

Felix Girke (ed.)

Ethiopian Images of Self and Other



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Ethiopian Images of Self and Other

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Preface by the series editor

The new series *Schriften des Zentrums für Interdisziplinäre Regionalstudien* serves as a forum for publications within the field of area studies. While replacing the *Orientwissenschaftliche Hefte* series which has reached more than thirty publications since its first appearance in 2001, this new series can also be said to continue the *Hefte*, although with new editorial aims and a shift in emphasis.

In recent years, the “Centre for Interdisciplinary Area Studies” has undergone structural and thematic changes. Mainly, this is reflected in the extension of its regional concerns beyond West Asia and our efforts to strengthen the links between regional expertise and the various disciplines which inform and shape our knowledge about regions and transregional connectivity. This widening research field has already been indicated by renaming the former “Orientwissenschaftliches Zentrum” (OWZ) as the “Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Regionalstudien” (ZIRS) in the year 2010. This extended spectrum of regional expertise and (inter-)disciplinary approaches necessitated reorganizing the publication series to allow for a broader range of studies from the research groups and individual scholars.

The inclusion of this series in the publication program of the *Universitätsverlag Halle-Wittenberg* also puts these volumes within a framework that is recognized well beyond Martin Luther University. Accordingly, the directorate of ZIRS, acting as the editorial board of the *Schriften für Interdisziplinäre Regionalstudien*, will be happy to receive and consider suggestions for publications in the field of interdisciplinary regional studies from scholars at other universities, in either German or English.

Prof. Dr. Burkhard Schnepel (January 2013)

Executive Director of the Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Regionalstudien

Ethiopian images of self and other: essays on identification and stereotype

FELIX GIRKE¹

Stereotypes and the practice of stereotyping
– attributing to all members of a category or class identical features –
have not traditionally been well received within the social sciences.

(Rapport/Overing 2007: 391)

As I set out to write this introduction, a story is hitting the news around the globe. On July 12, 2013, an Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 787 Boeing Dreamliner caught fire at Heathrow airport. What would appear to most of us as quite simply an unfortunate event, one in a string of misfortunes haunting a new and technologically ambitious airplane, triggered reactions throughout the internet which bear reporting. An Ethiopian newsportal, yehabesha.com, has done us the service of gathering dubious comments made by international users on Twitter and on a CNN webpage. Consider these (anonymized) examples:²

That Ethiopian airlines plane caught fire because it's made from sticks and mud. What did you expect?

-
- 1 I want to thank Judith Beyer and Verena Krebs for comments on this introduction. My colleague at ZIRS, Hanne Schönig, has gone above and beyond the call of duty in her efforts to improve this entire publication. Its shortcomings remain my responsibility. Gareth Hamilton, Anna Little Huk, Jean Lydall, and Charlotte Sutherland have generously helped with language editing.
 - 2 The original source was <http://news.yehabesha.com/people-around-the-world-reaction-after-ethiopian-plane-caught-fire-reactions-from-cnn-and-twitter/>; this site has since been taken down, but was preserved online at <http://ethiopiannewsforum.com/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=57026>, accessed January 22, 2014. All comments are reproduced in their original form – [sic!] applies throughout.

“Ethiopian Airlines plane catches fire” ... Honestly, i didnt realise theyd discovered fire in Ethiopia.

Why have Ethiopia got a Dreamliner, when they can't feed their people #confused

Ethiopia can't feed its population but it can afford a Boeing 787 #nointernationalaid

WTF are Ethiopia Air doing with a Dreamliner anyway? Cost of plane £140m, UK AID £330m per annum. Mugged off. #Ethiopia #stopforeignaid

If Ethiopia has 50 fancy dreamliner airplanes, why the fuck are we still sending them rice?

No real facts, or news for that matter...maybe the Ethiopians built a campfire in the plane and were roasting a goat.

I thought flying in Ethiopia meant flapping your arms in a tribal feather dress.

What shocks me is that there are enough people coming and going to Ethiopia to require a Dreamliner.

I hate flying Air Ethiopia. Meals are never served, ever.

There is little cause to assume that people who feel motivated to post vicious comments in online forums or to derisively tweet about current media events would be representative of the average media consumer. Still, the above sample surely is sufficient to make a simple point: images of a place, a nation, or a category of people, once they are out in the world, will not easily go away. The prevailing image in question here is an uninformed and insulting one of Ethiopia. It is an image likely based on unforgotten (and not updated) 1980s Western media campaigns and a solidified racist sediment, combined with revanchist sentiments that balk at providing international aid with so much amiss at home, underlying and feeding these commentators' views of the world.

However deplorable we consider stereotypes and judge them as superficial, inaccurate, or practically misleading, and whether we – as the epigraph by Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing suggests – disapprove of them in academia as much as in the everyday world: deploring them will hardly dispel them. Neither will specific stereotypes go away on their own accord, nor will the social practice of stereotyping vanish. Activists in the field of race and gender equality know best that it is extremely difficult to bring people to own up to their prejudices and work towards more realistic, empirically validated, regularly updated, fair und non-priv-

ileged notions. This is true for gender, origin, religion, or any of the other fields which people use to rhetorically categorize and characterize people. The by now proverbial *Orientalism* (Said 1979) is a case in point: a specific critique aimed at a cultural practice of othering that emerged in a specific context and for a specific audience has become so successful that it can now be applied metaphorically far beyond its originary frame of reference and still be (mis-)understood.³

But there is little evidence that there is much variation in people's tendency to approach the world through stereotypy, and while the powerful can always express their views more openly and loudly than the weak (compare Scott 1985), one would be hard pressed to identify anybody innocent of this original 'social sin.' While the anonymity of producing and widely disseminating negative images of others by means of social media or web 2.0 commentary functions is a modern aspect of this, as the examples above have shown, radio and newspaper previously lent themselves to that purpose just as well. This is not a modern phenomenon. It is not migration and cosmopolitan plurality that elicit such views; in fact, this volume offers some concrete evidence that images of self and other are as present and as relevant in much more 'traditional,' intimate and unmediated face-to-face settings.⁴ In acknowledging this universal relevance, then, the academic task must be to try and gain a clearer understanding of how stereotypy works, through example and analysis. Treating all these broad generalizations, the ready-mades of social *Gestalten* that we use for quick assessments as well as for strategic politicking, as mere mistakes and obstacles in the way of civility and equality is naïve and as a scholarly approach entirely on the wrong track.

Images and stereotypes fulfill important cognitive and communicative functions. They are rather resistant to falsification, and can be as contagious as any biological virus (compare Sperber 1996). They are 'good to tell,' they are the basis of much joking and of narrative clichés. At the same time, the virus analogy here is misleading, because despite the alarming introductory example, hardly all generalizations are pejorative and harmful. We often admire members of a certain category of people for some trait or other we ascribe to them – especially (but not

3 Recent reflections about the life and times of "orientalism" are found in the edited volume *Orient – Orientalistik – Orientalismus* (Schnepel, Brands, and Schönig 2011). Especially relevant for my argument would be the chapters by Schäßler about the reception of Said's book over the decades and by Kramer on Said's view of culture. It emerges quite clearly that Said's "intentionalist" approach sees only deficiency and a disturbing will to power behind "orientalizations."

