutions such as the Fund'o go underground when governments are tough and become potent when governments become weak and lose control in the region. If the rural south is peaceful to this day, it is by no means an

expression of the strength and stability of the state, but is instead a product of the strength of such traditional institutions in the region.

Not much is known about the antiquity of the Fund'o tradition in the region or in Hor itself. The Hor Fund'o, according to Lemma Gebre Tsadik, the institution's former head, was re-established after an interruption of about a decade.[14] There are only claims that it has been there for a long time, with its own myth of origin. Lemma said the following on this topic:

> The Fund'o is a family. They were created near T'adacha Worabe—Tula Salan in Borana country. Some Moslem and Konso elder traders agreed to divide the region into trading territories. With this agreement the Moslems took responsibility for the other part [part of Borana, Guji, etc.] and the Fund'o took responsibility for this part of the region [part of Borana, Konso, Hor, and currently Turmi and Omo-Rate'] with their centre in Konso. The elders appointed the child Guyyo Fund'o for this part to see that trade went on well.

The name of the Fund'o institution derives from the family name of this child. The Fund'o exercises its authority through persuading groups to impose sanctions on their members who do not abide by its decisions. When traders are found guilty, the public of the group concerned are instructed to refrain from buying from them or selling to them. Because of this power, the Fund'o base in Purqud'a is considered a kind of pilgrimage center for any traders and customers who are in dispute over payment of debts and unfulfilled financial and other promises. Those who need affiliation go there in person before committing themselves to the rules of the Fund'o.

But there is more to this pilgrimage than the power of the Fund'o to execute decisions. The original Fund'o child and his descendants are considered to be the Qawots or P'oqallas (the Konso equivalent of the Qawot) of merchants, craftsmen, and butchers collectively known as *birricha* in the Garatte part of administrative Konso. The original Fund'o "Qawot" lived in Yavallo once upon a time, and his descendant, according to Lemma, heads the Yavallo Fund'o. He originally was from

Purqud'a and this is where the site of his house is the center of the network, and is considered to have sanctity. His followers have constructed a tin-roofed building in place of the traditional thatch-roofed house. Each Fund'o office in different parts of the south contributed money for the construction of the house and money for its inauguration.[15] Lemma said that Hor contributed a bull and a few hundred *birr* for the construction of the house on the former site and this spot serves as both the pilgrimage site and the office of the network.

The ritual powers of the Fund'o "Qawot" and his descendants—power to curse, bless, and settle disputes—were channeled into the arena of exchange, craftwork, the market, and reproduction of wealth. In contrast, the allegiance to Qawots of the Hor is linked with the receipt of blessings for human, animal, and crop fertility and victory in warfare over the enemy. Similarly, the allegiance to the Fund'o "Qawot" by traders and craftsmen was traditionally sought for the reproduction of tools and pots, for retrieving lost money, and for the creation of wealth through trade and exchange. Today, those who seek this help are not just those from families of craftsmen and traders, but a broader range of Konso and non-Konso involved in many types of trading and bond friendship linkages. The effective power of the present-day Fund'o institution to facilitate this process, and its threat to curse and to take sanctions against those who hinder the process, seems to be one of the major reasons for the fact that it is expanding its influence across ethnic boundaries. The influence of the main Konso P'oqallas on the other hand, remains fettered within the bounds of the Konso clans as allegiance to them is eroded with the growth of trade and bond friendship in the region and with the growing allegiance of the Konso and other groups' traders and bond friends to the Hor Qawots and to the Purqud'a Fund'o.

This role of the Purqud'a Fund'o as P'oqalla of craftsmen and traders, that is of the marginalized, across ethnic frontiers in this region, has demonstrated the way in which ethnic groups that were and are in many respects politically autonomous participate in a regional economy in which they exchange their produce and knowledge. To survive as a group this economic interchange is essential. All ethnic groups depend on obtaining goods and services from the outside in exchange for their

own produce in a relatively secure, coordinated, institutionalized framework facilitated by the Fund'o.

The fact that in this area, craftsmen, many of whom are stigmatized, can hold a social position equivalent to that of their own Qawot can provide some possible indications about the nature, origin, and organization of craftsmen in the south of Ethiopia. Purqud'a is a place where old practices dominate compared to other parts of Konso, where traditions have given way to new practices. For example, the hunting ritual *kara* is no longer celebrated in any other part of administrative Konso except in Purqud'a, even though other areas acknowledge that their ancestors used to celebrate it. Likewise, it is possible that the Fund'o institution is a similar instance of the continuation of a set of traditional practices that may have been more widespread in the past. Craftsmen and traders may have been more widely linked by regional institutions than they are today.[16]

It is striking that the original Fund'o child did not live in Konso, but in Yavallo in Borana country and that he could maintain his ritual position from outside Konso. My suggestion here is that the Fund'o was the Qawot for fertility of wealth produced through exchange and through the production of crafts. He may possibly have been a descendant of a once very strong clan of artisans and traders in Konso and may have been forced into exile in Borana country. Similar clans with similar networks may have existed throughout the agricultural groups around lakes Abbaya and Chamo, but their power may have eventually been usurped by other clans and their members dispersed. Such speculations would need to be tested by research in Konso and elsewhere; information in the present paper is based on what is said in Hor country.

In the past in Konso, the division between those involved in agriculture and those involved in craftwork and trade was very marked. Weaving, woodcarving, selling meat, and involvement in trading activities were treated by Konso, who worked on the land, as entirely unacceptable activities for farmers. Today attitudes and practice have changed dramatically. Although agricultural activity is still stressed in the ideology, people from an agricultural background no longer exclude themselves from craftwork and trade but, on the contrary, take up such occupations more and more frequently.

The curse of Fund'o seems to be particularly feared because it is the curse of the clan leader of craftsmen. The mention of the name of the Fund'o helps solve most problems. Use of his name can be a means to retrieve lost money or stolen cattle, and a means to force individuals to help when one needs help. To say that one will go to the Fund'o to complain against someone over unfulfilled financial commitments or over stolen cattle is threatening to everyone involved in the matter. Those involved fear that they may lose their property or that they or members of their families may be struck down by illness or even die.

The Resolution of Disputes in Tabya and in Hor Villages

Tabya is a multiethnic center where no single group dominates in terms of control over resources or over the affairs of its residents. With regard to land used for cultivation of sorghum, the distribution of land and the practice of cultivation are carried out largely in accordance with the tradition of the Hor hosts. Regarding offences such as theft, Hor offenders would normally be dealt with by the Hor alone. But a Konso offender, for example, would normally be dealt with by a joint meeting of Konso and Hor elders, which would impose a fine on the guilty person of cash or its equivalent. If the guilty person refused to pay the fine imposed by the elders, the Hor side would be requested to flog the person or to ostracize him and his family by refusing to sell anything to him and to buy anything from him. The person would be avoided as much as possible until finally he would be forced to bend to the will of others.

Offences by civil servants or disputes between civil servants and Hor are handled by a joint Hor-Fund'o court and the kind of sanction used is not flogging but a fine of cash which, if the offender agrees, is paid, but if he refuses may be converted into ostracism. The most powerful sanction is a threat of mystical attack. Matters take a different course if any case is treated in terms of the law. This invites the participation primarily of the police who are likely to use the opportunity to enrich themselves by demanding money from the offender and letting him go if he pays. Usually, however, the elders of Tabya and the Jald'aba of Hor will not allow the police to deal with cases on their own. They will demand

that the cases be handed over to them so that they will be able to punish the offender properly. This usually means that in the end, offenders will be released after paying a fine and all three groups (i.e., the Jald'aba, the Tabya elders, and the police) will share the fine among themselves. This briefly illustrates the contending interests that operate in running the affairs of Tabya.

In Hor villages, however, there are no such contending interests to be seen in running the affairs of the village. Here, the generation set in power, and the four age sets that comprise it, have the authority to discipline village members according to the instructions they receive from their leaders. Non-Hor elders in Tabya and the police in Tabya do not in general concern themselves with the affairs of Hor villages. This applies whether offences committed in Hor villages are committed by Hor or by non-Hor.

The Saturday Market at Tabya

One thing that strikes an observer of the Tabya market is the variety of groups that attend it. Anyone who stands outside the village would note the flow of people to the market from all directions.

Those coming to the market carry various products. Tsamako bring tobacco, sorghum, *parso* beer, small stock, goat- and sheepskins, gourds of different sizes, honey, maize and sorghum flour, butter, pumpkins, melons, etc. Mountain Hamar from Buska and Lala come with peas, cereals, tobacco, honey, *t'eff* (Eragrostis abyssinica), pumpkins, and butter. Assile and Wangabaino Hamar who live in Hor territory in the lowlands around the lake bring wooden containers of fresh milk, butter, small stock, and the skins of sheep and goats. The Karmet come to the market with *d'urte* (tobacco seasoning), goat- and sheepskins, and butter. Konso traders based in Tabya spread palm mats and cowhides under the shade of the *garsante* trees in the market grounds and display their items for sale. The Konso sell cotton blankets, coffee husks, soap bars, safety pins, beads of different sizes, salt, necklace chains, etc.

For market day the residents of Tabya brew sorghum beer (known as *ch'aqa* by the Konso and *parso* by the Hor and all the others), prepare different kinds of food, araki spirits, beer, and wine brought from Arba Minch. The three bars and restaurants owned by civil servants serve

Photograph 6. Herdsman in Tabya

central Ethiopian food. Truck drivers and passengers get their food in these restaurants. For the market day most Tabya houses are converted into restaurants and drinking establishments.

When both Hor and their neighbors attend the Tabya market, precautions are taken to try to guarantee the safety of each person. No one is supposed to come to the market place until 10:00 A.M. The police may arrest non-Tabya residents who come too early.

People coming to the market must not carry firearms to the center of Tabya. The police will arrest them if they are seen with firearms. Before they reach the market, both Hor and non-Hor deposit their rifles in the houses of their Tabya friends, bond friends, or lovers. Hamar usually hand their firearms in to the police in the morning and take them back in the evening before they start their journey home.

The media of exchange used in the market and in the small shops and restaurants of Tabya are cash, ammunition, goats, and sheep. The six small shops of Tabya accept cash and ammunition as a form of currency to sell their goods.[17] They also exchange ammunition for goats and sheep. The average payment is ten Kalashnikov bullets for a medium-sized sheep or goat. There is a penalty for using ammunition instead of cash. The shops sell bullets for four *birr* each (£0.40), but buy each for three and a half *birr* (£0.35). The buying rate of bullets is the same in the restaurants as well as bars. When herdsmen have neither cash nor

ammunition, they usually pawn their rifles, headrests, axes, or clothes as guarantee for later payment. There are cases of complications caused as a result of someone pawning a rifle that belongs to a friend as a guarantee when drinking. Bullets known as *chekos* are more expensive and are not used for buying drinks but are exchanged for gourds of honey. So there are some restrictions on convertibility. There are also restrictions on what is on sale. Surprisingly, many goods essential to the Hor are not normally obtained in the market. Iron leg rings, knives, axes, ostrich feathers, giraffe tail hairs, and even Kalashnikov rifles fall into this category (see Photograph 6).

Bond Friendship

Bond friendship is a dyadic relationship that Hor men enter into with other Hor men or with men in other groups. After a bond friend's death, the relationship may continue with his widow. Bond friendship is an enduring relationship in which the two participants consider themselves bound to each other and from which both parties benefit by giving mutual support to each other when the need for support arises. The relationship is so binding that it should persist when the groups of the men in the relationship are at war. To make matters more clear I will describe other kinds of Hor friendship that involve less commitment.

When two Hor children of nearly the same age begin herding young stock they usually hunt birds and small animals such as lizards and squirrels. If they kill such a small animal, they both bite its ear and thereby enter a relation of *miso*. It is a relationship of killers and they hope that it will grow into a relationship of raiding and killing enemies in the future. They address each other as *miso* and are considered to be witnesses of each other's valor. This relationship is like the relationship between a man-killer and his assistant friend who severs the genitals of the dead enemy. The relation between the two children does not entail any other commitment of any kind.

When a group of young boys of nearly the same age (usually of the same age set) become adolescents they may enter a relation of *abujal*. This relation is formed by between four and twelve boys and sometimes even more. One of them slaughters a big male goat, usually stolen from the herd of a mother's brother of one of them. They make strips of the stomach fat (*mor*) of the goat and wear them around their necks and also rub the stomach contents (*ur*) on their bodies. This marks the beginning of a new relation between them. From time to time each member in turn kills an animal and lets his friends wear the stomach fat of the slaughtered animal and rub the contents of the stomach on their bodies. Then they roast the meat on an open fire and divide it up according to their order of seniority. This marks the first recognition of seniority among adolescent boys. Once killing and eating of the goat is reciprocated, this relation endures and the participants address each other as *abujal*. Those who enter into such relations may refuse to flog friends with whom they have formed this relation when seniors impose a punishment of flogging on one of them. This friendship, like *miso,* does not involve any other binding commitment between partners.

Bami is a friendship formed between two male Hor, which may evolve from *miso*. Those who develop this relationship dine together frequently and avenge each other's death if an outside enemy kills one of them. They can exchange gifts and are considered closer than brothers or other people related by blood. They use the term *bami* to address each other, although a husband and wife may also use this term in addressing each other. The relationship is most meaningful after marriage because dining together is easier to do when one is married and has a house and a wife to do the cooking. A bond friend can be a *bami*. But bond friendship requires "seeing the hand of the other," the taking of gifts; and "showing the other person one's own hands," the giving of gifts. Reciprocal taking and giving of gifts is the essence of bond friendship. In contrast, Bami give each other gifts, but not with the expectation of return gifts from the recipient.

Mogo is a relationship of equality formed between unequal male Hor. The inequality is based on the age of the persons entering the relation. The relation is formed when the parents of a newly born son give their son the name of a person they like very much—this name giving identifies the adult person whose name is given with the baby boy who receives the name. The parents become parents of both the baby and the original owner of the name. This relation makes the person whose name is given a brother of the baby and accordingly it denies him sexual access to the mother of the baby. The name donor is expected to give a fat sheep

or goat and butter to the mother of the new baby when he becomes a *mogo* (namesake) of the new child.[18] The namesakes may address each other as *mogo* but they do not have significant obligations to each other. Often the name donor will be so much older than the baby that he will be dead by the time that the baby has grown up.

Bond friendship is different to these various kinds of friendship. Almagor (1978, 108–28) lists D'assanetch friendships similar to the above as varieties of bond friendship. While this may be possible in the case of the D'assanetch, it is not the case regarding the Hor. Bond friendship differs from these kinds of relation in many ways.

Bond friendship is formed between two men who belong to different *wori*. It brings the two men involved into a relationship that is close to a kinship relation but does not make them kin. It creates a relation of interdependence between them and through them, linking their respective *wori*. When it is formed between Hor, both sides assist each other with contributions of grain, animals, sorghum beer, honey for weddings in each other's *wori* or for the feasts that are held if either of them becomes a *luuba*. Reciprocation can be delayed but is obligatory. This can sometimes require the formation of other relationships in order to obtain the means to pay unreciprocated debts. Not all Hor men have the means to obtain bond friends, but those that have will use their local and outside bond friends to satisfy the needs of their Hor relations who cannot afford to invest in bond friendship. Contributions for occasions such as weddings can be collected from clan members, affines, and age mates, but as this is not expected to be reciprocated other than in the form of honey wine given to those who assist, it is not a reliable source of assistance. One depends on bond friends for such contributions and invests heavily in such relations as the investment can be expected to provide for one's own future needs.

It is particularly important to reciprocate gifts received from another ethnic group. These outside bond friendships necessitate more investment than those with Hor bond friends. What one receives from Hor bond friends helps, but is likely to be less valuable than the things received from bond friends in other groups. Goats, oxen, and sorghum are normally the only items Hor bond friends can provide for each other.

What Hor Bond Friends Receive from Other Groups

The data indicate that most of the important things Hor require for rituals and for production do not come from their markets. Of course, honey can be bought in Hor markets, but Hor often cannot afford to pay the market price in cash or ammunition; the markets provide honey for traders who transport it to urban areas like Arba Minch and not to Tabya or to Hor villages. Bond friends are not as stingy and rigid as the markets. Hence, for the Hor it is much better and cheaper to get such things from bond friends than from the market where weighing, calculating prices, and immediate payment are the rule rather than reciprocal generosity and kindness.