4 While it is by no means difficult to find texts in the social sciences and humanities that strictly capitalize Self and Other, this book will forego this, largely for aesthetic reasons: while bearable for a chapter or two, the constant barrage of capital letters proved too intense at the manuscript stage.

exclusively) if we ourselves belong to this category. Stereotypy works in both ways, as generalizations beyond individuality serve to project fears as well as longing, and serve to nurture disdain as much as adoration. And if this is the case, what could be our epistemic basis for accepting positive stereotypes and rejecting pejorative ones? Here, we are halfway down the road towards the ‘strategic essentializing’ of postcolonial studies, in which an empowering narrative is valued above a critical one. One key to this conundrum used in this book is to temporarily shelve the question of the legitimacy or even of the correctness of images of self and other which find public expression and endorsement in favor of a decidedly empiricism-minded assessment of how stereotypes actually behave in the world.

Images of self and other is a non-judgmental attempt to capture this dramatic polarity, this awkward balance of (legitimate/positive?) images of self and (illegitimate/negative?) images of other in interaction. The case studies in this volume trace publically voiced imagery to its emergence and show its means of persistence; they reveal its vectors and sites, its nodes and branches. This is of clear relevance for the study of identification. Stereotypes and the wider images of self and other are expressions of perceived cultural specificity and difference, and also practical tools to engage in interactions which might well lead to utterly different “elaborations of being” (Rapport/Overing 2007: 394). Specifically in regards to ethnic identity and cultural contact, this focus offers up a rich data set.⁵

So – is this a book about stereotypes? First, I try to not use the terms ‘images’ and ‘stereotypes’ interchangeably. The visual metaphor of the (social) ‘image’ is obviously less technical, and has a wider penumbra under which a good number of other aspects can and should be subsumed. The ‘images’ in this book come in a plethora of forms, are multi-medial and multi-sensory: while acknowledging that the visual experience often determines or even over-determines perceptions of a situation, we find that statements about self and other are more fully embodied, and evocations of the other can cause sensations which go far beyond the visual. Stereotypes, then, are often partial expressions of images – but as such, as verbal things in the world, they are among our most accessible data. They are of essential value in the pursuit of the less tangible and certainly more complex idea of ‘image,’ which we take to be fundamental to all sorts of identification processes. So when

5 The reader might look for other social categories which might deserve attention in the Ethiopian context: what about the gendered self and other? What about differences in age, class, health, or wealth, all social parameters which usually lend themselves to strong divisions between people? Some of these do come up in the later chapters, but they are not the focus of this volume. As further reported below, the research program underlying this work focussed on “cultural and linguistic differences,” and it is this program we aim to enrich.

I call out stereotypes, I refer to (more or less collective) representations, which “provide a social group with collective explanations as to why different social groups act as they do” (Hinton 2000: 158), including of course these “groups” themselves. An explicit reference to images points to the less accessible but certainly no less real attempts by people to deal with a world full of other people in a coherent manner. This yearning for coherence and dislike of ambiguity can trump judgment and other critical facilities, but must it always? To demonstrate my capacity for dealing with ambiguity, I will refrain from further defining ‘images.’ In the following chapters, the contributions shall speak for themselves and for the wide range of ways in which human beings order the world and fill it with stories and portraits. Those portraits, it bears pointing out, will be of both individuals and of collectives. This is in fact the crux: there is always a fraught relation between a social category and its putative members. Individual identification is very difficult to disentangle from more collective assemblages. While identity can be worked at with solitary effort, the tendency to see people as representatives of something or other is usually too strong for an individual to entirely avoid getting caught up in stereotype.

The motivation for this volume arose out of research practice. The more anthropological chapters evoke their authors’ recognition over the course of fieldwork just how strongly their respective research sites were shot through with images of self and other, and how strongly these images demanded their close attention in turn. Without learning local idioms of stereotypy, how can – say – an anthropological researcher ever hope to navigate discussions about interethnic relations (compare Gabbert/Thubauville 2010) or processes of boundary-making, through which a group distinguishes itself from others? How can we study identity and self-esteem (compare Strecker/Lydall 2006) if we close our ears to which (self-) ascribed features people appreciate, and which features (of others) they depreciate? Some stereotypes, obviously, are simply crude and obvious; some are subtle and sophisticated. Some are critical while being appreciative: the Kara, the focus of my Ethiopian fieldwork, can in the very same sentence mock their Hamar neighbors for being slow to modernize, and praise them for being the ultimate herdsmen (compare Dubosson, this volume). Attraction and rejection can go closely hand-in-hand indeed, and the study of their verbal and non-verbal expression is inherently worthwhile. We can often find out that clichés are used reflexively or even ironically, as the people we study and live with reveal (with a wink maybe) their awareness of the spurious nature of what they sometimes claim about others – and themselves.

Academic approaches to stereotypes and images

To seriously engage with the title of this volume, with ‘images of self and other,’ requires us to look at semantics. The various available ways to imagine ‘images’ have a great influence on what this metaphor evokes, what expectations it raises, and how it prestructures our thinking in possibly unintended ways. Consider these sample questions we might ask: Are images fleeting visions, or are they hewn from stone, for eternal contemplation? Are they two-dimensional images, or three-dimensional? Are they moving images or still? Do we find images as a seemingly natural part of our cultural lifeworlds, or are they ostentatiously shaped by people? If so, can everybody engage in this task, or is it restricted to skillful artisans, or to people with high status? Specifically, concerning ‘images of self and other’ – does everybody have them? To the same degree? From which perspective? From whose perspective? Where are they exhibited? What senses are involved? Should we even talk about an ‘image’ in the field of cultural contact when the Dassanech of southern Ethiopia characterize their fishing neighbors as ‘smelly’? (Almagor 1987) It is liberating to realize that all these are empirical questions, using a sufficiently loose understanding of ‘images.’ Any and all can apply, and we simply need to be methodologically prepared to look for them. As anthropologists or historians, discussing things as ‘images of self and other’ invites us to explicitly address these modalities, or running the risk that unwanted presuppositions and assumptions infiltrate and subvert our and subsequently the readers’ thoughts. Talking about (visual) ‘images,’ we might inadvertently all disagree about what is typical of an image, or even what makes something an ‘image.’ Some caution is well-advised. We therefore actively engage and problematize this metaphorical notion.

There is not enough space here to comprehensively discuss the social science literature on stereotyping – or what has more recently, in its familiar guise of more macro-level ‘national character’ studies, been called “imagology” (Beller/Leerson 2007). Instead, I will briefly align my approach to the topic with a few select authors, to prepare the ground for the discussion of the ethnographic material compiled in the various chapters. At any rate, saying that this volume is about ‘images’ seems preferable to the cold diagnosis of ‘stereotypes,’ out of which surely nothing good can come.

As perspectives from within social or cultural anthropology come, Rapport and Overing (2007) provide one of the most useful discussions of this topic. They offer a concise assessment of both scholarly and non-scholarly (largely normative) attitudes towards stereotyping, and go on to constructively suggest a more fruitful approach. I want to echo some of the issues they raise in their handbook entry.

Identifying three academic traditions which deal in stereotypes, they point out that these all assume a deficiency view of this social practice: Sociological approaches treat them as “temporally and regionally consistent matrices which are learnt by individual members through processes of socialization,” and as a functionalist means to bolster internal coherence through “identity rhetoric” and a “normative treatment of others” (2007: 393). “Psychodynamic approaches” look at the human (even subconscious) underpinnings of self and other, at instincts and personalities (ibid.). Finally, cognitive approaches “have tended to reject a focus upon both motive and ideology,” instead acknowledging the “inevitable human fallibility” and our limits in dealing with situations where we are “bombarded with environmental stimuli” (ibid.). These various deficiency views are then resonantly summarized in the following manner:

[S]tereotypes are conventionally treated as overgeneralized, overdetermined, second-hand and partial perceptions which confuse description and evaluation, which merely reflect ideological biases, instinctual motivations, or cognitive limitations. (2007: 393f)

While particularly explicit, they are not alone among scholars to point out that to discard stereotypes as a bad or wrong sort of data – as for example Asmarom does (1973: 277) – is premature (see Barth 2000: 33; Streck 2000: 301). MacKie especially refutes positions which see stereotypes as simply mistaken (1973: 432ff) or which equate stereotype with negative prejudice (1973: 438). The definition she suggests is this: “A stereotype refers to those folk beliefs about the attributes characterizing a social category on which there is substantial agreement” (1973: 435). I would add that stereotypes, and also ‘images’ in the context of this volume, are always implicitly comparative, even where they are not negative.

For my argument, then, “folk beliefs” are important both in regard to the question what sort of social categories seem to call for stereotypy, and to the way such “agreement” is reached and expressed. If stereotypes are explanatory devices (see Bateson 2000: 38–58), what are people trying to explain? One must not assume that stereotypes override other aspects of social relations (Streck 2000: 301), or that they inescapably pre-structure interaction. Instead, as collective representations, they do not only reveal something of the world-view within which they flourish, but also allow a more pragmatic analysis: who uses what sort of stereotypes in which contexts about whom? How collective are they, really? How grounded are they in a “bodily experience of the enviroing world” (Rapport/Overing 2007: 46)? MacKie’s definition, in using the word “agreement,” points to this rhetorical nature of images. An image sticks if it is resonant (compare Girke/Meyer 2011), if it is persuasive; an image that does not persuade will be transient.

This leads back to my antecedent question about what we mean by ‘images’ – I suggest that it is necessary to understand images as something that is being shown, that is paraded around the village, so to speak. To evoke an image is an attempt to define a situation by invoking otherness or community, triggering chains of cultural associations, reverberating in echo chambers (Maranda 2011) and providing us with anchors to our social landscape. A stereotype is less vague and evocative, telling us more clearly what should be important about a given other, and as a conversational commonplace, it will often simply trigger assent. We might choose not to use such anonymizing categorization, but the stereotype is always there, beckoning us to reduce complexity and to increase situational relevance.

Thus, stereotypes are as a rule evaluative as well as of pragmatic use. But are they not ‘false’? MacKie cuts to the heart of the matter: “The symbolic interactionist finds the stereotype validity issue quite meaningless. He asks, ‘Since the stereotyped group’s behavior is determined by powerful groups’ beliefs about it, how can one speak of the accuracy of perception?’” (1973: 440) In analysis, then, one needs to assess in which way the image comes to be employed, abused, or resisted. How does it shape interaction? But this is again an empirical question, and has to be addressed as such. However much we might wish for it, there is little point in showing stereotypes to be ‘false’ if we strive for an understanding of how people actively relate to each other through their competing definitions of the situation.

Rapport and Overing actually try to move beyond the “deficiency view,” offering a number of insights on what stereotypes, “as a discourse and a cognitive resort, can be said to offer” (2007: 394). For one, they point to the rhetorical capacity inherent in the expression of stereotypes: “opposition and exaggeration,” even hyperbole, afford “opposition and contrast” and (with Mary Douglas) “clarity and definiteness.” Referring to the chapters of Dereje and Girke in this volume, metaphor needs to be added to this list, with its poetic qualities and its displacing effects.

In contrast to the views which consider stereotypy a hearsay affair, stereotypes can also be conceived as a “discursive currency,” a sense surely familiar to everybody ever learning a language in a foreign context. Knowledge of a “social landscape” and the features associated with it are fundamental elements of getting to know a lifeworld, and being able to join in (or even understand) a local idiom. Stereotypes, then, are not individual failings of judgment; they are cognitive anchors. We learn stereotypes as children before we ever learn about the reality they purportedly refer to. Rather than strictly ominous, this is helpful and necessary:

They afford bearings from which to anticipate interaction, plot social relations and initiate knowing – and from a safe distance, too – however far removed their biases become from the manifold elaborations of social relationship and being which eventuate. (Rapport/Overing 2007: 394)

In simpler terms, stereotypes are a starting point of interaction, and do not have to be its end product: “[I]ndeed, the simpler and more ambiguous the stereotype, the more situations in which it can be used” (*ibid.*). The important distinction here is that the individual stereotype, isolated and dissected, is of course false and demeaning or misleading; but stereotypes do not exist in isolation, and are not singular; they occur as “varied, rich and all-inclusive array” for navigating and communicating about the social world. What if we had to try to understand an other as a complete and particular individual before even initiating interaction? We would be caught in analysis-paralysis, and never proceed! In rhetoric, this is known as “Evidenzmangel und Handlungszwang” (with Blumenberg 1981; also Bailey 1981 on the necessity of persuasion in politics).⁶ Stereotypes circumvent this problem, and help us to frame encounters and proceed on whatever flimsy basis. The ‘fix’ offered by Rapport and Overing is this:

[T]he prevalence of such stereotypic imagery may be seen as less obscurantist, less outrageous or threatening of communication and civility, when stereotypes are seen not primarily as instruments prejudicially to predominate or pre-empt others, and not as evidence of merely thinking in stale, collective terms, but rather as means for individuals rapidly to project and establish a secure personal belonging in a shifting, complicating world. (2007: 397)

With this, the verbally expressed and so often slanderous-seeming stereotypes move back into our internal worlds and converge with the broader idea of ‘images.’ I encourage readers to keep this in mind when attending to the cases presented in this book, starting directly with Richard Pankhurst’s historical overview of contact situations: how these discursive ‘pre-fabs’ might be in fact interpreted not as loaded impositions, but as tentative invitations.

Despite its focus on Ethiopia, this volume cannot presume to constitute an antidote to existing stereotypes in that country, or even about that country. It serves first and foremost as a demonstration of the ‘social lives’ of images of self and other: what do people actually do with images? One of our aims is to sensitize readers to the variability of imagery in Ethiopia, how it reproduces and sometimes

6 I translate “Handlungszwang” and “Evidenzmangel” as the pressing compulsion to eventually act and the insurmountable lack of sufficient evidence, respectively.

subverts power relations. Another is to naturalize stereotypes as an inevitable aspect of social life, an aspect that ought to be dealt with as dispassionately (or passionately, as the case may be) as with any other aspect of people's lifeworlds.⁷

The contributions

A book such as this could (and possibly should) be written about most places in the world, but its focus on Ethiopia has reasons grounded in its academic genesis as much as in the very real issues faced by this dynamic nation. Nation-building cannot be considered complete in Ethiopia even today (see Markakis 2011), and debates about its future and its role in the immediate region, in Africa and in world are various. The question of how to best deal with cultural diversity remains relevant, even pressing. Recent publications on ethnic federalism and citizenship in Ethiopia, topics which raise the question of belonging and being a stakeholder, attest to the difficulties of integration and representation of both groups and individuals (e.g. Asnake 2013; Smith 2013; Vaughan 2013).