Another trouble with the Hor market is that there are essential items that may not be there in the amount needed or may not even be there at all. I have not, for example, seen any knife, axe, hoe blade, or pot in the Hor market. Knives, axes, and hoes are tools of production that are essential for irrigation work, for clearing the bush, for making animal enclosures, for constructing houses, and for harvesting sorghum. Pots are used for cooking and making coffee. Coffee is the medium through which prayer and blessing are made possible and a broken pot in a house is a threat of disaster. These items are obtained only from bond friends in other groups; therefore, if at all possible, one needs to have at least one bond friend in another group.

The Hor seek honey, tobacco, cotton blankets, tobacco seasoning, baking pans, knives, and headrests from Hamar bond friends and formerly they sought arrows from Karmet bond friends. The Hamar receive goats, heifers, and sorghum from Hor and each side receives a goat from any bridewealth received by their bond friend. Each attends any wedding festivities held in his friend's *wori*. From the Konso, the Hor require unhusked coffee beans, tobacco, cotton blankets, and sorghum, especially if the Konso harvest was good and the Hor had suffered from drought. The Konso in exchange need donkeys, small stock, heifers, oxen, ostrich feathers, game skins, giraffe tails, ivory, etc., which the Hor may get from across the Kenyan frontier, or perhaps from a hunting expedition with their Hamar friends in Karo land in the Mago National Park. The D'assanetch require and receive cowhides for roofing their houses, donkeys, tobacco seasoning, ostrich feathers, ammunition, and

cloths from their Hor friends. What bond friends of one group require from bond friends in other groups depends on what is available to meet their needs. As the Hor consider it taboo to keep bees, to grow coffee, to make pots, and to engage in metal work, they seek to obtain these products from their bond friends in other groups that produce honey, coffee, pots, and metal work. The prohibition of production actually creates the basis for interethnic bonds.

Bond Friends Exchange Visits

Bond friendship is not only about exchange of essential items, it involves mutual visiting and hospitality often accompanied by kin and friends. Gumadi frequently visits his Hamar bond friends; his reasons for doing so vary. Once, when his wife was about to bear a child, he needed a fat mountain goat to feed her during the birth and seclusion period and so he went to his bond friends. Other Hor go to attend the Hamar jumping-over-the-cattle ceremony of a bond friend's son or other relative or when they themselves are faced with preparations for a wedding, perhaps the wedding of a son or a daughter of another bond friend, or of a brother's son, for which honey and tobacco are required. Some simply go to visit and to eat roast goat in a bond friend's house.

Such occasions give the guest not only leisurely days of eating, drinking, and chatting in the mountains, but also give him experiences of other people and places. Such experience is useful for the Hor and can be seen in relation to the Hor idea of knowing about the other and being known by the other during such visits. The Hor say, "You take sandals off your feet when you enter a house, but not your eyes." This is said with reference to the care that needs to be taken by the Hor during the visits of their friends when there is conflict between the group the bond friend comes from and the Hor. The Hor try to avoid letting their property be spied upon.

If the situation in the land of the host is good, a goat will be slaughtered and a fresh slit skin bracelet, *mend'etcha,* will be put around the guest's wrist and strips of a goat's stomach fat around his neck. Only the guest and those who have accompanied him on the visit can consume the meat. Honey wine will be brewed for the guest. The provision of honey wine and fat indicate the seniority and honor bestowed on the

guest. Stomach fat and *mend'etcha* are the prerogatives of Qawot ritual chiefs, clan heads, heads of *wori*, and senior age set members (the Jald'aba and Mura), the leaders of the age organization. The seniority given to a guest honors him but has to be reciprocated at a later stage.

During such visits the guest is entitled to full protection as a member of his host's community and any offence against the guest is considered an offence against the host. The group, which the guest visits, must recognize him and acknowledge him as a friend of their member. Using such recognition a guest is entitled to establish friendships with other people of the same group. He can trade his goods for other people's goods and any bond friend from another place who has accompanied him on this trip can trade with them. When planning such visits, a Hor bond friend may arrange to bring his Hor, Konso, or Borana bond friends along with him for a visit. His accompanying guests should be able to enjoy the same kind of freedom of movement and protection he is given by his hosts. Although this is the ideal, serious problems may arise unexpectedly.

Ello, the only son of old Arjan, went to visit his Borana bond friend. After his arrival in Borana, his host asked him to go hunting with the host's younger brother and to bring back game meat. Ello did as instructed to please his bond friend. On their way back from hunting, the bond friend's brother shot Ello from behind in the arm and Ello fell bleeding. Borana from a nearby settlement carried him to his bond friend's camp and from there he was carried to a clinic in the nearest urban area. The camp members paid for his treatment and fed him goat meat until he recovered. Later on they held the younger brother of the host and, after handing him over to the police, intervened to pay compensation of a couple of bulls to Ello. They then accompanied him back to Hor. This treatment of the wounded man and the compensation the Borana gave him, pleased Hor elders and no revenge was taken.

In a similar way, when Borana and Hor unexpectedly became involved in bloody conflict, there were a few Borana friends in Hor villages who did not know what was going on. Hor hid them and protected them and sent them off with an escort only after the conflict was over. They took charge of their property and looked after it so that it could be collected at a later date.

Events in the area are unpredictable and conflicts can break out when Hor or other bond friends are on a visit somewhere else. Such incidents, Hor say, have not endangered Hor on visits elsewhere in the past. Hor usually take note of how many of their people are away on visits at any given moment. At the beginning of 1996 over 13 men were in different parts of Hamar, and one was in Nyangatom when a Hor man named Baje shot a Hamar man as he was dining in the house of his Hor bond friend. There was panic in Hor country. The Hor did not wait to see if their thirteen men in Hamar country would be killed. Instead, they handed Baje to the relatives of the dead Hamar guest to be killed in revenge. What this indicates is that although bond friendship is independent of the political structure of each group, its smooth functioning is valued and actively protected.

If a communal ritual is performed during a visit of a bond friend, the visitor will sit in a place appropriate to his age and status. If meat is distributed, he is entitled to those parts to which his age set status entitles him. If the group where he is a guest is going on a raid, he is entitled to join the raid if he chooses and to a fair share of any loot according to the tradition of his hosts. If his host is doing some agricultural work, he may help.

A visit to a bond friend may be arranged at a short notice when one is faced with a problem. A Hamar man from Wangabaino sent a message to Arato of Egude saying that he intended to visit him. He added that he would expect Arato to take him to Arba Minch hospital as he was having problems with his breathing. He came to Tabya where Arato had a second house and was given a bracelet of fresh goatskin and a stomach fat necklace. He asked Arato to buy him a second-hand cloth to use during their stay in Arba Minch. Arato bought him one and they went to Arba Minch for over a month for which Arato covered the cost.

At the beginning of a visit, a guest bond friend informs his host of his wishes and tells his host when he plans to go back. Before he leaves, the things he requires may be ready for him to take. If times are bad, he will be told to come back at some other time. If the bond friend (and his accompanying friends) are trying to sell their firearms and ammunition but are unsuccessful, they may leave them with the bond friend for him to look after or to convert into livestock. Host bond

friends are responsible for the free accommodation, food, and drinks of honey wine for the guests. A goat should be slaughtered for them.

Networks of Bond Friends

Borana, Hor, Tsamako, Banna, Maale, Marta, Bussa, Gamo, Gawad'a, Kholme, Konso, Banna, Karo, and Hor are connected in an extensive network of bond friendship that has certainly existed for a long time. It is evident from Schlee and Sobania and others work in the area that this institution has deep roots (Galaty and Bonte 1991, 15; Sobania 1991, 124–36; Schlee 1994; Sobania 1988, 4–5).

The terms the communities of the region use to denote this relation between members vary. Hamar, D'assanetch, and Maale use the term *bel* to denote a relation a person enters into with a person of a different group. Gamo use the term *jala* or *lagge*. Hor refer to the relationship and the person in it as *jala*. This term is widely used among the Gamo, Konso, and the Borana to denote a person with whom such a relation is established. Going to the south along the valley west of the Gamo Mountains, *bel* and *jala* denote this bond and practice and are used by the different groups for the same relationship.

The Hor speak of inheriting bond friends with whose ancestors their ancestors had such a relation for generations. Such long-standing relationships between families exist within Hor country and between different pastoral people in the region. The network of bond friendship consists of relationships formed between individual families for their mutual benefit; however, the network can only operate effectively if there is peace in the region. When war breaks out, bond friendship between men of the opposing sides does not end, but remains latent only to start functioning again as soon as peace is re-established. During times of group conflict, the partners on both sides keep careful account of things owed by both parties in the relationship and claims will be made when relations are reactivated after peace has been reached between the leaders of the groups.

When conflicts make it difficult for trade between other groups to exist, the network of a Hor may be used by his bond friends through the Hor friend. For example, if a Borana person wants his rifle or ammunition to be sold in a Hamar market and cannot do this because the Hamar

are enemies, the Hor man does it for him by going to his Hamar bond friend's house and making use of his contacts. He uses his rights to free lodging and to food and security when he travels within the bounds of his bond friend's group territory, and also to obtain freedom to bargain the sale of the item for a reasonable price.

Passing Barriers

A political barrier between groups resulting from conflict that has involved bloodshed may sometimes be broken by a bond friend from the other side. The ties of friendship may provide sufficient security.

Baqalu, a man from El Kunne in north Borana, was on a visit to Hor with his Borana wife, a Karmet woman, and a Borana man and his Hor wife who was originally from Murale of the Marle section of Hor. Baqalu had many important Hor bond friends. They included Arbla (killer of two male ostriches with one bullet) who is a known man-killer and a wealthy man living in Egude; Jarsa Ghino, a wealthy man who currently resides in Kulama; Iyya Bokao (Dalle Armar), Qawot of Tsamako; and Hunna Arshall, Qawot of Gandaraba.

Arbla was away on a visit to his Hamar bond friend. Before arriving in Marle, Baqalu and his group sent a message from Karmet land about their intention to come to Marle and asked for an escort as the relation between the Hor and the Borana had remained bad since the 1991 conflict that cost hundreds of lives. Baqalu's team was brought in with the help of an escort just in case. He brought with him a donkey loaded with gifts for his Hor bond friends in Marle, Kulama, and Kuile. He also brought a heifer born to Arbla's cow which is kept at El Kunne in Borana country and which calved a few years back, after the 1991 Borana-Hor fighting. When Baqalu arrived, Arbla's wives laid out a cowhide and served him coffee, milk, and dumplings. They could not kill a goat for him, as this is a man's responsibility. He relaxed. His arrival was big news. Children and adults alike gathered around to see the Borana group. Baqalu brought news to the Hor about developments in Borana country. Previously, the Hor had only received news about the Borana and their Borana friends indirectly from Konso traders who traveled between Hor and Borana countries. But, as the Konso and the Borana were long-standing enemies, the news tended to be prejudiced.

Baqalu's news included information about Borana bond friends of the Hor, about their health, their property, their families, deaths, etc. Baqalu also brought news about whether Borana in his area of north Borana wanted peace with the Hor, whether they were prepared to come to the cattle gates of the Garle and Olmoque Qawots to seek peace. He brought news about water wells, pastures, cattle, and crops. He provided information about life in south Borana—about the people of Hoboq and Marmaro and about their opinion regarding their current relations with the Hor and whether they were ready to enter the cattle gates of the Hor, bringing animals for peace.

However, the group's arrival was greeted with suspicion. In the evening of the day of their arrival, an urgent meeting of both Marle villages was called at a place in front of the space separating the villages of Egude and Murale. Surprisingly, this meeting was not called at the assembly place. Young people at the meeting threatened to kill all the visitors. Some curses against Borana were uttered. Old Arjan of Egude, a land distributor, rose to speak. "People do not take their eyes off as they do their rubber sandals when they enter your house," he said. In making this comment he was not encouraging hostility against the visitors but was urging caution and vigilance. He was suggesting that the guests' eyes would note the Hor situation and that Baqalu would report what he had experienced in Hor country to the Borana of El Kunne when he went back.

A number of interesting points arise. It is instructive that a strained relation between groups does not necessarily hinder the working of bond friendship. Many people felt that Baqalu had the right to enjoy the privilege of being entertained as a guest by his Hor counterparts although some people did object and even threatened to kill him and members of his team. Baqalu was protected and entertained in spite of the difficult relations between the two groups. Such contacts can be used as a means of knowing about the other group. Old Arjan's suggestion was that Baqalu should be given a clear impression of Hor vigilance. In an interview in 1995, this was what he said:

> Give them [the guests] milk and sorghum dumplings. Brew them coffee. Put a goat's stomach fat around their necks. Let the boys be

properly armed in the village and when they go to the bush so that the guests will see how vigilant we are. We want our cattle to go to the mountains, we want Borana cattle in Hor, in the delta.

This brought to an end the tension between some of the young people and the guests and at the same time it set up a situation in which Baqalu would be likely to report the Hor situation in an appropriate way when he returned to Borana country.

Interrogating a Hor Traveler

It is a very common practice in Hor for someone who has recently returned from a visit to a bond friend to be interrogated about conditions among the bond friend's group. Ngakas is of D'assanetch origin but has taken Hor identity and speaks the languages of the Hor and of the D'assanetch well. After every trip with Konso traders to D'assanetch, Hor elders pose many questions for him to answer. He explained to me what happens each time a person returns from a trip: "When a Hor man comes back from a trip, coffee is brewed and elders ask him about his going and coming back. 'What have you seen where you went? How did you get on?'" Ngakas, now a Hor of Gandaraba, speaks about such questioning as unique to the Hor when he responded to my question "What is it that makes the Hor unique compared to the D'assanetch or the Hamar?"

The bond friendship network may provide important advance information about the ill intentions of a neighboring group. Information may be passed between friends who owe each other loyalty that transcends group affiliation. There were, for example, cases in 1991 in which Borana bond friends alerted their Hor bond friends about Borana preparations to attack the Hor.

Size of the Network and Reasons for Hor Centrality

The Hor have bond friends among the Borana, Tsamako, D'assanetch, Hamar, Konso, Karo, Karmet, and Nyangatom. These groups cover much of the large area that lies between Somalia and southern Sudan. As we have seen, relations between the various groups have not always been peaceful. Compared to the rest, the Hor seem to have

better access to most groups, as they tend to have the smallest number of groups that they regard as enemies. Over the last three decades the Hor have regarded the Maale, the Borana, or the Hamar as their enemy at any given time. They did not have two enemies at the same time. This has allowed them to make more effective use of their network of bond friends than other groups. They have used their network on behalf of others as well as on their own behalf.

This centrality of the Hor in the network can be explained by the allegiance most of the above groups have to the senior Qawots of the Hor, which is expressed by their entering the cattle gates of the senior Qawots with various gifts. This is institutionalized entry. Rufo Ali, the Qawot of the Garle, can list the kinds of gifts the above groups have brought to the House of Garle for generations.[19] Hor cattle gates are famous throughout the region. Seeking human, animal, and crop fertility and victory over their enemies, the neighbors of the Hor entered the gates with gifts and went out of them with blessings. In fact, these gates provide a key to understanding the operation of regional linkages.

The regional groups in the network do not speak the same language as each other, but the Hor speak the languages of the Hamar, D'assanetch, and Tsamako. They use the Borana language for communicating with Karmet, Konso, Borana, and Gabra. This helps to make the Hor and their land central in interethnic commerce and communication.

The prayers and blessings of Hor Qawots strengthen the allegiance of all groups, but particularly of Hor who use the bond friendship network for trade, to the Fund'o institution and to the traditional routes and services it provides. The accommodating way the Hor handle outsiders in Tabya allows these outsiders the freedom to live their own lives in their own way. The Hor are flexible enough to work in cooperation with these outsiders as is shown in the Jald'aba-Fundo joint exercise of power in Tabya.

Those with Bond Friends

Not every Hor is able to have bond friends. It is prestigious to have bond friends, but it costs a lot to keep the relationship going. Maintaining such relationships involves receiving the bond friends, treating them well, giving access to information about one's family, one's cattle, one's

sorghum plots, and one's friends, including one's bond friends in other lands. It involves exchanges of visits during important family events such as weddings and supporting each other with items essential for occasions that the person engaged in the preparations may need.

Jarsa Ghino, currently a resident of Kulama, was a Jald'aba in Egude. He is one of the Hor people who has the greatest number of bond friends in most groups. Table 1 lists his bond friends by group, by locality, and by the things given and received.

Table 1. Jarsa Ghino's bond friends

Group	Locality	Name of Bond Friend	Given	Received
Borana	Marmaro	Halake Dabbaso	1 cow, 5 donkeys, 26 goats, 1 gourd of honey, killed 2 goats for him	3 cows, 3 shirts, 4 shorts, a pair of sandals, 1 quintal of coffee
	Marmaro	Mudda Damicha	1 donkey, brewed him honey beer, killed a goat for him during visit	1 garment, expects to pay a visit when peace is restored
	Marmaro	Jarso Halake	Killed a goat for him; he did not come back after the war	1 garment, 1 pair of trousers, 1 shirt, 5 M16 bullets (from brother)
	Makannes	Oba Dabbaso	1 heifer, 4 goats, 1 gourd of honey; made 2 visits	2 calves; made 2 visits
	Makannes	Malichcho Godana	1 bull, 6 goats, killed 3 goats for him, 3 donkey loads of sorghum.	1 garment, a goat was killed for him
	Hammessa	Halake Oda	4 goats	1 heifer
	Dibe Gayya	Sora Kasso	1 cowbell, 1 garment, 1 cow	A goat was killed for him; invited Jarsa to visit when peace is restored
	Sirmite Guddo	Ghinda Boru	1 donkey load of sorghum	1 garment, a goat was killed for him.
	T'addacha Bella	Bonayya Dabbaso	1 cow	1 cow
	Kunne	Baqallu Wolde Mariam	Brewed honey beer, killed a goat for him, 6 trousers, 10 shirts	Brewed honey beer, 15 goats, 1 donkey, 2 cows
Konso	Kholme	Fillaya Galtuma	Killed a goat for him, 2 goats, 1 donkey, 1 heifer, 1 bull	2 donkey loads of maize, 2 donkey loads of coffee, a goat was killed for him, 1 garment, seeds
	Kholme	Gaydare Gayya	Killed a goat for him, 1 cow	1 donkey load of coffee, 2 garments
	Dokattu	Bichitto Kalte	1 cow, 1 goat	2 gourds of honey
	Tabya (Horland)	Lemma Gebre Tsadik	2 cows, 2 goats	2 gourds of honey
	Tabya (Horland)	Kussiya	1 underwear, 1 shirt	1 sheep, 1 big ox
	Tabya (Horland)	Halle	1 bull	1 garment, spirit worth *birr* 2.00; friendship ended
Bura/ Tsamako	Gisma	Iyya Gosha (Alle)	2 donkey loads of sorghum, 1 donkey	1 big gourd of honey, 1 pot of honey
	Gisma	Iyya Gusho	1 gourd of honey, 1 donkey load of sorghum, 1 cow	4 cows
	Gisma	Qora	1 cow	1 goatskin bag of tobacco, 1 goat was killed for him, 1 axe
	Bonqole	Wole Utala	1 donkey load of sorghum	1 gourd of honey
	Kufuri	Ello Lokuruk	1 garment	1 carved wooden milk pot

Group	Locality	Name of Bond Friend	Given	Received
	Kufuri	Bali	5 goats, 1 cotton blanket	3 gourds of honey
Hamar	Assile	Apali Nasa	2 heifers	12 goats
	Assile	Orgomba	1 heifer	3 goats
	Assile	Heilamba	2 donkey loads of sorghum, 20 bullets *Albain* type	1 sheep when Jarsa's wife gave birth, 4 gourds of honey
	Assile	Heila (son of Heilamba)	Not yet properly started	Not yet properly started
	Assile	Mord'e Nasa	2 cows, 1 shirt for his son	38 goats, 1 very big gourd of honey too big for a person to carry
	Assile	Bali Gimanasa	1 heifer	11 goats, 1 gourd of honey, expects 10 goats and 1 donkey
Gelleba/ D'assanech	Inkoria (Kenya)	Nonkolol Merriya	Killed a young female sheep for him, 1 cow, 1 donkey, 1 calf, sent him five bulls in exchange for his rifle, bought him 1 garment	Took him to Gelleba for visit, killed a goat for him, attended a ritual with 8 other Hor, attended feast, 10 goats, 4 cattle, killed sheep for him and given fat necklace and skin bracelet, presented with a rifle.
	Inkoria (Kenya)	Lottur (Lowasimoy)	Gave him *Demitfor* rifle	He brought 4 cattle, 2 big goats
	Narich	Nakuma (inherited friend)	Jarsa's father gave 1 garment; Jarsa gave 1 calf	Gave Jarsa's father a heifer; visited Jarsa, gave him 1 donkey
	Narich	Nyongole attabaria	Invited him to visit; killed a goat for him, gave him 1 bull, 1 garment, a bag of coffee	1 donkey
Hor	Kuile	Dalle Armar (*Qawot* of Tsamako)	—	4 goats
	Kuile	Argari Shanqara (kin)	A gourd of sorghum for his daughter's wedding.	1 goat
	Sere	Bongo Arshal	1 big goat	1 big sheep
	Sere	Olle Sala	2 goats	2 goats
	Sere	Argari Bidini	1 bull	1 donkey, 1 goat, 1 gourd of sorghum beer for daughter's wedding
	Sere	Gura Qallate	1 bull, 1 cow to milk that later died	
	Sere	Lokitala Miri	1 big bull, 2 goats, 10 cows to milk	1 heifer, brewed honey beer, 1 goat

Most Hor who could not afford to establish such a network have a smaller network for basics such as tools, headrests, stools, and tobacco obtainable in exchange for small amounts of coffee, salt, and loincloth given to their counterparts in Hamar, for example.

This network is for trade, exchange, ritual benefits, peacemaking, alliance formation, etc. The Hor have a prominent place and central location in the network. They speak the languages of the major groups of the region. This is evidence of the long tradition of interaction and coexistence of the Hor and the other groups of the area. The Hor have shared their resources with these groups. Sharing of resources with peaceful neighbors seems to have been a main feature of the region before the people were incorporated into the state domains of Ethiopia

and Kenya. The tradition of sharing resources continues to this day as a strategy for coexistence and for surviving difficult times. The limited success of the states of the region in improving the living conditions of the people and in making their lives and properties secure means that the people continue to depend on indigenous institutions that provide for their needs quite effectively.

Conclusion

Bond friendship is interestingly reminiscent of that most famous of tribal institutions, the Trobriand *kula*. Like the *kula*, bond friendship provides an institutionalized means by which members of groups that are largely politically autonomous and potentially hostile to one another can interact on the basis of economic partnerships. Of course, the goods exchanged are more varied in bond friendship and the formalities are less elaborated, but, like the *kula*, bond friendship is a set of constantly self-renewing treaty-like contracts that tend to sustain peace (or limit the likelihood of endless war) between hostile local groups that lack centralized authorities, allowing them the security to trade valued resources that are differentially distributed in the region (Leach and Leach 1983, 6). It is also probably true that, as in the *kula*, members of these southwest Ethiopian societies can, like Jarsa Ghino whose transactions I have listed, obtain power, wealth, and prestige in their own communities through the success in their transactions with outsiders (Leach and Leach 1983, 7). Unlike the *kula*, bond friendship operated and continues to operate, not on its own, but in combination with other institutions—notably the wide-ranging ritual influence of the Qawots and the dispute resolution procedures of the Fund'o—to provide a complex and varied set of interethnic linkages in southwestern Ethiopia.

Notes

1. While they have been abolished in many places, the roadblocks in the major centers in the south, Shashamanne and Awassa, remain intact and a thorough check of goods and personal effects of passengers on buses and trucks is still carried out. State- and NGO-owned cars and cars operated by "whites," *ferenjis*, are exempt. At Tabya, cars are required to stop at the station where they are searched. Most of the roadblocks that existed in Soddo, Arba Minch, Lante, and Konso had been removed when I was last

there in 2000. Cars operating between Yavello, Konso, and Tertalle have to report to stations in Konso and Tertalle and undergo a thorough search of luggage and of people before they stop in these towns.
2. One such example are the Gamo. Covering a large area and located between the Omo River in the west and Lakes Abaya and Chamo in the east, the Hamasa River to the north and the Woito River (below Zargulla) to the south, they are tied into a wide network of trade. This network operates within the 60 autonomous *deres* of Gamo and with larger and smaller neighboring groups such as the Dawro, Basketo, Maale, and Zala to the west. The network also involves the Kore, the Gedeo, and the Guji across the lakes mediated by the Haruro boat makers of Lake Abaya and the Ganjule of Lake Chamo. In this large mountainous region of Gamo country, over 25 large markets operate in which the law and order of the market, security and well-being of both people and property is observed by the market assembly (*dubusha*), headed by the fathers of the land (*dere adde*). Trade routes criss-cross the mountains and reach the various other peoples in other groups as mentioned earlier. These trade areas cover different ecological areas and ethnic groups and have endured over centuries.
3. Some similar issues to those discussed in this paper are raised by C. Humphrey (1992) and by M. Sahlins in the last two chapters of *Stone Age Economics* (Sahlins 1974).
4. See Tadesse (1997, 1999) on Hor warfare and fertility. It must be noted here however, that the severing of genitals for the purposes mentioned above is performed once in a generation or even at greater intervals. The last time the Hor say they killed members of such a specific group was when they were given 16 rifles by Italians to escort them during their flight through areas occupied by groups unfriendly to Italians.
5. I employ the term "bond friend" to mean a ritually established relationship between consenting married adult male individuals of either the same or differing ethnic groups.
6. Konso, including those in Purqud'a and Jarso, regularly visit Hor Qawots and also invite the Qawot to their land to provide blessings for rain and to curse their enemies. Hunna of Egude was in Purqud'a in 1995 for this purpose.
7. All trucks owned by the various state institutions and by NGOs working in the Omo area charge for passengers and goods. Only privately owned trucks are entitled to charge, but in practice all the trucks do so. Tabya to Arba Minch costs a person 30 *birr* (£3.00 or $4), to Konso or to Tourmi costs 10 *birr*, to the Omo costs 15 *birr*.
8. I counted fourteen such checkpoints between Addis Ababa in central Ethiopia and Omo-Rate' in the south between 1994 and 1996 (see Map 1). This indicates not only the extent to which movements of goods suffer delays, but also the extent of the uncontrolled abuse of power by the police. There are cases of beatings of passengers, illegal confiscation, and unchallenged taking of money.
9. The worst punishment that is given to a policeman for taking bribes from passengers is to transfer him to an off-the-road police station west of the

Omo or to one of the police stations in the mountains that are inaccessible by car.

10. A black garment worn for rituals by grooms, worn by Qawots when they curse, and used to cover the corpses of men of bracelet-wearing clans.
11. One of the factors underlying the great expansion of the Samburu in the nineteenth century may have been the fact that they were "at the best of times . . . among the region's most productive pastoralists" (Sobania 1991, 121).
12. Donaldson Smith mentions Hor use of loincloths and head-dresses of gay colored material, made in Merka and Modisha, which the Hor had obtained from the Borana (Smith 1969, 262). He explains in other places in his book where Merka and Modisha are: " . . . Merka and Modisha, two Italian ports, to the east of the mouth of the Jub" and "Some of the ivory finds its way to Merka and Modisha on the Italian coast near the mouth of the Jub" (Smith 1969, 154, 373). He also hints at a trade route between the district surrounding Lake Rudolf and the port of Mombasa on the Kenyan coast (Smith 1969, 373).
13 Jald'aba together with Mura land distributors form the leadership of the generation set in power in Hor country.
14. I heard of the death of Lemma at the end of 1998.
15. Money is also contributed for other purposes. The Konso Peoples Democratic Organization, one of the EPRDF political organizations, appealed to the Fund'o office for financial contributions for one of its annual celebrations. The network asked its branches for contributions suggesting the amount expected from each. The Hor branch was asked to pay a sheep and 50 *birr* as its contribution to the political organization.
16. Today the network of the Fund'o and its appointed officials covers key areas in southern Ethiopia. In administrative Konso one finds its councils in Garatte, Fasha, Turo, and in seven other villages in Gawad'a. The Hamar Fund'o in Tourmi is headed by Gulilat and the Jinka (provincial town of the current province of south Omo) Fund'o by Adeye, the Qey Afer (Banna) Fund'o is headed by Lodaibo Galabo, the Taltale Fund'o (Borana) by Dabbaso Ch'olta and the Yaballo (Borana) Fund'o by a descendant of Guyyo Fund'o, and the Yirga Ch'affe (Gedeo) Fund'o by Kalkalo Kussie, etc.
17. Three shops are owned by Ufo, Halle, and Wollamo, all Konso traders; the fourth by Assaminew who is a school teacher of mixed ethnic background; the fifth by Alemayehu, a policeman (originally from Porqud'a Konso); and the sixth by Alpha, a Tsamako employee of the Norwegian Save the Children organization.
18. Two families, that of Arato P'oqong'a and that of the widowed sister of Ghido whose husband died in the 1991 Borana-Hor conflict, named their baby sons Tadesse. To the former I gave a goat and butter and to the latter a baby shirt. This automatically makes Arato and his wife Bokao my parents and my namesake becomes my little brother.
19. See Tadesse (1999, 247) for details of gifts brought from neighboring groups to the cattle gates of Hor Qawots.

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Clans, Kingdoms, and "Cultural Diversity" in Southern Ethiopia: The Case of Omotic Speakers

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Introduction

The region currently addressed in the academic literature as well as in political discourse in Ethiopia as "Omotic speaking groups" is a relatively recent construct first used by linguists towards the end of the 1960s. The dominant image of this region, and of southern Ethiopia at large, is diversity: ethnic, linguistic, and cultural. Ever since the southern region was incorporated into Ethiopia towards the end of the nineteenth century, the question of how to administer (in reality, how to control) these "disparate peoples" of the south has engaged the various agents of the central government. Since the early 1990s these "peoples" of southern Ethiopia are being administered under a hierarchical political construct referred to as the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS). Beneath the politico-administrative category SNNPRS lies an assumption that this is a region of disparate groups of people where geography is the apparent unifying factor.

In academic research undertaken on southern Ethiopia so far, some aspects of the diversity of the communities and "cultures" of this region have been documented as ethnographies, histories, studies of local cultural or knowledge systems, and so on. There is not point in denying the importance of such documentation. In fact, there is not enough documentation (ethnographic or otherwise) on all the societies of southern Ethiopia, nor on all the important aspects of most of these societies. However, what has been critically missing is comparative analysis.

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Typically in the ethnographic monographs (like is the case in the rest of Africa, as Wendy James once remarked), attention to substantive differences between tribal groups seemed to take priority over fluidity of interconnections, movement, circulation, or exchange of language, goods, ideas, marriage, and other human interactions, which underlie the formation, transmission, and transformation of patterned social life on the ground.

Though it largely went unanalyzed, the fact that the "Omotic-speaking groups" of southwestern Ethiopia, for instance, do share at least what Leach (1954) calls a common ritual language or common "cultural grammar," was noted by many observers (Haberland 1959; Straube 1959; Donham 1985). For instance, Donham (1985, 38) wrote: "From Kaffa on the west to Wolayta on the east to Banna and Hammar on the south the prosperity of peoples, the fertility of their lands, and the multiplication of their cattle and goats were said to depend on the vitalizing presence of divine kings." Though he did not provide the actual data, the late Jacques Bureau (1990, 5) put forth that "we have to stress that the same patrilineal clans criss-cross the whole area [Ometo] and that all these 'nationalities' [of Ometo] have close historical links; the proof for this are the oral traditions, the toponymy, and the anthroponomy of the whole Ometo region." Such interconnections at the level of the deepest and most fundamental aspects of the values of these communities cannot be explained by mere geographical juxtaposition. How could it then be analyzed in order to be explained?

From both of the observations just cited we need to ask: to what extent does this "imagined interconnectedness" of a kind in the "cultural universe" of these communities of Omotic-speaking groups relate to the actual social interactions among living persons doing ordinary things? Without answering this question, terms such as southern Ethiopia, Omotic-speaking peoples, and Ometo[1] appear to be at best mere linguistic constructs and at worst unappealing geographic labels sustained by "top-down" politico-administrative means. The dynamics of actual and/or imagined interconnections between people across the variously defined boundaries in this region and the patterns of change in such interconnections in response to macro-political changes pose an interesting challenge awaiting in-depth comparative analysis.

In this paper I attempt to show how the perspective of variation may help to understand the nature of interconnection between the apparently diverse yet deeply interrelated Omotic-speaking groups of southwestern Ethiopia. My ethnographic data come primarily from Wolaitta and Dawro, both of which had their own autonomous political units (kingdoms) before their forced incorporation into Ethiopia during the late nineteenth century. By exploring cultural knowledge and practices pertaining to *qomo* (clans) in the social life of people in these societies, and through a preliminary mapping of actual social relations and imagined relatedness between clan members across political boundaries, I argue that while variation in time and space in aspects of culture(s) within each political unit and between Ometo political units is ubiquitous, there is a high-level of shared cultural knowledge and practices across this region. How can we explain such shared cultural practices in the face of a history of apparently rigid political boundaries? What analytic methodology is appropriate to understand the nature of diversity of southern Ethiopian societies?