The following chapters do not deal in solutions to these big questions, but aim to further understanding of how the situation on the proverbial ground presents itself, and how contemporary complexity emerged and is sustained. How do people order their social worlds, and how do their images of self and other find expression? What are priorities for identification, what triggers allegiance? What are the aesthetic aspects of the social practices that constitute community and belonging? Where do we encounter stereotypes, and of whom, and why then and there? What work do they do? Attending these questions, even as they mostly focused on localized and particular processes, throws light on realities on the ground too easily overlooked from a macro-perspective.

Readers engaging with the book's linear structure will find a thematic order, as we move from historical views to the more contemporary, and from the center

7 To link to another current discussion, I would like to draw attention to our contributor Erin MacLeod's recent interview with Verene Shepherd, (University of the West Indies professor and Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on people of African descent), on the practice of blackfacing and the case of the Dutch "Zwarte Piet" on the blog site "Africa is a Country" (see <http://africasacountry.com/the-year-the-blackface-tradition-in-the-netherlands-hit-the-big-time/>, accessed January 21, 2014). #blackface has also been a recurrent Twitter hashtag in Germany throughout 2013, as various media with a clear lack of historical awareness and cultural sensitivity used blackface for purposes of comedy. Blackface, especially when presented as a harmless carnival, obscures its own roots in racist practice. In today's world, it matters as a decontextualized and anti-historic presentation of self and other. Each incident reveals the inextricability of stereotyping, identification, in- and exclusion.

to the periphery. Additionally, as the book progresses, an ever-stronger emphasis is placed on how images make manifest the internal discontinuities of community and national claims. There are no separate sections, though, as each chapter picks up on some of the topics addressed so far, and certain issues recur throughout. Taken together, the contributions provide a broad historically grounded palette of Ethiopian cases which cast light on the social practice of stereotyping just as much as the more elusive but also more comprehensive and multi-sensory images of self and other. Cultural contact is relevant throughout, as people struggle to find and maintain their identities in comparison and often contrast to others. The image of self arises precisely from the fraught contact situation with the other; this dialectic holds true throughout this book.⁸

This comes out very clearly in “Ethiopian stereotypes. An inquiry into changing perceptions over the millennia,” by Richard Pankhurst, a senior historian. His chapter begins with an overview of images of (highland) Ethiopia from outside perspectives as they have emerged over centuries, and on subsequent imagery that arose with increased contact and especially heightened presence of foreigners in the country. Beginning with early Egyptian, Greek, and Arabian stories about the “land of God,” the “land of the best people” “where no-one is wronged,” he goes on to enumerate the shifting images of the country over the last two millennia. The rather positive early notions came to be complemented later on by others that referred to people’s physical features, such as the Greek concept of the “land of the burnt faces” or of “savages” even. Famous mythical or real historical characters, such as Prester John or the Queen of Sheba, or more recent events, such as the defeat of the Italians at Adwa 1896, came to be known abroad and caught hold of the occidental imagination. In a second part he juxtaposes these external images with internal Ethiopian stereotypes of themselves and each other, that is, the somewhat mutual and often problematic notions different people living within the boundaries of Ethiopia held and expressed. To complete the diorama, Pankhurst then turns to the documentation and even travelogues of foreign visitors to the country, who found themselves in social categories not of their own making, and stuck with loaded labels they partly resented, partly accepted.

The sheer plethora of images spilling out of the historical record goes along with a partly drastic emotive power, even where or especially where the actual

8 Readers will find that not all authors use the same transcription style from Amharic to English. This is a common problem for edited volumes in Ethiopian studies. Rather than change all instances of *färänj* into *ferenj* and ‘Haile Selassie’ into ‘Haylä Sellase,’ or vice versa, I have elected to respect each author’s choice. This should cause no problem for understanding or cross-reference.

words spoken were only little understood. Exemplary is the use of the term ‘*ali*, addressed at Europeans, which seems to have been frustratingly maddening to some foreign visitors for its very opacity. What is in a name? Does a term of address bestowed on an other already carry an image, or represent a stereotype? Many contemporary visitors to Ethiopia have found themselves addressed as or referred to as *fārānj*, and had to deal with their own uncertainty whether they were being insulted or just labeled. Pankhurst’s text preserves this ambiguity in the use of labels.

For “From empire to airport. On *antika*-painting in Addis Ababa of the 1930s,” Jörg Weinerth also begins in the past. Richly illustrated with photographs of paintings collected by the Frobenius Institute in Frankfurt/Main, his text traces the emergence of a rather recent art tradition: *antika*-style paintings on canvas. In the decades leading up to the 1930s Italian invasion, this new style of painting was developed and finally adapted to the taste of foreign collectors and even tourists chasing after souvenirs. This eventual commercialization of a painting genre that was formerly only produced for churches, and then later for the court, is revealing in regard to images and imagination. The themes chosen by the painters, especially early on, very specifically reflected the Ethiopian highland (*habesha*) identity: paintings of the Queen of Sheba myth and of the Battle of Adwa supported the national narrative. But what originally could not unjustly be called propaganda material with a certain legitimating intent lent itself with its often comic-like serial narration and its depiction of heroic or mythical scenes to adaptation to consumer aesthetics. In this peculiar configuration of the political economy, state policies, and tourism, the *antika* (already carrying a claim of antiquity in its name) came to be seen as typical and traditional Ethiopian, a status they to a degree still hold today: a prime case of cultural heritage.

Weinerth’s chapter thus echoes some of the topics raised by Pankhurst – as it turns out, the items which monopolized the foreign attention on Ethiopia were just as affectively powerful at home. By conveying a celebratory image of the *habesha* of both recent and mythical past, this art form clearly has potential to contribute to a present-day image of people who understand themselves as the inheritors of this patrimony. As the following chapters will show, though, the great narrative depicted by *antika* and also alluded to by some of the stereotypes from Pankhurst’s chapter is not all-inclusive. Many Ethiopians at the periphery, often contrasted with the *habesha* by use of the derogatory term *shankilla*, share neither this religious tradition nor the imperial one, unless one counts having been potential slaves to the Highland population as sharing that patrimony (compare Donham 2002: 12).

The next chapter also addresses visual and in a way excessive aestheticism, but focuses on its relevance for personal rather than collective identity. With an admirable grasp of what is truly important to his informants, Jérôme Dubosson explains the relationship of Hamar men to their favorite ox, called *errawak*. The Hamar, agropastoralists from the South Omo region and neighbors of Arbore, Mursi, and Kara,⁹ are not alone in celebrating cattle, and linking individuals to specific specimens for aesthetic and social reasons. Dubosson's approach towards this practice emphasizes the multiplexity of the relation between the herder and their animals, and how personal wants and desires are inscribed into the body of the *errawak*, even as the name of the animal (describing the particular configuration of the colors on its hide) becomes the preferred name of its owner. The animal comes to be a medium of communication about the self, a manifestation of an individual's desires for autonomy and recognition.