A Methodological Note

Here I shall make a short note about the methodology I used to carry out an anthropological project of providing a comparative analysis on aspects of social organization. Comparison in anthropology involves identifying two or more forms as "variants" of "the same," which means constructing an overarching category within which the forms can be included, compared, and contrasted (Barth 1981, 1993). In this kind of comparison the concept of variation has emerged as a useful analytical tool. The challenge then is how to conceptually transform difference and diversity into the field of variability, and ultimately analyze how certain features tend to co-vary (Barth 1999). At least in anthropology it has become a common ontological assumption that variation characterizes human societies and that it constitutes a fundamental reality (Vayda 1994), while stable, persisting, and often vitally important social relations are maintained across variously defined boundaries (Barth 1969, 1994). This is clearly an important step forward to redress the inadequacies of past "essentialist" studies, which favored bounded, smaller units and fostered divisive tenets by exaggerating tribal boundaries and neglecting

broader, encompassing categories with which their subjects identify themselves at various levels (local, sub-regional, regional, national, or even global).

For my analysis of the Ometo material in this paper, I want to introduce Barth's (1993) conceptualization of "tradition of knowledge." A tradition of knowledge, as defined by Barth, is a body of (broadly shared) lore, images, concepts, ideas, and practices. This assumes that culture is embedded in knowledge (Keesing 1987) as much as the reverse. Knowledge as a modality of culture is shaped by processes of reproduction and flux; it is taught, learned, borrowed, created, and discarded (Barth 1999). This implies that by looking at how the knowledge of a population is produced and changed, we may be able to discover the processes that generate variation. The following then is an analysis of one fundamental aspect of Ometo culture as a collectively understood tradition of knowledge so defined. As an aspect of culture, a tradition of knowledge is neither internally homogeneous nor externally bounded. Also, the nature of this sharedness or collective understanding is to be interpreted within the general view of culture in contemporary anthropological literature as variably distributed among members of a society (see Rodseth 1998).

To apply a methodology of variation with an underlying assumption of continuity or sameness of a kind is not a simple exercise, however. An aspect of the methodological issue I want to raise in this limited space is the question of scale in the southwestern Ethiopian context. What does one assume, for instance, when one sets out to analyze variation between two political/territorial units (e.g., former kingdoms) of Ometo? What is the appropriate scale for doing comparison? I submit that a comparison of cultural variation between any two Ometo political units is an appropriate scale and it may be done as an analysis of internal variation within the same tradition of knowledge. What follows is a step towards such an analysis of variation in cultural knowledge and practices by taking the case of *qomo*. First a few remarks on the conceptualization of "brotherhood" in myths among Omotic-speaking groups.

The Idea of Brothers in Mythologies of Omotic-Speaking Groups

Several scholars of southern Ethiopia have noted the interconnectedness of the communities of southern Ethiopia in general and southwestern Ethiopia in particular. What has not been sufficiently analyzed, however, is what actually constitutes this interconnection at the regional or sub-regional level. Perhaps we can learn something about the nature of this interconnection between the communities of southwestern Ethiopia by looking at the various myths that exist in different versions. In his research on early church history in Wolaitta, Paul Balisky documented one such a myth, which states that seven brothers (Wolaitta, Gamu, Dawro, Gofa, Konta, Kutcha, and Borodda) came with their father and settled in Waho Gongolua (a cave in present day Wolaitta). "After a time," the myth continues, "Wolaitta claimed to have had his ancestral spirit tell him that he would be a great man and he would some day dominate his brothers. Then the six brothers left their original area and settled in the respective areas that are now named after them."[2] This myth was documented in Wolaitta. At least two points are apparent from this myth: a Wolaitta claim of seniority over his junior brothers (which is a common cultural genre throughout southern Ethiopia; see below) and at the same time a Wolaitta (self) critique of the domineering nature of those who claim seniority and who, on that account, ran the risk of resistance and ultimately being abandoned by the junior brothers.

From his Maale data, Donham (1985, 1999, see also his paper in this volume) notes that it was typically the younger brothers or seconds who escaped and ran away from their eldest brothers when they grew too demanding. Indeed, a recurrent theme in the origin myth among Omotic speakers is the notion of brothers (often more than two) coming from somewhere, one of them tending to dominate others on various grounds (such as being the eldest, coming first, or having communicated with ancestral spirit and having obtained the power to bless and curse), and commonly the juniors move out to what Donham calls a foreign ritual field. Donham himself documented one such a myth among the Maale:

> One day four strangers, *brothers*, along with their company arrived from a country to the east, Bussa, and they camped below the [Maale] chief's house. They spent the night and the next morning the eldest brother, the king of Bako, got out his fire drill and attempted to make fire. But when he twirled the fire stick taro instead of fire sprang forth. Then the others in the company said "You go to the high country! You are meant for there." So he left for Bako. The next elder brother, the king of Shangama, then tried his hand at the fire drill, and like his brother he failed. . . . The next eldest brother, the king of Banna, took up the task and he too failed. When a cow sprang forth from the fire drill, he was sent off to Banna. At last, Maaleka, the youngest brother took the fire drill and he, after all of others had failed, produced fire (Donham 1985, 40; emphasis added).

Such myths recount both the relatedness and tension between different political units such as Malle and Banna. Within the internal context of each such unit it is common to note the structural tension between eldest brothers (who as a rule inherit from their ancestors via their father the power to curse and bless, and the symbolic power of fertility) and the juniors, who either have to ritually depend on dominating elder brothers or run away and establish their own "units." The latter process could serve as a striking illustrative case of Kopytoff's (1987) thesis on African frontiers, which may help explain both diversity and such striking similarity (see below) of cultural practices found across this region. With the frontier perspective, Kopytoff argues that most African polities and societies were constructed out of "bits and pieces" of existing established societies. The African frontier, as he conceptualized it, consists of politically open areas nestling between organized societies but internal to larger regions in which they are found (9). The reasons for people to move to the frontier areas could be varied: internal rivalry, population pressure, famine, war, and so on. Jacques Bureau (1990) provides a paradigmatic example of how the Ganjule emerged from the small kingdom of Bonke (one of Gamo units) in a very recent past:

> Because of the dense population of the upper neighborhood, these Bonke settled there, in these lowlands which were later submerged by the uprising of the lake Chamo. In short Ganjule was born from the Gamo emigration and nature obliged these migrants to adapt: once peasants they became fishermen while fish remained taboo to their cousins and they, whose preferred tool had been hoe, had turned into boatmen. (5)

This is just to give an instance from the range of processes through which new territorial/political units of Ometo might have been born from an existing Ometo society. Just as the causes of immigration could be varied, so could the geographic destinations. But here I am concerned with processes *within* the region. As will be shown in the next section, neither the junior brothers who ran away nor the people like Ganjule cut off their kinship ties with their relatives "back home." *Qomo*, both in its ideological and sociological functions, served this important purpose of mediating links across political or ritual boundaries.

Clanship and Trans-Territorial Flow of Cultural Knowledge

The *qomo*[3] constitutes one of the most basic forms of personal identity throughout the Omotic-speaking region. The idea of *qomo* is emotionally flavored and forms the basis of actual (and imagined) social relationships between clan members, wherever they are thought to exist and whenever they happen to meet. *Qomo* in this sense is a kinship idiom with a concrete affective reality. It starts from the nearest family members interacting in daily life, such as father, mother, brothers, and sisters, and then extends further afield. In Ometo everyone is a member of a *qomo*, but people know only some members of their *qomo* and others are simply imagined to exist in distant places people just heard of. One's *qomo* is a relatively fixed aspect of a person's identity in the sense of being a category one belongs to for an entire lifetime. Changing it is extremely difficult, if not actually impossible. But *qomo* is a dynamic identity with regard to what people do with or about it, where and how it is made relevant, and what different generations of people think about it.

Both in Dawro and Wolaitta, for instance, clan operates as a kinship term that denotes the highest category of patrilineal descent of people with reference to a common ancestor. Segmentation of *qomo* in Ometo is

not as clearly structured as the segmentary lineage structure of, for instance, the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1990), but it is a common understanding that an entire *qomo* in both Wolaitta and Dawro is divided into what are called *so* (literally: houses), which may be referred to as lineages, and then into household heads.

In both places clans claim origin from a wide geographical space. In Dawro, for instance, where there are over 170 clans identified so far, only two clans claim to be native to Dawro; other places of origin include: Käfa, Wolaitta, Gofa, Maale, and even far away places such as Gondar and Wello in northern Ethiopia. Though some of the place names people mention as the place of origin of their clan may not sound likely—for example, Kalisia from Kemisse, Wello[4]—what actually counts is what the members of that clan believe as their origin place.

Membership of a clan transcends membership to any single Ometo political unit (ethnic group or former kingdom). When, for example, two persons from two different Ometo political units who never knew each other meet and happen to open a conversation, sooner or later they will ask each other about his/her clan. This is because similar clans are found in different places and members of most clans are not confined to any one political territory.

A young trader from Konta (from the Goshana clan) I met in Ameya, says:

> I have *dabo* (members of the Goshana *qomo* in this case) in Tercha (Dawro), Malo, Chata (Käfa), Konta Koysha, and Gofa. I was also told that I have *dabo* in Wolaitta. However, from my Dabo living in distant places so far I have close personal relations with those in Tercha and Chata only. I have never met others, I was only told I have relatives in all these places. If I happen to travel through any of these places I will try to meet my *dabo*. I am sure they will be very happy to know me as I am to meet any of them. (Interview at Ameya, March 2000)

Operating with such a sense of distribution in space, the underlying understanding when a Wolaitta and a Dawro (or two people from any two Ometo territorial units) ask about each other's clan is that there are members of one's clan (relatives) in the other's land and that this particular person might be one of them. We may try to look at the actual distribution in space of this imagined community of clan members across the region. My preliminary survey of distribution of clans in a few places in Ometo shows a striking overlap of distribution of clans across the political boundaries. For instance, out of the 45 clans found in Zima, a locality in lowland Dawro, 34 (76 percent) are found in Wolaitta. Of over 170 clans reported to exist in the whole of Dawro, 71 (about 41 percent) are reported to be found in Wolaitta. That means, out of the 182 clans identified in Wolaitta, about 39 percent reported so far are to be found in Dawro. In a locality called Koysha in lowland Konta, informants reported 28 clans to be found in their *hera* (locality). Of these, 14 (50 percent) were among the ones reported in Zima, Dawro, though the two localities are far away from each other. Expectedly, there is variation in clan distribution in different places within one political unit. For instance, a native Wolaitta, Abreham Babanto (1979), reported 133 clans in Wolaitta, whereas Chiatti (1984), an anthropologist who did his Ph.D. fieldwork in northern Wolaitta, identified 110 clans of Wolaitta. The match between the two lists is 64 clans, i.e., 48 percent of the clans Abreham reported are found in Chiatti's.

What pattern does the distribution of clans across space show and what accounts for such a distribution of similar clans across political boundaries? The following is one example of institutionalized practices among the Ometo of the pre-Menelik era (before the 1890s), which may partly explain why members of one clan are found in different political units. Ato Dodicho Dosha of the Arusi Gozo peasant association (highland Dawro) claims his great-great...grandfather came from Gofa as a war leader to help the king of Dawro when the latter was fighting with the king of Käfa. At that time, he further claims, some fighters also came from Wolaitta for a similar purpose and they and their descendants settled and remained as Dawro, since that was *Dere Woga* (tradition) of the day.[5] Note that the oral accounts also mention that the Dawro king of the time had to fight with the kings of Wolaitta, Kambata, Gofa, and Kucha, who tried to seize his territory (Elias, Shiferaw, and Abebech 1999, 126). During my interview, Dodicho mentioned the name of *Kati* Erashu Halala (son of king Erashu) as the king in office when his great-

great-grandfather came to Dawro. Halala is the most popular of Dawro kings for both expanding and defending the Dawro territory. Using a historical method of allowing 25 years for each generation of Dawro kings, Elias, Shiferaw, and Abebech (1999) estimate that Halala was in office sometime around 1757–82. According to the Dawro royal genealogy, it is exactly eight generations from *kati* Halala to Terefe, the grandson of the last Dawro king (A. Selassie), who lives in Addis Ababa now. Since no conventional documentation of pre-twentieth century history of Dawro and most of other kingdoms of southern Ethiopia is available, the dates and the nature of the institutional processes being described here as a background to the distribution of clans in the Omotic-speaking area are far from being precise. However, with information of various kinds and sources we may do better.

For instance, another informant from highland Dawro, who claims that his eighth "great-grandfather" came to Dawro at about the same time as that of Dodicho above but from a different place (Kucha) provides a precise genealogy of his ancestors and how their relationships run across political boundaries. Ato Asaro Arara (Woshesha clan), of the Arusi Gozo peasant association (highland Dawro) narrates:

> It was my eighth great-grandfather [traced as Asaro, Arara, Aya, Aka, Hassa, Worba, Loma, Lota] who came from Kucha [another former kingdom]. Up until Aya, frequent contacts were maintained with relatives in Kucha and Wolaitta. They used to attend events such as wedding, funeral, housing; and visit a *dabo* if seriously sick. However, my father maintained relations (with reciprocal visits every year) with only his *dabo* in Wargo and Lasho in Wolaitta. I myself used to have strong relations with my *dabo* in Wolaitta which to my dismay is weakening now. I have no doubt that my relatives in Wolaitta still maintain relation with relatives in Kucha since it was their father's death-bed will to keep in touch with relatives and also they are geographically closer to each other. Particularly during my father's time it was common to spend nights with relatives in Wolaitta or Kucha and the latter in Dawro travelling for hunting marches, trade, going to or coming from the then regional courts (in Arba Minch, Awassa, Jimma). I experienced so many of such nights accompanying my father as mule attendant (interviewed in Arusi Gozo peasant association, Dawro, August 1999).

What is important is not just the existence of similar clans in different places, or whether people's claim of coming from a certain place sometime in the past may be true, but that members of one clan residing in different territorial units actually believe that the members of their *qomo* exist in all these places and that they are real *dabo* (relatives) related by a common ancestor,[6] although they do not often trace the genealogy up until the 'apical clan ancestor'. More concretely, living persons maintain concrete relations with members of their clan beyond the geographical limits of the political unit.

According to Ometo clan ideology, descendants of one clan are thought to be blood brothers and sisters regardless of which political/territorial unit they reside. (Note that in a political context, people from different political units may view each other as enemies and as *alaga* [outsider].) The rule of clan exogamy prohibits intra-clan marriage whether either of the potential couple is from the same or different political units.

As informants insist, until as recently as the early 1990s there was no necessary contradiction between claiming origin (clan or otherwise) in a political unit different from where one is presently a member throughout Ometo political units. In such cases a person is supposed to (and often does) maintain contacts with *dabo* (members of the *qomo* in this context). In fact, if a person discontinues relations with his/her kinsmen in the place where he says he came from, this invites suspicion about a person's status and may even be debasing. This is because it is believed that if a person is from a "socially modest" background and if he (or she) is proud of his background he would maintain relations with his *dabo* or at least talk about them proudly. Thus, in the cases presented above, Asaro and Dodicho proudly disclosed their place of origin from Kucha and Gofa, respectively. They were equally proud to present themselves as Dawro now. This suggests that they changed their political belonging (in this case their ethnic identity), but they did not change their clan identity. This is in some parallel with Schlee's (1989) observation on

shared clanship among ethnic groups of the Ethio-Kenyan border, where he found ethnicity being fluid while clanship was a comparatively conservative principle. In the case of the Omotic-speaking area, there are ways in which the nature of political boundaries (with the tendency to be control-oriented and "disciplining") feeds into why people have to maintain clan networks beyond the control of a political unit.

How Shared Is Knowledge about Clans?

Despite the modernist denigration in certain "educated circles" in Ethiopia of *qomo* as a "backward" basis of relatedness, and hence to be abandoned, the traditions surrounding the clans are still among the core of the cultural heritage and values of this region. It is hard to think of culture in this region without the traditions and practices pertaining to clans. For many, clans still matter on issues of marriage, funerals, ideals of self-worth, and personal identity. But to what extent do members of a clan living in different places (far or near) agree on what is appropriate for their clan, or to what extent is what they know shared? That there may be variation in the knowledge and practices of members of the same clan residing in different territories is exactly what one may expect. The more interesting question is: if what the members of a clan living apart know about their clan converges, what accounts for it? We may attempt to answer this question by looking at how generally cultural knowledge about clans is reproduced and communicated.

In Dawro, for instance, an important institutionalized mechanism facilitating the reproduction of clan knowledge and intra-clan communication was a clan ritual locally referred to as *zarua eqa*,[7] which was held annually (see Freeman 2002 for a description of one such ritual in Doko [Gamo] with significant variation but also with a clear indication that this is a variant of *zarua eqa*). A generalized description of the *zarua eqa* ritual in Dawro follows.

For celebration of the annual *zarua eqa*, all adult members of one clan in a given *hera* (locality) contribute money to buy an animal to be sacrificed for the clan spirit (different clans have different spirit names) and other ritual items. They also contribute "first fruits" from crops such as ensete, taro, maize, haricot bean, and so on. A designated person from the clan then purchases the animal to be sacrificed (according to

Freeman, in Doko, the second senior person of the clan buys the animal). On the *zarua eqa* day, all the members of a given clan in the *hera*, including children and married women, and often clan seniors from neighboring *dere* (territory or locality) get together at the clan spirit's ritual site, commonly at the front yard of the sacrificing lineage head. The food is cooked by the women members, and the animal is ritually slaughtered by the eldest of the sacrificing lineage. After sacrifices to the ancestors and the clan spirit are made, people eat and drink. Then it is time to recall episodes from their clan's "history" and the deeds of "great fathers" (also at times of some extraordinary women) of the clan. As much as it is time to recall received knowledge, perhaps it is also time to modify or create new knowledge about a clan. Participation in this ritual for clan members is obligatory. If any member fails either to contribute the ritual items or join the celebration, the sanction is ex-communicating him or her for a long time to come. People usually do not fail to show up for weak excuses. Moreover, the event appears to be enjoyable and self-rewarding.

However, it is not uncommon that this ritual is interrupted for longer or shorter periods following any mishap. For instance, staging the *zarua eqa* ritual of the Zagaduria clan in Zima, lowland Dawro, was interrupted for almost twenty years from the mid-1970s, following the death of the clan sacrificer, who died without begetting a male descendant. Clan members did not agree on who should succeed. This was also the beginning of a new era, i.e., the socialist revolution in Ethiopia (1974). According to the emerging revolutionary Marxist ethos such things as clan rituals were defined as "backward," and hence there was pressure on the people to get rid of all such traditional rituals. In Zima, the *zarua eqa* of the Zirgomalla clan was restarted around 1996 because some clan members thought that the serious livestock disease—trypanosomiasis—was devastating their area partly due to their failure to observe *zarua eqa*.

Obviously when the ritual is enacted after such an interruption, conscious or incidental modification to the ritual is inevitable. Such is one of the processes that generates variation in what members of one clan living in different places know or believe about their clan.

Examples of such variation in knowledge about one clan among its members is not difficult to document. For instance, the Kalisia, Hayo

Malla, and Kawka clans are classified as Malla (of the Malla-Dogalla-Amara division) in highland Dawro, whereas all three are Dogalla in Wolaitta. In Dawro, this has an important implication since the Malla are associated with political leadership and the Dogalla are associated with indigenous spiritual leadership (for details, see Data 1997). In highland Dawro the *Tsossa* (spirit) of the Kawka clan is Gamonta, in lowland Dawro it is Molla, and in Wolaitta it is Qaidara.

My informants in highland Dawro believe the place of origin of Agarshua clan is Wolaitta, informants from lowland Dawro believe it is in Gamo, and those in Wolaitta believe the place of origin of Agarshua is Tämbaro. It should be stressed, however, that despite this variation in the knowledge that different people possess, Agarshua members in all these places believe they are from the same clan and hence related.

In short, there is a remarkable variation in cultural knowledge and practices among members of even a single clan about their own clan, let alone what everyone knows about all the other clans. In fact, debating between members of a clan about their "history" is common and at times a consensus may not be reached. However, open debate and recognition of variation do not make them stop seeing each other as members of the same clan and thus as related persons. Such variation seems to be the inevitable outcome of the modus vivendi of clans, i.e., decentralizing and spreading across space. In pre-Menelik southern Ethiopia, political boundaries in the region, at least in the Ometo area, were drawn by kingdoms or chiefdoms whose modus vivendi was to centralize. What are at present referred to as *biher/bihereseb* (ethnic groups, nations, nationalities, or "tribes") in southern Ethiopia bear the name of their pre-Menelik political history, i.e., the name of their kingdom or chiefdom.

The Legacy of Kingdoms

Following the promotion of ethnicity as a legitimate principle of political organization in the early 1990s by the new central government led by the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front [EPRDF], the history of pre-Menelik kingdoms/chiefdoms was used as part of the evidence to claim a status of "ethnic group." Nonetheless, looking at the actual internal organization of kingdoms shows some interesting similarities in their political structures. A brief comparison of the kingdoms of Wolaitta and Dawro may suffice to illustrate this.

In both Wolaitta and Dawro the same local term *Kawo* or *Kati* was used alternatively to refer to the "king." The office was sacred and hereditary, legitimately accessible only to the first-born son from the Wolaitta-Mala clan in Wolaitta and from the Tsata clan in Dawro. While power was abdicated from the Wolaitta-Mala by a "migrant" Tigre clan (with a claim of origin from Tigray) in Wolaitta (Tsehai 1975), in Dawro it was lost to a "migrant" Kawka clan (claiming origin from Gondar) (Data 1997).

Looking at the actual political structure of the two kingdoms, we see an interesting variation in the location of titles in the hierarchy, clearly showing that they were variants. For instance, while *Guda* is the title immediately below the *Kawo* in Wolaitta, it is the fourth rank in Dawro. *Erasha* is the third highest rank in Dawro, whereas it is sixth in Wolaitta; *Dana* is last but one in Dawro, whereas it appears with modifiers at the third, sixth, and seventh ranks in Wolaitta. Expectedly, there is variation in what these titles signify, as well as the associated responsibilities of the offices that bear the same names but stand at various distances from the *Kawo* between the two systems. The important point for the argument being pursued here is that similar political titles were used differently in the two Ometo Kingdoms. The significance of such an overlap of the very terms used would need to be explored in further detail.

Another variation between the two systems is that there are ranks that appear in only one of the systems and not in the other. *Woraba*, the second highest rank in Dawro, does not exist in Wolaitta, but, for instance, *balimola*, *dencha*, *tondia*, *ocholua*, and *mochona* appear only in the Wolaitta system and not in Dawro. While the Dawro structure had only six hierarchically ranked titles, the Wolaitta system had at least ten, with most ranks having their own subdivisions. This is hardly surprising since compared with its contemporaries, the kingdom of Wolaitta was the most centralized and complex in the area and had developed a state apparatus similar to that of Käfa (see Chiatti 1984; Donham 1985). We also need to note the fact that as the Dawro system has not yet been fully described, this may to some extent account for the relatively simple picture of it.

The fact that out of six ranked titles in Dawro, five are found in Wolaitta represented with the same local term is in line with Kopytoff's frontier thesis discussed earlier: frontiers as politically open areas nesting between organized societies giving rise to variation and elaboration of political units but which generally remain internal to the structure of larger regions in which they are found. Nonetheless, we do need historical research to look more closely into the exact nature of relationships between Omotic-speaking kingdoms and chiefdoms before the conquest of the 1890s. As an ethnographer, I can provide evidence from my own observations about social relationships, acts, ideas, and concerns of my informants in the present. Thus, in the following section, I will discuss how the continuities of cultural knowledge mediated by clans and the discontinuities marked by political history of the kingdoms in Ometo are currently made relevant.

The Politics of Distinctness and Relatedness: The Case of the Wogagoda "Language"

What do different actors make of diversity in different contexts of the changing present? The following is a description of how ordinary people from Wolaitta and Dawro dealt with variation in one social setting (taken from my field notes in August 1999).

It was a funeral ceremony of a locally influential person from Zima, lowland Dawro, an area neighboring Wolaitta. A group of mourners with a distinct symbolic dress called *landua*, performing a distinct dance, and a band of musicians (called *dinkia*) somewhat differently organized from those in Dawro came from Wolaitta, accompanying the deceased's daughter and his niece, who were married in Kindo, Wolaitta. As part of the expected behavior, on arrival at the funeral place these people from Wolaitta played their part in the funeral drama. From the performance one could clearly see the cultural boundary being put on display: the music, dance, the way they held spears, the way they scratched their forehead. When the Wolaitta performed in the drama, the Dawro, as spectators, were enjoying the Wolaitta dance and music and also commenting on what appeared "different" to them. For instance, the way the women scratched their forehead with thorns. After they performed their

duty, the Wolaitta guests in their turn started enjoying and showing amusement at some practices of the Dawro, which appeared different from those of the Wolaitta.

Looking at the social interaction on this occasion between ordinary people from both sides of the River Omo, one notices that the "historical boundary" between Wolaitta and Dawro was both displayed and transcended at once: at one moment people addressed each other as Wolaitta and Dawro, at the next moment this was irrelevant in the intimate conversations between *dabo* from both sides of the river. This was indeed an opportunity for *dabo*—clan members or otherwise—to meet and discuss any ordinary issue of their concern.

On the other hand, in the mainstream political life of North Omo, this was the time (1999) when tensions around Wogagoda (see below) were about to reach their highest point. And this tension was later extended to a noticeable extent into everyday life as an aspect of the state-society interface. This needs to be put in broader historical context. Looking across the periods of the last three state regimes in recent Ethiopian history, we see some interesting twists in the strategies of the central authorities to control this region as well as the kind of "middlemen" they co-opted to mediate the flow of power and control.

During the whole of the Ethiopian imperial era following the incorporation (1890s–1974), what are now called Omotic-speaking peoples were clustered into three different administrative provinces, Käfa, Sidamo, and Gamo-Gofa; either without an understanding that these people were related or with a cunning intention of creating a lasting boundary between them. Mostly, people from former royal lineages and locally dominant clans were put in charge of lower sections of the administrative machinery and thus served as intermediaries between their own people and the northern governors, who claimed ownership of the new Ethiopian state. With the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974, some fundamental changes were introduced to the principles of recruiting local agents of the state. At this time, the former locally dominant families were mostly removed from their positions.

Towards the end of the Derg regime, perhaps in partial recognition of the cultural history and psychological or cultural unity of the people of Omotic-speaking area, some of the former political units were dissociated

from their imperial provincial administration and reassembled as "North Omo," "South Omo," and "Käfa." For instance, Wolaitta, from the former Sidamo, Dawro and Konta from the former Käfa, and Gamo and Gofa from the former Gamo-Gofa provincial administrations were put into the North Omo administrative area.

Since the arrival of the new EPRDF government, with an ethnic overtone, the entire country was regrouped officially along ethnic/linguistic lines. Accordingly, in 1991, the Transitional Government redefined the Derg's regions of North Omo, South Omo, and Käfa under three "new" regions (*killil*) as: Wolaitta, Omo, and Käfa. In 1992 when the entire southern region was "brought together" as the Southern Nations, Nationalities, Peoples Region (SNNPRS), which included the former five regions (7 to 11); the Omotic-speaking area was restructured into North Omo, South Omo, Käfa-Sheka, and Bench-Maji Zones. The last administrative restructuring in this region took place in September 2000, following a popular challenge to what seemed an unacceptable or unworkable administrative design. From this last restructuring, Wolaitta, Gamo-Gofa, and Dawro emerged as separate zones, and Konta and Basketo emerged as "special *woredas*" from the single previous zone North Omo, while Käfa-Sheka became two zones, i.e., Käfa and Sheka. South Omo remained as one zone.

What is particularly interesting about the North Omo Zone is that during the formative years of the EPRDF as the ruling party of Ethiopia, "Ometo political units" such as Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa, Dawro, or Konta were recognized as independent nationalities (*bihereseb*) in southern Ethiopia. A separate political party represented each unit. The criteria used to recognize nationalities as such included: occupation of a specific territory, speaking a language of their own, having a history that distinguished it from the neighboring group. During this time, some newly constituted groups from each of the Ometo units perceived an opportunity in this constitutional provision and emerged as representatives of the distinct people or nationality. (This also happened elsewhere in the country.) There were also political groups who sought to represent bigger areas or formed alliances that were not favored by the EPRDF.

As part of a political effort to construct southern Ethiopia as a political block, some political groups from the Omotic-speaking area sought to

first organize this region under one unified political structure. At one point there was even a political party named "Umawi" (roughly "Omotic"). In 1990 Jacques Bureau already voiced his concern over such new ethnic-political classifications or distinctions as follows:

> One may question the reason why are bound together people as different as a Borana herdsman, an Arsi Sheikh, a Wollega merchant, or a Tulema soldier, but let us admit for a time the idea of this Oromo unity based on a community of language and some shared historical roots. Why then divide any other cultural area whose unity is in many ways equivalent to that of the Oromo? Though some of these so called Ometo nationalities, notably the Wolaitta, have once upon a time developed into independent and powerful political formations just as the Oromo kingdoms of the Gojjeb, they, nevertheless, still belong to the Ometo culture area. The unity of language and culture of the Ometo is a long standing fact, and is as manifest as the one attributed to the Oromo. (4)

Notwithstanding this, the ruling EPRDF continued to treat the groups of Ometo as distinct "nationalities." During the late 1990s, however, the ruling party seemed to have changed its position at least in the case of North Omo and sponsored the task of "uniting" the people of North Omo. For this they started with the process of ultimately "uniting" all the territorial wings of the ruling party, such as the Wolaitta People's Democratic Organization, and the Gamo, Gofa, Dawro, Konta Peoples Democratic Organization. From this emerged an acronym called WGGDPDO (Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa, Dawro Peoples Democratic Organization), often referred to as Wogagoda, which is an acronym consisting of the first two letters of the four major groups: Wolaitta, Gamo, Gofa, and Dawro. In the Ometo language spoken in North Omo, "Wogagoda" as a word means either "big master" or "master of tradition," depending on how it is pronounced.

The very fact that the acronym Wogagoda came only from the four major groups caused dissatisfaction and negative reactions from numerically smaller groups such as Konta, Oyda, and others on the ground that it did not represent them. Partly addressing this, the acronym was

declared to being a meaningful linguistic/ethnic name called Wogagoda. In order for this to hold, it was also decreed by the ruling party that Wogagoda did not stand for Wolaitta, Gamo, etc., but for the entire population of North Omo. And thenceforth North Omo units that were recognized till then as distinct nationalities, such as Wolaitta, Dawro, Gamo, and so on, were no longer recognized as distinct. It was advocated then that these peoples were connected through clans, speak dialects of the same language, and are socially, economically, and historically interrelated. School books were published in the new language (Wogagoda) and it was declared as the official language of North Omo.

Differentially situated actors reacted differently to this radical political decision. The strongest resistance was put up by the Wolaitta,[8] where Wogagoda was vehemently rejected. (It is particularly important to note that in the early 1990s the largest support for the idea of the "unity of peoples" of North Omo under one administrative/political structure came from Wolaitta.) One of the most organized political efforts outside the party line was the setting up of a Wolaitta elders representatives council, which appealed for the Wolaitta cause at various levels of the government bureaucracy, demanding reinstitution of their language and also demanding at least a separate zonal level of "self-administration" for the Wolaitta. They argued that since it was because Wolaitta ceased to exist as a political entity that their language was dissolved in the first place. The history of the Wolaitta, and how it was treated by past Ethiopian regimes since the incorporation, was retold by the Wolaitta foes of Wogagoda, while the supporters of Wogagoda (including cadres from Wolaitta) started searching for elements of interconnectedness with the peoples of North Omo. Supporting the former, in October 1999, students in Soddo (Wolaitta) took their demand to the streets, broke into police stations and freed teachers imprisoned for opposing Wogagoda. They also broke into stores and burned books published in the new language. According to a government statement, three people were shot dead on this day and many were wounded. Schools were closed for almost two months in most parts of Wolaitta. The crisis became a national issue and attracted the attention of national and international media. According to the 1999 Ethiopian Human Rights Council report on what happened in Wolaitta, five people were killed, 11 were shot and

wounded, two disappeared, 78 were detained, 10 were suspended from work, 29 were released after detention, 136 (teachers only) were transferred from their work place to areas that are defined as remote. Later on, the forced transfer of civil servants, which started with teachers, affected people in all the government bureaus throughout Wolaitta.

To cut a long story short, after such turmoil the ruling party reversed its earlier decision to make Wogagoda an official language, and the former languages were reinstated. The political/administrative unit that gave rise to Wogagoda, North Omo, was also dissolved, and from October to November 2000, the constituents of Wogagoda were split into three separate zones (Wolaitta, Gamo-Gofa, and Dawro) and two "special *woredas*" (Konta and Basketo).