The self-image of an individual, as manifested in their *errawak*, is intrinsically grounded in a collective understanding of selves as people of cattle, intimately sharing an environment with the cattle. People consume milk and related products, they smell the animals, feel them, and are around them from earliest childhood on. This intimacy breeds familiarity, and mutual knowledge, in the sense of Haraway's "companion species" (2003); and on top of all that, cattle are of course the most prized and valuable possession of the Hamar. Being a Hamar man, then, entails having a favorite animal (or being perceived as deficient), and it is crucial to understand that beyond partaking of a general ethos, this is also a path to individual identity in this rather egalitarian society, which offers its members (in the absence of ubiquitous conspicuous consumption) few extrinsic means of distinction.

Having cattle matters not merely to individuals, but shapes a whole way of life. How a life on the path of pastoralism influences especially aesthetics and the soundscape of a place is one of the first topics explored by Echi C. Gabbert. In "Songs of self and others in times of rapid change. Music as identification among the Arbore of southern Ethiopia," she invites the reader to follow her as she analyzes song lines and walks along (figurative) song lines in Arbore. Her analysis is the result of years of meticulous transcriptions and dedication to the intangibles of social life. It reveals not just the complexity and range of Arbore music, but also gives a twist to the visual bias of the word 'images.' The songs sung by the Arbore are arguably rich in imagery, poetic, allusive and persuasive, and they not only mark Arbore identity, they are in a way a central aspect of it. We learn how certain songs are diligently protected not only from foreign influence but from endogenous

9 See, respectively, the chapters by Gabbert, LaTosky, and Girke, all this volume.

modification as well, a preservation effort which raises an entire new set of questions regarding heritage and authenticity.

While the Arbore songs are a historical record of specific events, they also record the “living routines of Arbore identity,” value struggles and other dynamics of change. Even when they are normative or even admonishing, their meaning can be taken ambivalently: of course, the girl Dakara who absconded with her true love rather than following the traditional path into marriage did do a bad thing – but she also did follow love rather than calculation, valuing her freedom over custom. Subsequently, the young girls who sing Dakara’s song today have motivation to both be and not be integrated into the song themselves one day. Would they rather be remembered as rebels of the heart, or not be remembered at all for being ‘good’ girls? Gabbert has a pithy phrase to describe the relation of Arbore songs and Arbore culture: “In whichever way songs represent and remind, they reflect and constitute at the same time.” The images contained within them are mobile, open to flexible interpretation, and of high emotive power.

With the final four chapters, the book’s focus is shifted from the imagery of self-identification to cultural and social divides. Shauna LaTosky reports on the Mursi, who are, due to the lip-plates worn by some women, probably the most iconic of all the Ethiopian minorities, and very much an instance of underprivileged and marginalized *shankilla*. Her chapter “Images of Mursi women and the realities they reveal and conceal” is a critical vivisection of contemporary visual practice. There is a thriving cottage industry of professional (and amateur) photographers and film-makers who use Mursi images to achieve fame and make some profit, both online and for more traditional coffee-table books. The effect of their efforts is to visually sustain ideas of exoticism and primitivism, while allegedly celebrating the lifeworld of the Mursi and other phototourism-afflicted people. The staged and arranged and often plain bizarre nature of the pictures, as LaTosky demonstrates, proves that there seems to be much less interest in understanding Mursi than in (re-)presenting Mursi, or, to echo a recent film she discusses, in “framing the other.”

The Mursi photos draw the gaze, and are immensely suggestive, but as LaTosky’s nuanced contextualization drives home, such suggestions are apt to mislead. The social reality behind the lip-plates and the correspondingly stretched lip are far removed from the drama and spectacle viewers and tourists expect and perpetuate. Mursi women have their own viewpoints, their own reasons for sustaining (or abandoning or modifying) the practice, and act in awareness of what tourists, aid workers, missionaries as well as the national administration expect of them. In effect, LaTosky provides an emic and nonconformist subtitle to the still images of

the Mursi which consumers have come to cherish as screens on which to project their own fantasies about women and Africa.

LaTosky's chapter is much enriched when read with a web browser at hand, to either access the various URLs provided or simply look up available pictures of Mursi. It is for the bothersome vagueness of the legal situation that we chose to not reproduce the glossy photographs which feature in her analysis. Our alternative tactic, to provide URLs, is less cumbersome than it might appear: the internet today is saturated with Mursi photography, and it is enlightening and yet simple to sample this wealth. Readers will likely find that LaTosky has even understated her criticism.

Felix Girke's contribution on "Metaphors of the Moguji. Self-defining othering in Kara political speech" turns its lens on the question of the mutuality of images. The occasion is a meeting intended for the reconciliation of Nyangatom and Kara, who had been at war for some time even as many close bonds cross-cut the populations. Convening in southern Kara, representatives of both polities use the opportunity to blame a third party for the ills that have befallen them: the Moguji. Not only are individual Moguji singled out as instigators, but the entire ethnic category is colorfully denigrated. For a long while, Moguji had settled among the Kara in an ambiguous non-egalitarian relationship, and are in fact considered the earlier masters of the land. Kara and Moguji thus formed a heterogeneous group of selves living in the same territory while strictly kept apart by multiple ritual restrictions that have separated them into dominant subjects (the Kara) and a subordinate others (the Moguji).

Kara community life was complicated by the recent turn of disgruntled Moguji to their Nyangatom neighbors, whence they hoped to find support. The meeting however shows Kara and Nyangatom colluding in putting the Moguji in their place. Imagery has an important role in this dynamic, and its rhetorical (specifically: metaphorical) expression in political speeches by Kara and Nyangatom forms the core data of this contribution. But the political dominance of the Kara permeates everyday life to such a degree that it is not even clear which counter-narratives the Moguji hold. They are not being given the public space to express any, as that would present a challenge to the political status quo. Images here occur not just as epiphenomena of larger struggles, but as the very means and in a way as the ends of politics.

The next chapter again addresses an imbalanced relation. In "The pure, the real, and the chosen. The encounter between the Anywaa, the Nuer, and the Highlanders in Gambella," Dereje Feyissa depicts the existing mutual stereotypes of two lowland groups (the Nuer and the Anyaa), and the highland Ethiopians who have

settled in Gambella as representatives of the Ethiopian central state or during the resettlement program in the 1980s.

This is another fraught relationship, which is here explored by an intriguing cultural analysis of what people pick out as diacritical markers – what is it that makes the other an other? A perfect example is the lowlanders' disdain of the *habesha's*, the highlanders' predilection for raw meat. In a reversal of the narrative which paints them as backwards and marginal *shankilla*, the Nuer and Anyaa take this an indication of a lack of refinement and cultivation, seeing themselves as less primitive because they would always cook meat. Dereje's term of "mutual irritation" really comes alive in these examples, as the actors in this encounter at every turn manage to re-interpret a proudly presented identity marker into something negative. Beyond the illustrative examples of a situated encounter, Dereje points to the role of institutions and political economy as the backdrop: echoing Girke's queries about domination and mutuality, he makes clear that power plays a decisive role in the question of who can make what sort of statements about whom when and where.