Knowing the interconnectedness of the people of this region, one would think the construction of something like Wogagoda should have been a very positive step forward towards politically/administratively managing the rather "phenotypic" diversity in this region. But as many local intellectuals hinted, the way Wogagoda was constructed unfortunately appeared to be "a right thing done the wrong way." Clearly there are genuinely complex problems in this region, which need, among other things, a political/administrative solution. In other words, as Abbink (1998, 75–76) noted, "There is an objective need in this multi-ethnic and diverse Southern Region to sustain commonalities and shared institutions which facilitate the bridging [of] ethno-cultural/linguistic differences and define common issues and interests of efficient governance and economic development."

Unfortunately, in this particular case of North Omo, the problem was ill understood and the solution was colored too narrowly by party-political interests. To uncover the full extent of the political processes involved in the making and unmaking of Wogagoda and to assess its consequences, particularly the human suffering that followed it and the human agency that deconstituted it, would deserve an in-depth analysis on its own, as there are some fundamental lessons to be drawn. The crude summary provided here is intended to give some idea of how diversity or interrelatedness may be (mis)appropriated by differently motivated and differentially empowered actors for various ends and can easily turn out to have tragic effects. Hence, a call for the mobilization

of the best anthropology and the social sciences can offer in terms of knowledge and insights into these issues is needed.

Conclusion

This article has described some aspects of cultural processes in a region where a number of apparently distinct yet deeply interrelated communities live in a relatively small geographic area. These communities and their individual members interact at different levels. Like is the case with any geographically proximate communities, trade, marriage, ritual exchange, circulation of ideas, and the competition over resources and the resultant tensions take place as common events of life. What was stressed in this paper was that, among other things, the criss-crossing of similar clans across political/ethnic boundaries indicates that there is much more to the interaction and linkages between these communities than the fact of being mere geographic neighbors. Indeed, connections through clans and other aspects such as high-level sharing of cultural codes between these societies suggest interconnections at a deeper level. Conceptualizing this deeper framework as a tradition of knowledge, it was attempted to look at how such deeper level interconnection is maintained alongside apparent boundaries and diversities.

It is also important to note that no less real than the connection through ties of clanship and cultural similarity is the representation of the distinctness of each community, each with a clear sense of their specific, local history. At different moments of their existence, the people deal with both feelings of relatedness across political boundaries and feelings of distinctness, with a shifting stress on either, as appropriate to the prevailing context. This is not necessarily a contradictory practice. There are enough materials on the ground both from history and from current practices to stress what serves the interest of different groups of actors best, as both distinct local histories as well as "trans-ethnic" interconnections are facts of life here. Thus, an analytical or practical over-emphasis on either distinctness or interconnectedness to the neglect of the other leads to a distorted representation of the reality on the ground. Whereas earlier anthropological studies tended to over-emphasize the boundaries and distinctness of each group, the latest developments in the Ometo area warn against over-emphasizing the interrelatedness of communities, if the

current concerns of the people themselves are not addressed. Put otherwise, the conceptualization of interrelatedness across political boundaries has to be counter-weighed against people's own understandings of identity, based on specific local histories. These specifically local identities in Ometo are as real and influential as trans-territorial relatedness. What was proposed in this article then is that to understand cultural processes and how cultural diversity in particular is generated and reproduced in this region, useful insights may be gained by looking at the multiple-level interplay between clans, as they mediate flows of cultural knowledge and practices across the region, and kingdoms, as they mark discontinuities in the region. Finally, what cannot be left out from this analysis is how the national state and its local agents understand and (mis)manage different aspects of the diversity of this region.

Notes

1. Here I am using the term Ometo only in the sense linguists use it to refer to the groups in the former North Omo Zone, such as Wolaitta, Dawro, Gamo, Gofa, Konta, Oyda, and so on. Politically, nothing is agreed upon about this category yet.
2. I am grateful to Paul Balisky for kindly giving me excerpts from notes for his doctoral dissertation, which was submitted to the University of Aberdeen in 1997.
3. In Dawro, for instance, where I made inquiries about the meanings of local terms such as *qomua* (*qomo*) and others, not everyone understood the same thing by the term *qomo*. Some informants seemed to use it to refer to clans, strata, or a category for anything. When it is used in reference to strata, particularly people from the lower strata rightly reject the idea of *qomo* as an ideology of domination and discrimination. But with its clan reference, most informants, including those from lower strata, did not have any problem. In the case of lower strata, which are themselves composed of various clans, it is the stratum reference that is the icon of discrimination. For analytic reasons I am using *qomo* only to refer to clans and prefer to use terms such as *yara*, or *shesha* for strata.
4. Editor's note: The town of Kemisse, however, was only founded in the 1930s (in Italian times) after an influx of Sudanese Muslim labor migrants (according to local information in Kemise, May 1998). The town is said to have emerged around a weekly market on Thursday, the fifth weekday (*Qamis* in Arabic). So, strictly speaking, the ancient origin of this clan from Kemisse seems to be impossible. But as the author says, this fact may not be so relevant here, as it is overruled by the local perception of people about a northern origin.

5. Such a history of one political unit fighting with a neighboring one at one point should not be essentialized to suggest that in the old days warfare between political units was more endemic than peaceful coexistence and trans-territorial alliances. Warfare might have been common but neither the warring units nor their alliances were permanent. Peace-making, traditional treaties, and dynamic alliances were equally common.
6. *Dabo* is a term with broad references. In this article it is used to refer to relations of clanship.
7. Some informants also use the term *dubusha* to refer to the same practice but most agree that *zarua eqa* is the term mostly used to refer to the annual clan ritual. Also note that of late there are even clan-based *idirea* (a burial or housing association), which facilitate intra-clan communication (Haileyesus 1996).
8. There is no assumption of a single Wolaitta view, i.e., all agreeing on any political position. In the context in question, most of those within the ruling party circle were seen defending Wogagoda and the party decisions in general.

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Language and Ethnic Boundaries: Perceptions of Identity Expressed through Attitudes towards the Use of Language Education in Southern Ethiopia

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Introduction

The field research that provides the material for this paper concerned the introduction of local languages into the primary education system in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) of Ethiopia, and the reactions of local people to this change in government language policy. Previously, Amharic was the only language used in primary schools throughout Ethiopia. Local languages have now been introduced as media of instruction (the language in which subjects are taught) in many areas of Ethiopia, in response to the present government's broadly conceived programs for political and cultural reform intended to "create equality" for Ethiopia's many ethnic or linguistic groups, at least in proportion to the sizes of their respective populations.

Article 39.2 of the new Ethiopian Constitution of 1995 asserts the linguistic rights of groups of people in the Ethiopian state as follows:

> Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history.

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In response to this stated right, eight local languages have been introduced for use in the primary schools of the SNNPRS. The SNNPRS is divided into nine zones and five special *woredas*, which have been defined according to the presence of particular languages or groups of languages. Two zones, Bench-Maji and South Omo, the areas of the greatest linguistic diversity within the Region, have opted to continue to use Amharic for all official purposes. In these zones no language presents itself as suitable for the purpose of education. All of the remaining zones have introduced the language that represents the largest proportion of the population for the purpose of primary education. Local languages are used throughout the Sidama, Gedeo, and Hadiya zones except in the zone capitals (Awassa, Dilla, and Hosanna), where some schools continue to use Amharic. In the North Omo Zone (decreased in size and renamed "Wolaitta Zone" in early 2001), which is inhabited by the groups of people whose languages form the Ometo cluster of Omotic languages, two languages have been introduced, Wolaitta, in the northeast of the zone, and Gamo, Gofa, Dawro (a composite language) in the remainder of the zone. Some schools in the former zone capital (Arba Minch) continue to use Amharic. In the Kembata, Alaba, Tembaro (KAT) Zone the Kembata language is used in the *woredas* inhabited by the ethnic group of the same name, while the *woredas* inhabited by the Alaba and Tembaro continue to use Amharic. In the Gurage Zone only the Silt'i Gurage have had their language introduced for teaching purposes, and, similarly, in the Kafficho-Shakicho Zone only the Käfa people use their language, while all other areas of these two zones continue to use Amharic.

The research project at the basis of this paper focused on the attitudes of local populations towards the introduction of the local languages into the primary education system, and not on technical aspects of the implementation process (See also Cohen 2000, 2002). In pursuance of this topic, several of the areas in which local languages are now being used for the purposes of primary education were visited. These were the areas inhabited by the Sidama, Gedeo, Kembata, Hadiya, Silt'i Gurage, Wolaitta, Gamo, and Gofa, all of whom inhabit highland areas bordering the Southern Rift Valley. For the sake of comparison, some areas where the local languages are, as yet, not employed in primary education were

also visited. These areas included Konso and Aari on the southern rim of the Ethiopian Highlands, Alaba in the central Rift Valley, and the Mesken and Sebat-bet Gurage areas in the north of the Region close to the national capital, Addis Ababa. Research was also conducted in the Region's major urban centers (Awassa, Arba Minch, Dilla, and Hosanna), where primary education in the local languages now exists alongside primary education in Amharic.

Visiting a large number of both urban and rural areas inhabited by different linguistic or ethnic groups enabled a comparative analysis. Similarities and differences in the manner in which the various peoples covered by the research reacted to the introduction of local languages illuminated the cultural self-perceptions of the peoples of the Region, which are based on the historical patterns of education and literacy in each area. These patterns are, in turn, a reflection of the position that groups of people have occupied in the Ethiopian state. Long-standing cultural perceptions of the differences in the nature of groups of people in Ethiopia also often found expression in attitudes towards the reform. In this paper the intention is to illuminate some of these differences by comparing the reactions of various groups of people in the SNNPRS to the reform.

Ideas about language and ethnic identity are harnessed together to such a great extent in present day Ethiopia that ethnic and linguistic boundaries are increasingly presented as congruent. Both politicians and academics from various disciplines have equated the two ideas. The current political climate in Ethiopia encourages this approach since, at the constitutional level, language has been used as the primary defining criteria for ethnicity, upon which the new geopolitical divisions of the country have been based. Although the recent redrawing of Ethiopia's internal geopolitical borders is ostensibly between ethnic groups, it is much more appropriate to regard the divisions as being between Ethiopia's principal language groups. It is, for example, difficult to present the Oromo as a homogeneous ethnic group, given the great diversity of cultural traits and structures of social organization displayed by Oromifa-speaking peoples (cf. Baxter 1983, 131). The question of whether the Amhara can legitimately be regarded as an ethnic group has also been raised, given their distribution throughout Ethiopia, and the

incorporative capacity of the group that has led to the inclusion of individuals from a wide range of ethnic or linguistic backgrounds (see Takkele 1994; Tegegne 1998).

Similarly, the defined units of population in the SNNPRS often share language, but do not necessarily form what would commonly be referred to as an "ethnic group." Perhaps it is better if we label these groups of people "language groups," since language is the feature that is relied upon in defining them. There are internal divisions, often based on geographical separation, or different historical patterns of contact, within some language groups, which bear a much closer resemblance to what would commonly be referred to as ethnic groups. The question of what is meant by an ethnic group needs to be more accurately defined, and is a question, which, to a large extent, lies beyond the scope of this paper. For the present purpose, however, we can assume that an ethnic group should display some homogeneity not only in language but also in culture, religion, and structures of social organization; above all, an ethnic group should have an internal conception of unity. A language group, on the other hand, may be broadly defined by the single criteria of language.

In the following discussion these themes will be developed by examining three specific examples of groups of people in the SNNPRS who are related to each other in a linguistic sense, an ethnic sense, or in both senses, but nevertheless display profound differences from each other. Each of these examples is intended to illuminate a different aspect of the problematic process of defining the nature of groups of people, and discerning those features that bestow upon them their sense of internal unity. Each of the examples comes from the highland area, which lies between the western side of the Rift Valley and the Upper Omo River. Firstly, the different reactions of the Kembata and the Alaba, neighboring groups who share an administrative zone with closely related languages, to the introduction of local languages will be set against a historical background. Secondly, the reasons for the different attitudes displayed by the Silt'i Gurage and other Gurage will be analyzed. Thirdly, the use of language as the primary defining criteria of an "ethnic" group will be questioned with reference to Hadiya-speaking groups.

The Highland Kembata and the Lowland Alaba

Historians and anthropologists of Ethiopia frequently encounter a particular construct, which shapes the attitudes that are held by many Ethiopians towards the group of people to which they feel they belong, and towards other ethnic or linguistic groups in the state. This pan-Ethiopian attitude concerns the different climatic zones into which Ethiopians have traditionally divided the country. These climatic zones are often quite loosely defined, they are not employed to reflect precise topographical features, and neither do they correlate with altitude, although height is the accepted currency of the differences between each zone. These divisions are, rather, a feature of a pan-Ethiopian mentality, which has emerged in response to both real and perceived ethnic differences and the historical patterns of contact between the various peoples of Ethiopia. In Amharic the three climatic zones are named *dega, weyna dega*, and *qolla*. A similar conceptual package, however, is present in most Ethiopian languages. These climatic divisions had more relevance under the feudal system, which has now been dismantled by the actions of successive modernizing governments in Ethiopia. The attitudes, which are held by groups of people towards one another, remain to a large extent as legacies of the historical patterns of contact that were established over many centuries, and, therefore, continue to exist in spite of government actions.

The *dega* is the highland zone, which is temperate and often described as cold. The *dega* is inhabited mainly by those groups of Ethiopians that are seen as superior, primarily the Amhara and Tigreans, who have been the traditional rulers of the Ethiopian state and who are typically characterized by their Semitic languages, adherence to the Orthodox Christian Religion, and feudal type social system. Although mountainous areas exist in most parts of the country, the *dega* is primarily associated with the north of Ethiopia, the historical seat of governance and power.

The *weyna dega* is an intermediate temperate zone regarded as suitable for farming and habitation and, consequently, northern colonization. Many northern Ethiopians live in areas that are considered to be *weyna dega,* but it is also inhabited by other Ethiopian groups. These include the Oromo of western Ethiopia, the Gurage, and other highland

groups of the southwest including the Kembata. The agents of the northern state often saw groups of people inhabiting the *weyna dega* as suitable for conversion to Christianity and incorporation into the established structures of rule that were developed by the northern Ethiopian state. Many groups of people who inhabit the *weyna dega* developed institutions of kingship similar to those found in northern Ethiopia. Examples of this kind include the Oromo polities of western Ethiopia such as Nekemte, Jimma, and the Gibe states, and the kingdoms of the southwest, which include Yem, Kembata, Wolaitta, Käfa, and the other kingdoms of the Omotic language area. Where hierarchical structures were present in the areas conquered by the northern Ethiopians, they facilitated incorporation into the state through a system that resembled the practice of indirect rule adopted by the European colonial powers elsewhere in Africa.

The *qolla* is the lowland or hot zone. Most *qolla* areas are on Ethiopia's borders or in the Valley bottoms of the country's great river systems. In the south of the country some areas of the Rift Valley are also considered *qolla*. Groups of people living in the *qolla* zone have usually been considered inferior to groups inhabiting the highlands, and have consequently been regarded with disdain. The incorporation of groups of people living in the *qolla* zone was often felt by northern Ethiopians to be impossible, or at least undesirable. Often such groups are pastoralists, as opposed to the agriculturalists of the highlands. They are also differentiated from the ethnic groups living in the highlands by religion; groups of people who inhabit the *qolla* zone often practice either variants of Islam or adhere to earlier indigenous belief systems.

The Kembata are a typical example of a highland, Christian, agricultural group inhabiting the mountainous area to the west of Rift Valley in the area of Lake Abyata and Lake Shala that would be considered *weyna dega*. The Alaba, on the other hand, are a lowland, Muslim, pastoralist group living in a *qolla* area of the Rift Valley to the southwest of the same lakes. The Kembata and the Alaba border each other in the area of the foothills of the Rift Valley wall, where some Kembata villages are found in relatively low-lying areas. In response to overcrowding in the highlands, many Kembata have settled in areas of the Rift Valley, but have not demonstrated a tendency to intermarry or assimilate with other

Ethiopian groups, except in the larger urban centers. The Kembata and Alaba regard themselves as being markedly different from one another. The languages spoken by the two groups are, however, very similar; they are, to a large extent, mutually intelligible. When local language teaching materials were introduced into the KAT Zone they were received enthusiastically by the Kembata, but rejected by the Alaba. The reasons for these different reactions must be set against a historical background of state activity and education.

The origins of the Alaba are in the medieval Hadiya state, which was fragmented by the Grañ wars of the sixteenth century and was entirely submerged by the subsequent expansion of the Oromo over the following two centuries. Like many other Hadiya groups, the Alaba were forced westwards in search of territory. The language spoken by the Alaba was adopted from the Tembaro (a group whose language is closely related to that of the Kembata, and who inhabit a neighboring section of the highlands) during the eighteenth century when the Alaba sojourned for a time in the highlands (Braukämper 1980, 433). Eventually, their nomadic wanderings came to an end in the mid-nineteenth century when they settled in an area of the Rift Valley to the south of Lake Shala. The domination of the area by the northern Ethiopian state during the reign of Emperor Menelik had a general sedentary effect on the groups in the area. Prior to conquest, the main cause of population movements had been the pattern of constant conflict that existed between neighboring groups in the area. The conquest of the southwest by the northern state under the leadership of the Shoan nobility introduced a more powerful authority into the area. Northern Ethiopian rule introduced a forced peace, and brought local conflicts to an end.

Although the Alaba lost their original language, which may have been a Semitic "Adare" type language thought to have been spoken by many of the inhabitants of the former state of Hadiya (Braukämper 1980, 430), in favor of the Cushitic language of the Kembata, they maintained the religion of the Hadiya state, namely Islam. Furthermore, they never adopted the cultivation of ensete, which characterizes the agricultural system of the inhabitants of the highlands to the immediate west of the Rift Valley. Instead the Alaba continued to rely on the historical occupation of the ancestral Hadiya, namely pastoralism, particularly sheep

rearing. In response to the imposition of taxation in money during the reign of Emperor Haile Sellassie, the Alaba increased the cultivation of *berbere*, a crop suited to the hot and dry conditions in the part of Rift Valley that they inhabit. The Alaba, living in a *qolla* area, have never been the focus of sustained state development initiatives. They remain an underdeveloped group of people, even by Ethiopian standards.

The Kembata have an entirely different history. An early period of contact between the Kembata and the northern Ethiopian state in the thirteenth century, when Kembata was incorporated as a province of the northern empire, firmly introduced Orthodox Christianity to this part of the southern Ethiopian highlands (Braukämper 1983, 295). In many ways the Kembata came to resemble other groups of Ethiopians to their north. Relations between the Kembata and the north of Ethiopia were severed for several centuries during the era of the expansion of the Oromo, and many of the Kembata reverted to traditional religious practices; however, sections of the Kembata never relinquished the Christian faith completely. During the eclipse of relations between the Kembata and the northern Ethiopian state, the Kembata were preoccupied with defending their territory against the encroachment of Hadiya-speaking groups who were forced westwards by the fragmentation of the Hadiya state and the expansion of the Oromo. In particular, the Kembata fought with the Limu and Soro Hadiya. Other Hadiya groups, namely the Badewacho, who were not perceived as a threat, were often allied with the Kembata in their military campaigns. The Kembata developed institutions of dynastic kingship and were ruled by a royal lineage that was only deposed at the time of the conquest of the area by Emperor Menelik's armies in the last decade of the nineteenth century (cf. Braukämper 1983, 296–97).

In the twentieth century the development of the polities of Kembata and Alaba have been strongly influenced by the historical patterns of contact with the northern state. Christianity, both in the form of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and later as a result of missionary activity, was reintroduced into the Kembata-speaking highlands from the time of the northern conquest. Today the vast majority of the population of the Kembata highlands are followers of one form or another of the religion. As a consequence of concentrated missionary activity that began in the

1960s, the Kembata-speaking highlands have a literacy rate of 41 percent, the highest for any rural area in the SNNPRS. The Muslim Alaba have not been the focus of missionary activity and have one of the lowest literacy rates in the region, only 12 percent. The Alaba have also been neglected by the provision of state education because they are Muslim, and because they live in the *qolla* zone. As a consequence, attitudes towards education in Kembata and Alaba are markedly different.

Throughout the southwest of Ethiopia, the central government has usually been regarded with suspicion by the local population. The provision of state or church sponsored education was felt to be threatening because it is thought to lead the children away from home. As a result of education children learned the Amharic language, which, it was thought, was used by the state as a tool of repression. If they were successful in education they would often leave to find work elsewhere. The child's economic value to the household was then lost; many rural people felt that they could not afford to educate children because they needed them to work. In addition to the loss of a child's labor potential was the cultural loss of the child who became something other than what he or she should, according to cultural norms. Many communities of people in the southwest of Ethiopia regarded their educated children as "Amharas," in other words conquerors or oppressors, since these were the connotations of the label Amhara in the area. This attitude was reinforced by the fact that many educated children became government workers, thereby becoming part of the apparatus of the repressive state. In many areas of the southwest, educated members of the local language groups were ridiculed, chastised, and even ostracized by their families for participating in the education system and cooperating with the northern Ethiopians.

Education as introduced by missionaries in the 1960s was often received in a different manner since it came not from the state but from another body. Often missionaries appeared to be challenging aspects of the state by preaching a doctrine of universal equality. Furthermore, missionaries preached material as well as spiritual advancement, whereas the Orthodox Church had often advocated the virtues of poverty and acceptance. Education was often a cornerstone of missionary activity and was always provided in Amharic, since under Haile

Sellassie's government this was the only language allowed for the purpose of primary education. Mission-educated southern Ethiopians who were literate in Amharic were often more successful in challenging the agents of state than their illiterate counterparts. For example, in cases of land disputes those who spoke Amharic had a better chance of achieving a fair result, even against northern Ethiopians. Therefore, in areas where missionary activity was concentrated, the population gradually began to realize that the Amharic language could allow them more access to the benefits of inclusion in the state.

The exclusive use of the Amharic language in primary education, however, represented a barrier that seemed to have been erected against the speakers of other languages in the Ethiopian state and many children were, as a result, unsuccessful in education. In areas where missionary activity was concentrated and literacy rates were high there developed an acceptance of the inherent value and importance of education. Over the last twenty years, however, the population has come to question the use of Amharic in primary education and has often expressed a desire to use local languages. This desire was born of a long-standing collective experience of education. During the era of the Derg local languages were used in the national literacy campaign, which was started in 1979 and was aimed at adult literacy. This policy failed both because the campaigns were forced on the population and because local languages were not simultaneously introduced for the purpose of primary education, and this made their use for adult literacy appear redundant.

In areas where educational opportunities have been very limited, there remains an underlying distrust of schooling that is coupled with the belief that the main purpose of education is to learn the Amharic language. In such areas it is not necessarily the case that the population does not want to learn Amharic; on the contrary, many people feel that the language will give them access to wider opportunities. The population of such areas does not have the educational experience to realize that in education a language is being used to convey other forms of information. Consequently, many people regard the teaching of school subjects as being inherently dependent on the use of the Amharic language. In areas like Alaba it is assumed that the difficulties of learning in Amharic are associated with the process of education itself;

furthermore, informants in Alaba often argued that their own language is unsuitable for the purposes of education. This view would seem to be is mistaken given that the very similar language of the Kembata has been demonstrated as suitable for use in primary education. The attitude displayed by the Alaba is, in all likelihood, a response to a negative cultural self-perception, which causes the group to regard themselves, and their language, as inferior to other languages within the state. This attitude has been reinforced by their marginalization in the provision of educational facilities.

In Kembata it is observed that the populations of rural areas are almost universally in favor of using local language teaching materials, whereas in Alaba the people still prefer Amharic. This is because the Kembata have experienced the benefits and drawbacks of education in a language other than the mother tongue, whereas the Alaba have had little experience of education and therefore are, as yet, unable to understand the benefits of using local languages.

The Differences between the Silt'i and the Other Gurage

The Silt'i are the largest of the many groups that have been collectively labeled "Gurage." They live in a section of hilly land at the foot of the Rift Valley wall, and in the mountainous areas to its west. To the south the Silt'i border the Alaba and the Limu Hadiya; to the west and north, the other Gurage; and to the east, in the Rift Valley, the Mareko and Arussi Oromo. The Silt'i are differentiated from the other Gurage in several respects; however, they nevertheless see themselves as forming part of an overall Gurage identity (see Markakis 1998 for an analysis of change in Silt'i identity).

Among the Gurage there is a great diversity of religious, linguistic, and cultural features. Many Gurage are members of the Orthodox Church, others are Protestants, some are Muslim, and others in the central, mountainous, and often inaccessible areas of Gurageland continue to follow traditional religious practices. While the languages spoken by the various groups of Gurage share membership of the Ethio-Semitic language family, they are by no means closely related; many are more

closely related to other Ethiopian languages than they are to one another. The proximity of the languages of the Gurage to other Ethiopian languages has been used to demonstrate their historical origins. Thus groups of Gurage, such as the Aymellel and Soddo, who speak languages more closely related to the Semitic languages of northern Ethiopia and adhere to very traditional forms of Orthodox Christianity, have been revealed to have their origins in the north. Those in the east of Gurageland, which include the Silt'i and Ulbarag, trace their ancestry instead to the medieval Hadiya state. These groups speak languages that are related to the Semitic language of the Hadiya state and to the very similar Adare language spoken by the inhabitants of the city state of Harar. The Silt'i are also Muslim, a feature that has been used to demonstrate their historical connection with the Islamic Hadiya state. Although some groups of Gurage developed institutions of kingship, there has never been an overall ruler of the Gurage; instead they have most usually been loosely organized in "houses" or clans. It has been argued that the cultivation of ensete, otherwise known as the false banana, which is the most pronounced feature of Gurage agriculture, has to a large extent shaped the nature of Gurage society (cf. Shack 1966) and, thereby, given the Gurage some conception of internal unity or homogeneity against this background of diversity.

When, under the present program of government sponsored reforms, local languages were introduced in the Gurage-speaking area for the purpose of primary education, the Silt'i were enthusiastic about the use of their language, while the other Gurage favored the continued use of Amharic. The reasons for these different attitudes lie in the historical development of the Gurage over the course of the twentieth century, and the patterns of their contact with the central Ethiopian state.

Population pressure was felt even more keenly in Gurageland than in Kembata further to the south. At the time of the northern conquest the population of most areas of southwestern Ethiopia had been decimated by the smallpox epidemics of the late-nineteenth century. Consequently, as the population recovered from this disastrous period there was a shortage of land. This was partly due to the actions of the northern state. Firstly, much of the fertile land had been given in grants to northern settlers who acted as agents of the state. Land in Gurage was particularly

desired because of its proximity to Addis Ababa. Secondly, since interethnic fighting was now impossible because of the presence of garrisons of northern soldiers (*neft'ennya*), there was very little opportunity for military activities that might enable territorial expansion. In Gurageland, therefore, there developed a tendency for young men to go out and seek their fortunes elsewhere in Ethiopia, often as itinerant traders.

Furthermore, with the introduction of taxation in money under Haile Sellassie in the 1930s, the Gurage were placed in an awkward position. Ensete, their principal crop, is not easily converted into money; it is not suitable as a cash crop. Given the existing levels of overcrowding, it was also very difficult for the Gurage to branch out into other more lucrative forms of agriculture, which would have necessitated the cultivation of additional land. Instead the Gurage increasingly turned to trade as a way to generate income. Many of the towns of the central Rift Valley were first established by the Gurage as trading posts along the main road that was constructed during the Italian occupation of the 1930s. Addis Ababa's *Merkato* also became a stronghold for Gurage traders, who were able to maintain links with their ancestral homelands because of the proximity of northern parts of Gurageland to the national capital. Many Gurage became enthusiastic about trade and, consequently, incorporation into the wider society of the Ethiopian state. Gurage communities were established in all the major towns of the south. Towns as far south as Dilla, Yirga Chefe, Wolaitta-Soddo, and Arba Minch still have substantial proportions of Gurage forming their populations. The Gurage established a large trading community in Addis Ababa and, in the larger towns of the Rift Valley, such as Debre Zeit, Nazret, Zeway, and Shashemene, the Gurage continue to represent a sizable proportion of the population.

In all of these urban areas, Amharic was used as the lingua franca between the members of all ethnic or linguistic groups, and the Gurage traders enthusiastically learned the language. The Gurage who went out to work have demonstrated a tendency to actively maintain a strong connection with their home communities. Often Gurage labor migration only involved males. Many Gurage became migrant laborers in the factory towns of the Rift Valley such as Akaki, which is now little more

than a suburb of Addis Ababa. These migrant laborers needed to have a command of the Amharic language in order to secure employment, and when they returned to their families they encouraged other members of the local community to learn the language because of the opportunities that arise from its use. In many parts of Gurageland, as a consequence, the population speaks Amharic as an equal first language with the local Gurage language.

Many Gurage are primarily concerned with strengthening their connection to the wider networks of Ethiopian society. They have been very successful as professional urban dwellers and as traders, and therefore they actively seek to increase the extent of their fluency in Amharic, since it is the best vehicle for pursuing opportunities in these areas. They have not, however, relinquished their Gurage identity; they have adopted Amharic because of the benefits that accrue from its use. For these reasons the population in most areas of Gurageland favor the continued use of Amharic in primary education.

The Silt'i have experienced the historical developments that have affected the whole of Gurageland in quite a different manner. Overcrowding has never been so keenly felt in the Silt'i-speaking area, which is the furthest part of Gurageland from Addis Ababa. Because of its distance from the capital, the area was never as actively desired as an area for northern settlement. Furthermore, the Silt'i, living in the slopes on the western side of the Rift Valley, were able to produce a lucrative cash crop, *berberé*. They were, therefore, able to pay the taxes imposed by Emperor Haile Sellassie's government from revenues generated in the local environment. As a result, the Silt'i were not forced to leave their ancestral homeland in the way that the other Gurage had been.

The Silt'i are the largest and most homogeneous group of Gurage, and this may also encourage their decision to use their own language. Many other Gurage argue that the size of their language group is too small to be worth developing materials for use in primary education. Furthermore, while other Gurage have actively courted modernity and become involved in the process of urbanization in Ethiopia, the Silt'i have remained more firmly attached to their land and traditional ways of life. Since the Silt'i are Muslim it is more difficult for them to assimilate with Ethiopians from other backgrounds, particularly the northern

Ethiopians, because Muslims have historically been seen as inferior to the followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Although many Silt'is have become successful in trading activities, their involvement in trade has been much more recent than that of other Gurage. Consequently, the levels of fluency in Amharic in the Silt'i-speaking area are much lower than elsewhere in Gurageland.

It is, therefore, in response to the patterns of contact with the wider society of Ethiopia that the Silt'i have chosen to use their own language, while the rest of the Gurage have opted to use the Amharic language.

Are the Modern Hadiya an Ethnic Group?

Unlike the groups of people examined in the previous two examples, all the groups of Hadiya, as defined in the present Ethiopian state, have decided to adopt the use of their own language for the purpose of primary education. This would suggest that the Hadiya identify themselves as one group that shares a common language. The present Hadiya zone in the SNNPRS, is comprised of four *woredas*: three are in the highlands and lie between the KAT and Gurage zones; the fourth, Badewacho, is separated from the others, and lies to the south of the Kembata-speaking area on the edge of the Rift Valley. The Badewacho border the Kembata to the north, the Alaba to the east and the Wolaitta to the south and west.

As has been observed in the previous two examples, many of the peoples of the highlands to the west of the Rift Valley owe their ancestry, at least in some part, to the medieval state of Hadiya, which was located in the highlands on the eastern side of the Rift Valley. The Alaba and Silt'i Gurage are both examples of groups descended from the Hadiya (Braukämper 1980, 429). In the sixteenth century, the Hadiya joined with Ahmed Grañ in his Islamic jihad that was directed against the northern Christian Ethiopian state. From this time many of the Hadiya formed into nomadic clans, which would move on when necessary and were dependent on pastoralism. Many groups of Hadiya followed the Grañ armies north and settled in the area of Wag and Fatagar to the north of Lake Zeway. They were driven out from this area by the northern Ethiopian counteroffensive of the mid-sixteenth century, and turned west to settle in the highlands on the western side of the Rift Valley.

These groups of Hadiya forced their way into the highland areas occupied by the Gurage and Kembata. The Hadiya in the highlands are descended from these waves of settlement.

Many Hadiya who remained in the highlands were enveloped by the Oromo expansion of the seventeenth century, and the Arussi Oromo contain many clans who trace their ancestry to the Hadiya state (Braukämper 1980, 427). In response to the expansion of the Oromo, other groups of Hadiya were pushed westwards from the highlands into the Rift Valley, the Alaba and the Badewacho are examples of this type.

The area of the highlands on the western side of the Rift Valley became an area of protracted conflict between the Hadiya groups attempting to establish themselves and the existing ethnic groups of the area. Many Hadiya groups, among them the ancestors of the eastern Gurage, adopted the cultivation of ensete from the local population and became, to a large extent, assimilated. The Soro and Limu Hadiya fought for territory in the central part of the highlands and for a time the Soro dominated the Kembata states of Donga, Dubamo, and Tembaro. The domination of the Soro Hadiya in these areas was broken in the early nineteenth century by a combined Kembata-Badewacho force. The same alliance also fought the Wolaitta into whose territory they sought to expand.