Less focusing on confrontation, but certainly indicating irritation, Erin C. MacLeod's closing chapter casts some light on a unique case: the relation between the Rastafarians immigrants to Ethiopia, who settled in and around Shashamane, and their 'Ethiopian' neighbors and hosts. As is well known, Rastafari regard the former Emperor His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie as God, and their religion accordingly (and somewhat ironically) is difficult to reconcile with orthodox Ethiopian Christianity. Even Ethiopians who appreciate the Rastafarian dedication to Ethiopia find this problematic, and cite this heterodoxy as a strong impediment to full integration of the Rastafarians into society. Interviewing descendants of the imperial family and academics, MacLeod goes beyond more established receptions of how the Rastafarians imagine Ethiopia and their expectations regarding their 're-patriation': combined with her observations in Shashamane, a complex picture emerges which revolves around and perpetually recurs to four icons of difference. One is of course HIM Haile Selassie, another is religion as such. Problematic in a different way are the third and the fourth: the alleged dangers of marijuana (intrinsically associated with the Rastafarians), and the intermarriage between Rasta men and local women, the latter leading to unresolved identity questions for children and worries of being left out by local men.

It will have become clear that – unlike the commentary which began this section – the chapters do not deal with imagery projected onto Ethiopia from the outside, excepting the chapters by Pankhurst and LaTosky (and, to a degree, MacLeod and Weinerth). More emphasis is placed on the views Ethiopians have cultivated

of themselves and towards each other: not far-fetched opinions, but rather contact-induced generalizations. At the same time, the intensity and type of stereotyping are not so very different from the abstruse comments on Twitter and CNN. For the practical purposes of navigating a social landscape, intimate knowledge of individuals does not necessarily trump the sweeping generalizations about a collective, and stereotypes within Ethiopia do not appear to be different in quality than those wielded by outsiders. Both can be equally unfounded, unfair, hate- or hurtful, and both can be helpfully analyzed to see what cultural tropes and commonplaces people use to negotiate their belonging and orient themselves towards an other.

Still, by looking at more intimate relations, situations of direct and often everyday contact, this focus presents a stronger contribution to Ethiopian Studies, especially considering that there is currently a body of work by scholars such as Jan Záhorský (2008, 2011) on international images of Ethiopia, and a plethora of work on the relations between the larger populations of the country, such as Amhara, Oromo, and Tigre. Smaller places have been spotlighted more infrequently. The background of a number of the contributors, who previously collaborated in a research program on the modalities of cultural contact, presents another reason for this focus, as the next section documents.

Area studies and the background to this volume

This book appears now as the second volume in the new series “Schriften des Zentrums für Interdisziplinäre Regionalstudien.” While the research presented here was not facilitated by the Zentrum (also: ZIRS), the constellation is still auspicious. A central objective of the ZIRS is to stimulate and coordinate work in a modern understanding of area studies, which explicitly seeks to build on regional expertise to make meaningful contributions to the systematic disciplines. In this case, these are social/cultural anthropology and history in general, or, more granularly, peace and conflict studies, human-animal relation studies, art history, comparative religions, and, in fact, imagology. Each contributor is an expert on their particular part of Ethiopia, and taken together, the book will surely be of interest to any self-identifying Ethiopianist (and hopefully to a good number of Ethiopians as well); but the real ambition is to provide case studies which link back to issues in these systematic disciplines and thus reach out and contribute to discussions far tran-

scending Ethiopian studies.¹⁰ As contributors and as editor, we are grateful to the ZIRS for this opportunity to publish the manuscript in the “Schriften,” and invite scholars from any background and with any regional expertise to engage with our chapters and join our conversation on images and stereotypes. The fit between the aim of this particular book and the aims of the “Schriften” seems genuine and congenial.¹¹

At the same time, this book belongs to a less formal book series, comprising two other edited volumes: *The perils of face. Essays on cultural contact, respect and self-esteem in southern Ethiopia*, edited by Ivo Strecker and Jean Lydall (2006) and *To live with others. Essays on cultural neighborhood in southern Ethiopia*, edited by Echi Gabbert and Sophia Thubauville (2010). Each book was released by a different publisher, and yet they are intimately entangled: all three spring forth from the work of a project group which was part of the Sonderforschungsbereich (SFB) 295 “Cultural and linguistic contacts. Processes of transformation in North-Eastern African and West Asian history” funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG) and located at the University of Mainz.¹² The project group was led by Ivo Strecker throughout its three phases, who also provides an afterword to this volume.¹³ Echi Gabbert, Shauna LaTosky, Jörg Weinerth as well as Felix Girke were all at some point direct participants in the SFB’s work. The other contributors joined us along the ways, in various venues and creative collaborations, and in academic sympathy for the work achieved and planned on the basis of Ivo Strecker’s visions and teachings.

What entwines *Ethiopian images*, *The perils of face* and *To live with others* is, then, not only an academic history, continuity of personnel and a general regional focus, but a fundamental motivation to positively explore diversity in Ethiopia, to probe the depths of Ethiopian cultural worlds, and to celebrate the people who welcomed us as researchers into their lives, hosting us in some cases for years, and proudly taught us what we wanted to know about their lifeworlds. Now, eight

10 Jon Abbink’s panel “Rethinking the anthropology of Ethiopia – from ethnography to explanation, held” at the 18th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Dire Dawa (2012), similarly sought to reconnect regional expertise to larger questions in the systematic discipline of social/cultural anthropology.

11 2014 is also the year in which the ZIRS is trying to set up a platform for interdisciplinary Ethiopian Studies at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, as there are ongoing and yet unconnected projects in and partnerships with Ethiopia in legal studies, pharmacy, economics and social/cultural anthropology.

12 See <http://www.uni-mainz.de/Organisationen/sfb/295/>. The page was last accessed January 29, 2014, but is no longer maintained.

13 After Ivo Strecker’s retirement, playfully known as his new research stipend, Prof. Thomas Bierschenk took over the formal directorship of the project group.

years after *The perils of face* and four years after *To live with others*, *Images* sees publication, and continues the discussions begun in these earlier volumes. Cultural contact is a central concern throughout this series, as are emotion and imagination, as well as the expression of culture in practice, in interaction.

Readers familiar with current developments in Ethiopia will know that many of the lifeworlds presented here (esp. chapters by Dubosson, Gabbert, LaTosky, Girke) are in danger of being modernized into oblivion. The agropastoralist populations could end up as collateral damage, their communities dispersed, their traditions disrupted, their knowledge declared worthless (compare Girke 2013).¹⁴ While ominous, this process is still ongoing and there is still some hope for equitable solutions and measured development. If not, the world could possibly once again see an abundance of pictures of misery from Ethiopia in the next decade, of destitute and demoralized people resettled in the name of efficiency and development. In a bitter irony, these would be images just like those that gave rise to the tweets and comments mentioned initially, and which still today feed the problematic reputation Ethiopia still found all over the world.

Halle (Saale), June 2014

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14 See the relevant 2012 Human Rights Watch report here: ‘What will happen if hunger comes?’ <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/06/18/what-will-happen-if-hunger-comes-0> (last accessed February 20, 2014). It has now been supplemented by a multimedia show found here: http://4246-multimedia-hrw-org.voxcdn.com/features/omo_2014/slide.html#/.