The Badewacho consider themselves to be different from the Hadiya groups of the highlands. Not only are they separated from them by geography, they have also had a different pattern of historical development, which has caused them to be allied with Kembata in certain periods of their history, whereas other Hadiya groups have been the enemies of the Kembata. The Badewacho, however, speak the same language as the other Hadiya and regard it as their own. It is unclear whether the Badewacho should be considered part of a Hadiya ethnic group even though they clearly belong to the Hadiya *language* group.

Conclusion

In the examples of the Kembata and the Alaba it is clear that the two peoples form two separate ethnic groups even though their languages are very similar. Religion is employed, as an immediately visible characteristic that differentiates the two groups. The relative positions of these ethnic groups in the Ethiopian state have been formed partly by the different climatic zones that they inhabit. The different reactions of the Kembata and Alaba to the introduction of local languages are explained by the historical patterns of education and contact with the state in each area.

In the case of the Gurage, it seems that while the Silt'i appear to be very different from the other Gurage they nevertheless see themselves as being part of the same ethnic group. Linguistic and religious differences seem to be of little consequence to the Gurage. The Silt'i have demonstrated a different reaction to the introduction of local languages for the purpose of primary education. This is a response to the less well-established patterns of contact with modern Ethiopian society in the Silt'i-speaking area compared to those in the rest of Gurageland.

The remaining fragments of the historical Hadiya state seem to have lost any ethnic identification with one another that existed in the past. The Badewacho Hadiya, although they speak the same language as the highland Hadiya, see themselves as being different from them and being separated by more than simply geography. All the Hadiya speakers have, however, chosen to use their language, and this demonstrates that they all regard the language as their own. The concept of ethnicity is, of course, highly flexible and open to constant redefinition. The purpose of this article has not been to demonstrate this point, but to argue that language cannot be relied upon in defining the boundaries of an ethnic group.

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Book Reviews

Gordon and the Sudan: Prologue to the Mahdiyya, 1877–1880
Alice Moore-Harell
London and Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass, 2001. Pp. xvi, 286; maps, tables. Cloth $55.00

On 26 June 1879, during an official gathering in Khartoum to announce the deposition of Khedive Isma'il and to celebrate the accession of his son Tawfiq, Alice Moore-Harell writes, a storm broke out and the Egyptian flag fell from its staff. The Sudanese interpreted this as a bad omen. Six months later, on the eve of his resignation as governor-general of the Sudan, Charles Gordon wrote a letter to Malet of his sense of an impending crisis for the Sudan. He warned that if the administration in the Sudan returned to Turco-Egyptian hands, widespread agitation and unrest throughout the country would be the result. What had gone wrong to merit this foreboding?

Gordon and the Sudan: Prologue to the Mahdiyya could perhaps be the missing link Sudanists have sought in their quest for a more comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the background and causes of the Mahdist revolution. The book is an in-depth analysis, indeed a "total history," of the governor-generalship of Charles Gordon from 1877 to 1880. Historians of the Sudan have generally recognized the critical importance of Gordon's tenure to the outbreak of the Mahdist revolution. And yet, surprisingly, the author observes, no one has ever found it necessary to devote separate research on the period. *Gordon and the Sudan* is Moore-Harell's attempt to fill in this important lacuna in the historiography of Turco-Egyptian Sudan.

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The book is divided into five chapters, a conclusion, and three appendices. Chapter 1 is devoted to discussion of the relationship between Egypt, the Sudan, and Europe. It also covers employment of high-ranking European officials in the Sudan. The thrust of the argument in this chapter is that until Egypt's financial crisis in the late 1870s, there was no European imperial interest in Egypt. Chapter 2 focuses on Gordon's administration, covering various aspects of the governor's duties, functions, administrative reforms, relationship with officials and people, and diplomatic relations and issues of war with Ethiopia. Chapter 3 examines the economy: agriculture, trade, taxation, transport and communication systems, and the slave trade. Chapter 4 discusses social policy—a broad concept that encompasses religion, law, education, health, and slavery. Finally, chapter 5 focuses on civil unrest and revolts. It discusses security problems in general, and military campaigns against the slave traders in particular. The concluding chapter is both a summary and a synthesis of all the chapters, and it ends with reflections on Gordon's long-term impact on the Sudan.

Alice Moore-Harell's central thesis is that Gordon's governor-generalship marked a new era in the history of the Turco-Egyptian regime in the Sudan. The powers and tasks granted to him, as well as the complete autonomy he enjoyed in all administrative and financial matters, were unprecedented in the history of the regime and made Gordon the most powerful governor-general in the history of Turco-Egyptian Sudan. Because of his power, Gordon affected the administration and the country more profoundly than any Turco-Egyptian ruler before or after him. He was the first governor-general to move decisively against the powerful slave traders. He won the confrontation during the latter half of his tenure, although that victory ultimately proved to be partial and temporary. Nevertheless, this suppression of the slave trade provoked the hostility of the slave traders, who now waited to vent their anger and frustration on the government should an opportunity present itself.

In the meantime, almost simultaneously, the financial crisis in Egypt in the late 1870s quickly drew in the involvement of the European creditors in Egypt's internal affairs and progressively eroded that country's independence. The first victim was Khedive Isma'il, who was deposed at the urging of the European creditor nations. This foreign interference

quickly provoked a virulent nationalist revolution led by Colonel 'Urabi, which in turn led to British intervention and occupation of Egypt. Seeing no future in the Sudan, Gordon tendered his resignation and left the country. His departure left a power vacuum in the Sudan, which was soon filled by an Islamist revolution, the Mahdiyya.

Gordon's impact, according to the author, was felt all along the Nile Valley during his tenure and can still be felt in the politics and conflicts in modern-day Sudan. One of the main strengths of the book is that it has depended on many primary sources previously unknown to researchers. Readers will also find the book's three appendices interesting.

Gordon and the Sudan: Prologue to the Mahdiyya presents a balanced analysis of the complex issues and problems Gordon faced during his governor-generalship of the Sudan from 1877 to 1880. Students of the history of nineteenth-century Sudan and Egypt will find it refreshing and compelling.

Abannik O. Hino
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The Making of Oromo Diaspora: A Historical Sociology of Forced Migration
Mekuria Bulcha
Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers, 2002. Pp. 272; illustrations and maps. Paper $25.00

The Making of Oromo Diaspora is an account of forced migration from Oromoland. The book originates in the author's research on forced migration and explores some of the social and political factors that led to the uprooting and scattering of thousands of Oromos in different directions and at different times (13). As someone who has personally experienced the history he describes in his book, Professor Mekuria Bulcha demonstrates both the passion of an interested insider and the objective reflection of an unbiased scholar.

The book starts with the sociology of forced migration, followed by an illustration of the Red Sea slave trade. In chapter 2, the author notes that "slavery and slave trade were practices with ancient roots in northeast

Africa. Slavery has been an important feature of Abyssinia's social and economic life" (33). Moreover, the slave trade and the import of firearms have played an important role in the "establishment and maintenance of Abyssinian domination at the end of the nineteenth century" (51).

In subsequent chapters the author describes in detail the fate of slaves in the host societies (chapter 4). Here the personal stories of men and women who were captured and sold into slavery, yet who eventually made significant contributions to Oromo studies, are brought into light (chapter 5). Amongst them, the author discusses the lives of four personalities: Malik Ambar, Bilile (Mehbuba), Onesimos Nasib, and Aster Ganno. The brief story of Nasib and Ganno is most interesting, not just because the author describes Onesimos Nasib as the father of Oromo literature, but because both migrated back to their homeland after a long period in exile to have a meaningful impact on their people. The challenges these individuals faced on returning to their society reveals much about the old Ethiopian state system, which is not quite different from the oppressive one that exists today. In their trail, these people (what the author refers to as the bygone Oromo Diaspora) laid the basis for Oromo literature, and extended literacy and education to their homeland.

The focus of chapter 7 is the forced migration of Oromos from 1900 to 2001. The account of Abyssinia's conquest of Oromoland, the formation of the Ethiopian empire-state, the paralysis of its founder (Menelik, from 1909 to 1913), and the story of Lij Iyasu, the prince who became de facto ruler at the age of 15, but soon became "a refugee in his own country" (163), all paint a remarkable picture of Ethiopia's social and political system. It is interesting to note that Iyasu put into place grand policies of religious and ethnic tolerance and social justice. One would desire to ask whether the policies were envisioned by a teenager who was the product of arranged marriage or crafted by his supporters and advisors. In any case, the prince antagonized Menelik's powerful nobility, referring to them, perhaps accurately, as "my grandfather's fattened sheep" (162). Youth and inexperience cost the prince his throne and the country the opportunity to implement the policies.

Bulcha then turns his attention to developments in the 1960s, the suppression of Macha and Tulama Association, and related social movements, which resulted in an increased flow of refugees to Sudan and Somalia.

Internally, what Rene Lemont calls "mechanised feudalism" caused the large-scale forced eviction and displacement of *gabbars* or serfs. The situation got worse with the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974. The seizure of power by the Derg precipitated political and religious persecution, war, forced labor and military conscription, and "economic policies [that] created the largest number of refugees in the country's history" (167). What is more telling of this period is the acting out of political violence by the state system and its opponents. In 1977 the Ethiopian state unleashed a policy of state terrorism known as the "Red Terror." In its wake, the Red Terror left not only a new Oromo Diaspora, but also one of the most miserable places on earth, which is quickly and commonly identified with pestilence, hunger, famine, death, and destruction. The story of misery did not end with the demise of the Derg in the early 1990s. According to the author, war is being "waged against the civil society," (171) causing forced migration to neighboring countries, cross-border raids against refugees, as well as intense grief and a sense of nostalgia among the refugees.

The silver lining of the story is the formation of diaspora Oromo organizations, including TBOA (Oromo acronym for Union of Oromo Students in Europe), UONA (Union of Oromos in North America), and OSA (Oromo Studies Association), which are free from the illusory attempts "to democratise Ethiopia" (188). Here is a place to study the past that is separate from the education system.

The book is a marvelous reflection of reality as seen from the angle of the sociology and political economy of the oppressed. It is superb in its conceptual clarity, historical brevity, and sociological analysis on the making of a large diaspora population created as the result of the Ethiopian state's undertakings in slave trade, conquest, and endless conflict and upheaval. I certainly gained a lot from reading it and recommend to anyone with a slight interest in events in that part of the world.

In saying so, I leave readers with the following quotation cited in Bulcha's book (206):

> When Tewodros heard the English had come through Zula, that Dajach Kassa received them, he counseled as follows: "No, we cannot fight; where shall we flee?" the army did not exceed 200, for all had deserted him. They say Fitawurari Gebreyye replied: "Where

can we be secure? Where is the place in which we did not kill, shed blood, a country which we did not plunder and devastate!" And advised "We should die rather honourably." He then released the English prisoners, Shawa prisoners, and Gojam prisoners. He threw the rest of the Ethiopian Balabbat and Wallo Balabatoch, who numbered more than 500, down the precipice of Maqdala after having shot each of them with a bullet.

The story in the book, one may add, is about both the devastation caused by a depraved and inhuman system which did not cease as of yet to make more diasporas and the imagined communities the latter aspire to create.

Seyoum Hameso
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Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War
Tekeste Negash and Kjetil Tronvoll
Oxford: James Currey Ltd. and Ohio University Press, 2000. Pp. xi, 179. Cloth $42.95; Paper $18.95

In the period immediately after they overthrew the *derg*—the military regime that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991—Eritrean President Isaisas Afeworki and Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi joked that they had switched mothers. The president's mother came from Tigray in Ethiopia, while the prime minister's hailed from what is now Eritrea. The camaraderie of the two leaders and the goodwill they had for one another helped forge a firm alliance between their respective parties as they came to dominate politics in both countries: the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), now renamed the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which heads the coalition that rules Ethiopia. Both forces originated from the same highland Tigrayan culture, and the leaders seemed to be strongly aware of this affinity. Above all, they seemed to have convinced themselves that the continuation of their political hegemony depended on their solidarity against many of their common detractors in the region.

Despite occasional tensions, relations between the two forces remained close almost from the beginning of the armed insurgency in Tigray during the mid-1970s. The first group of TPLF fighters were trained in and launched from Eritrea. EPLF commanders initially played a prominent role in assuring the viability of the fledgling insurgency. A book called *Terarawun Yanqeteqete Tewuled* (The Generation that Rocked the Mountains), published in Amharic under TPLF sponsorship shortly before the 1998 war, reveals the extent of the EPLF's role in starting the TPLF's armed struggle. In return, the EPLF won not only a potentially valuable military ally, but also an unwavering supporter of Eritrean independence. The TPLF went out of its way to produce a 331-page book, *Ye Eritrea Hizb Tigil Keyet Wodet* (The Eritrean People's Struggle: Its Beginning and Future Direction), to explain the colonial nature of the Eritrean question and to justify its claim for independence.

In the military sphere, the TPLF was able to blunt the repeated campaigns of the Ethiopian army against the EPLF by blocking access to Eritrea. The fact that the sizable Ethiopian force was bogged down in Tigray enabled the EPLF to defend its base in the Sahel when its own force was routed by a successful Ethiopian counteroffensive in 1978 and 1979. The assistance from the TPLF also played a crucial role in the EPLF's war against its rival, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), in 1980 and 1981. In fact, ELF forces operating in the southwestern parts of Eritrea were for the most part crushed by the TPLF army. In the late 1980s, the military collaboration between the two fronts grew in scale and intimacy, resulting in many spectacular victories against Ethiopian government forces and, ultimately, the collapse of the *derg* itself. Once in control of Addis Ababa, the TPLF government provided unreserved assistance to the EPLF to facilitate the Ethio-Eritrean separation and to ensure the success of Isaias's regime in Eritrea.

In 1998, this exemplary brotherhood collapsed suddenly, and the close cooperation between the two quickly escalated into a murderous conflict. Given the tradition of secrecy and political opacity in both organizations, few outsiders had any clue about what lay behind the rapidly deteriorating relations between the two former allies. It is this mystery that *Brothers at War: Making Sense of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War* attempts to explain. We owe the authors, Tekeste Negash and Kjetil

Tronvoll, much for producing the first serious and comprehensive account of the 1998 war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Because *Brothers at War* came out while the conflict was still in progress, before the secretive tradition in both parties began to crack, the book did not benefit from many of the sources that came to light after the division within the ruling cliques in both countries. Oftentimes, books that are rushed to print to fill the information gap on current issues tend to be short on facts and shallow in analysis. This is not the case with *Brothers at War.*

The two authors bring their profound understanding of the region's history and their keen observation of contemporary developments into play in this study. Tekeste Negash's work on Italian colonialism in Eritrea and the Ethio-Eritrean Federation is well recognized. Kjetil Tronvoll's work has closely followed developments in post-independence Eritrea. Their cooperation has resulted in a book that is rich in its coverage of the background of the conflict. The authors have carefully sifted through the available public and government sources to make sense of the causes of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. They appropriately devote a large section of the book to a discussion of the competing economic ambition between Eritrea and the Tigray region, while at the same time emphasizing that reasons such as ideological rivalry and Eritrea's desire to force the final delimitation of the borders may have been powerful motives for the conflict.

Shumet Sishagn
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Special Issue: Cultural Variation and Social Change in Southern Ethiopia: Comparative Approaches

Guest Editor: Jon G. Abbink

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Comparing Cultures in Southern Ethiopia: From Ethnography to Generative Explanation

Jon G. Abbink
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This special issue of *Northeast African Studies* is an exercise in comparative ethnography and theoretical exploration. It starts with the following question: Why is there such remarkable regional diversity in the cultural traditions and modes of life in the societies of southern Ethiopia, and with what kind of theoretical and ethnographic understanding can we explain it? The question has often been posed as to what extent these small-scale societies with their notable linguistic commonalities (being of the Omotic, Cushitic, and Surmic language families and thus per group suggesting a common "origin") have shared social and economic traits, political institutions, ideologies, and ritual complexes, and what has generated their paths of differentiation.

Apart from evoking fascinating ethnographic questions, this issue also raises theoretical problems, of wider significance outside the Ethiopian ethnographic context, related to structural comparison, societal change, and the import of underlying ecological and socioeconomic factors or processes that fuel cultural differentiation. Regional comparison is a well-established research tradition in anthropology and has many forms. There is the school of statistical comparison and correlation, going back to the now largely ignored work of Harold Driver and his group (Driver 1973; Jorgensen 1974), and which is partly continued in the electronic journal *World Cultures* and in the large number of studies of the Human Relations Areas Files at Yale University. The work of

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