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Ethiopian stereotypes: changing perceptions over the millennia

RICHARD PANKHURST

Ethiopia, because of its antiquity and the dynamics of its history, has had many contacts with the outside world. The country has in consequence been perceived differently by peoples of different civilizations and epochs. The result is that Ethiopia and its inhabitants acquired a number of very varied stereotypes. These have changed dramatically over the millennia, are still changing, and will presumably never stop changing. The people of Ethiopia, throughout recorded history, have themselves also been in a state of flux and have developed their own, also changing stereotypes to refer to their neighbors as well as to foreigners from far-afield. This paper, which has no claim to be exhaustive, seeks to focus on two different areas of stereotyping: first (because of its greater recorded antiquity), perceptions of Ethiopia by foreigners from outside the country; and, second, within Ethiopia itself, i.e., stereotypes used by its own inhabitants. Since a number of the following observations treat general matters which have been documented elsewhere, it has seemed sufficient in many cases to refer only to general works rather than burden the text with detailed references.

Foreign stereotypes

“God’s land”

The historic region which we now know as Ethiopia coincided, at least partially, with the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden coastal area of Africa, which the Pharaohs of ancient Egypt called the “Land of Punt.” They saw this area, which lay somewhere south of Egypt, primarily in exploitative terms: as a source, above all, of myrrh, but also of other valuable commodities, including gold, ebony, ostrich feathers, ostrich eggs, and wild animals, and their skins. The Egyptians, from the fourth to the second millennium B.C.E., accordingly carried out numerous expeditions along

the Red Sea coast, primarily in quest of Puntite myrrh. This commodity was so important for ancient Egyptian worship that the Pharaohs created the first known stereotype for the area, by giving it the exalted name “God’s Land” (Pankhurst 1961: 38).

“Burnt faces”

The ancient Greeks, who coined the word Ethiopia for what they termed the land of “burnt faces” south of Egypt, used it as an essentially racial concept, for they applied it to lands inhabited by “burnt,” or dark-skinned, people. The Greeks had, however, two other stereotypes for the Ethiopians. One of these conceived the latter as a remote people. In the ninth century B.C.E., Homer thus wrote of them in the *Odyssey* as *eschatoe andron*, i.e. “the most distant of men.” He declared that they lived “at earth’s two verges, in sunset lands and lands of the rising sun.” Herodotus, in the fifth century B.C.E. likewise observed that the Ethiopians inhabited “the ends of the earth,” while Aeschylus, using the two above stereotypes, stated that the Ethiopians belonged to a “far off land, a nation of black men,” who lived “hard by the fountain of the sun” (Levine 1974: 3f).

The third Greek stereotype, which recalled the Pharaonic concept of Punt as “God’s Land,” saw the Ethiopians as the best people in the world. Homer thus refers to them in the *Iliad* as “the blameless Ethiopians.” He asserts that they were visited by Zeus, the king of the gods, by the goddess Iris, who went to Ethiopia to participate in the sacrificial rites of its inhabitants, and by Poseidon, the god of the sea, who also “lingered delighted.” Diodorus of Sicily similarly stated, in the first century B.C.E., that Hercules and Bacchus were both “awed by the piety of the Ethiopians, whose sacrifices, he claims, were the most acceptable to the gods” (Levine 1974: 4f).

The above perception of the Ethiopians as markedly pious was, however, contradicted by a fourth Greek stereotype, also formulated by Diodorus. Writing of Ethiopia, located further south, he says, they were “entirely savage,” and displayed “the nature of a wild beast.” He adds: “They are squalid all over their bodies, keep their nails very long like wild beasts, are far removed as possible from human kindness to one another; and cultivate none of the practices of civilized life as these are found among the rest of mankind” (Levine 1974: 9f).

“Where no one is wronged”

Contacts across the Red Sea between the Aksumite Empire, situated in what is now northern Ethiopia, and South Arabia, led to the formulation, in the latter, of yet another stereotype. It was expressed, in the early seventh century C.E., by none other than the Prophet Muhammad. He had learnt about Abyssinia, or Habash, as the Arabs called the country, from two main sources: from his nurse, Baraka Umm Ayman, who was herself an Ethiopian, and from his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, who had traveled to Ethiopia extensively on business. When, early in his teaching, his followers were being persecuted in Arabia, Muhammad reportedly advised them to seek refuge in Abyssinia, and declared, in a famous utterance, that it was “a country where no one is wronged,” a concept that recalled the earlier ancient Greek perception of the “blameless Ethiopians.” This stereotype was later reinforced by the Prophet’s injunction to his disciples to “leave the Abyssinians in peace,” an utterance which was destined to have a profound influence on Muslim thinking (Pankhurst 2000: 39f).

“Prester John”

The conversion of the Aksumite Empire to Christianity, several centuries earlier around 300 C.E., had meanwhile opened a new historical dynamic. Many Ethiopians, after this conversion, traveled as pilgrims to Jerusalem, where they came into contact with Christians from the West. The latter, then deeply involved in the Crusades against the Saracens, or followers of Islam, were much influenced, in the early thirteenth century, by letters supposedly written by a ruler in the East, styling himself Prester John. His primary ambition was allegedly to assist the West in the conquest of the Holy Land. Attempts were made to trace this figure in the north Indian region, but failed, which was scarcely surprising in that he did not exist. It was thereafter widely postulated, almost in desperation, that his kingdom was situated in Ethiopia, the majority of whose inhabitants were understood to be Christians. This led to an entirely new perception of Ethiopia, which came to be stereotyped in Western Christendom as the fabulous land of Prester John. King Henry IV of England, for example, wrote a letter in 1400 to the “King of Abyssinia, Prester John,” while the early sixteenth century Italian poet Ludovico Ariosto, in his work *Orlando Furioso*, has his hero fly to Ethiopia, to the palace of Prester John (Slesarev 1959; Ullendorff/Beckingham 1982).

This Prester John stereotype proved remarkably enduring. This is evident from the writing of Francisco Alvares, chaplain of the first Portuguese mission to Ethiopia. Though he had spent half a decade in the country in the 1520s, and was fully aware that Ethiopian monarchs had never used the title, he insisted in giving the memoirs of his visit to the country, published in Lisbon in 1540, the title *Verdadera Informação das Terras do Preste João das Índias*, i.e., the “Truthful Information about the Countries of the Prester John of the Indies” (Pankhurst 1993: 22–5). The “Prester John” association was so strong that the French historian Jean Doresse likewise published a two-volume history of Ethiopia in 1957 with the title *L’Empire du Prêtre-Jean*.

“Able to divert the Nile”

In the medieval period, Ethiopia was the subject of another quite different, but equally unfounded stereotype. This centered on the myth that the country’s rulers had the technological ability to divert the course of the Nile, and hence to ruin their enemy Egypt. This belief differed from the “Prester John” fantasy in that it was not an exclusively Western construct, but was accepted both in Egypt and in Ethiopia itself. The Arab writer al-Makin thus reported that in the early twelfth century C.E. that the flood of the river failed. The Egyptian Sultan al-Mustansir thereupon reportedly dispatched Patriarch Michael of Alexandria to the king of Ethiopia, with the request that the latter restore the river’s flow, which, it is said, he did. Later again, in the sixteenth century, we find an Ethiopian monk, Abba Raphael, telling the Venetian scholar Alessandro Zorzi that the Emperor of Ethiopia could take the water of the Nile from the Muslims “so that it did not reach Cairo,” but that he refrained from doing so because he feared that the Muslims would react by ruining “the churches and the Christian monks who are in Jerusalem and those in Egypt of which there are many” (Pankhurst 1999: 26, 30).

“The Queen of Sheba”

Yet another early stereotype attached to Ethiopia, both inside and outside the country, sprang from the legendary story of the Queen of Sheba. She was widely believed to have ruled over Ethiopia and to have visited King Solomon of Jerusalem, as stated in the Biblical Book of Kings. Her identification with Ethiopia dated back to at least the first century C.E., when the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus stated in his *Jewish antiquities* that she was “Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia.” The

belief that she came from Ethiopia was later accepted by Alvares, who, on visiting Aksum, referred to it as “the city, chamber and abode” of the Queen, who had traveled with camels “laden with gold” to visit the king of Israel when he was building his famous temple in Jerusalem (Pankhurst 2000: 19). Belief in the Sheba legend was significant in that it also led to the stereotyping of the country’s rulers as potentates descended from the Biblical kings of Israel. Such early perceptions of Ethiopia and of its people subsequently gave way to other no less striking stereotypes, which were equally varied, and in some cases entirely contradictory.

“Happy valley”

In eighteenth century Britain for example, two new and very different stereotypes emerged. The first was the literary creation of Samuel Johnson, the future English lexicographer. Based on his reading of the memoirs of the Portuguese Jesuit missionary Jeronimo Lobo, whose memoirs he had translated into English, he conceived of the country as a place of calm and contentment. His novel *The history of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*, often simply known as *Rasselas*, published in London in 1759, thus presented the picture of an Abyssinian “happy valley” whose inhabitants lived a life of “soft vicissitudes of pleasure and repose,” in a country where oppression was “neither frequent nor tolerated.”

“Blood was spilt like water”

The Scottish traveler James Bruce, who arrived at the Red Sea port of Massawa only a decade later, met a very different scenario and drew upon its violent imagery. In his *Travels to discover the source of the Nile*, published in Edinburgh in 1790, he told of countless murders and killings, as a result of which, he claims, “blood was spilt like water.” “I will spare myself,” he continues, “any further account of these horrid cruelties; enough has been said to give an idea of the character of these times and people” (Bruce 1790: IV, 81). This negative view of the country was reinforced by the same author’s often quoted description of a bloody court banquet (Bruce 1790: IV, 301–5).

Early nineteenth-century stereotypes

Such opposing stereotypes continued into the early nineteenth century, as may be illustrated by the differing views of country as represented by the British and

French envoys to Shāwa. The British representative, Major Cornwallis Harris, wrote of King Sahlä Sellase's "insatiable love of plunder," which, he claimed, was "inherent in the breast of every savage." As for the country's inhabitants, he declared them "abject slaves to superstition," motivated by "the spirit of merciless destruction" (Harris 1844: I, 163, 166). The French envoy, Rochet d'Héricourt, by contrast, wrote optimistically of the possibility of using the common Christian faith to "join Abyssinia to the general civilization of the world" (quoted in Marcus 2005: 391).

Emperor Tewodros

Foreign stereotypes of Ethiopia, as of other lands, were often highly unstable. They changed over time, or were actively transformed, as a result of political and/or military events. The easy defeat of Emperor Tewodros by the British, and that monarch's suicide in 1868, created the widespread foreign perception that Ethiopia was weak, and easy to invade. This stereotype almost certainly led Khedive Ismail of Egypt to believe in the following decade that he could easily defeat the then Ethiopian ruler, Emperor Yohannes IV. The latter's victories over the Khedive's men at the battles of Gundat in 1875 and Gura in 1876, followed by Ras Alula's crushing defeat of an Italian invading force at Dogali in 1887, gave rise, however, to another quite different image: the one of Ethiopia's near-invincibility. This caused one Italian writer, Achille Bizzoni, to ask rhetorically, "Who has ever heard of victories over the Abyssinians?" (Bizzoni 1971: 139)

The battle of Adwa

Emperor Menelik's victory over the Italians, at the battle of Adwa in 1896, likewise led to a significant transformation in European stereotypes of the country and its people. The modern American historian Harold Marcus, discussing this development, observes: "The Ethiopian success at Adwa revealed conclusively that [...] an African power could overcome the challenge of modern European imperialism. [...] Europeans had to rationalize Menelik's victory." To do so, he argues, they created a new stereotype of the victors, by representing them as a civilized, essentially non-negroid race, ruled by an extraordinary, almost superhuman monarch (Marcus 1998: 391–8). Other contemporary observers imagined – both with hope and fear – that the country might emerge as the Japan of Africa, capable of mod-

ernizing itself and of opening a new era in world history by breaking the power of European colonial domination.

The League of Nations

Though the above perceptions of Ethiopia, and of the Ethiopians, were largely undirected, and in a sense haphazard, the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of new state-sponsored stereotypes of the country. Ethiopia's entry into the League of Nations in 1923, Regent Tāfāri Mākonnen's European tour in the following year, and Tāfāri's subsequent royal accession as Emperor Haylā Sellase, was followed, in 1930, by a spectacular coronation, staged to impress the outside world. Attempts were likewise made, by the Ethiopian government of the day, to stereotype the country as "civilized" (a word which gained considerable usage at the time) and as a state resolutely committed to modernization, including the abolition of slavery.

The Italian fascist invasion

Later in decade, Fascist Italy's ambition to establish a new Roman Empire in Africa, the ensuing invasion of Ethiopia, and Emperor Haylā Sellase's appeal to the League of Nations, led to an unprecedented upsurge of stereotyping. The country became in many parts of the world a symbol of League opposition to aggression, and a symbol of collective security. Ethiopia was, a little later, regarded as the "First of the Victim Nations" (Laurens 1967; Waley 1975; Procacci 1978). Books and pamphlets appeared with such titles as J.W. Roome's *Ethiopia the valiant* (1936), and Arnold Wienholt's *Unconquerable Ethiopia* (1926). To other observers in Africa and the West Indies, Ethiopia was the land and nation with which they identified their nationalist and anti-colonial aspirations (Padmore 1956: 146, 175). Daniel Thwaite, in his *The seething African pot. A study of black nationalism 1882–1935*, published in 1936, went so far as to observe:

Ethiopia's prestige in Africa consequent upon her triumphant success in repelling invasion, and in having remained unconquered throughout the centuries, is practically unfathomable. To Africans in general, not only to those who invoked her as a liberator, she stands as a granite monument, a living exponent and testimony to the puissance of the black race, the shrine enclosing the last sacred spark of African political freedom, the impregnable rock of black resistance against white invasion, a living symbol, and incarnation of African independence. (1936: 207)

Italy's "civilizing mission" in Ethiopia, as Mussolini called it, was at the same time accompanied by extensive Italian propaganda designed to present the country as a land of barbarism and, to quote the title of Professor G.C. Baravelli's widely circulated pamphlet, *The last stronghold of slavery* (1935). Fascist Italy, as a totalitarian state, was able not only to control its own media, but also to circulate innumerable copies of anti-Ethiopian propaganda publications throughout the Western world, the Middle East, and even India. Control of Italian thought was so tight that, although the use of poison gas had been a major factor in the invasion of Ethiopia, not a single Italian military figure ever mentioned it in any published account of operations. The Fascist stereotype of Ethiopia as a country which had needed (and benefited from) the Duce's "civilizing mission" was later perpetuated in post-World War II Italy by (1) the failure of the United Nations War Crimes Commission to try anyone for Fascist war crimes in Ethiopia, and (2) the refusal of the Italian Ministry of Defence, until 1995, to admit that poison gas was ever used (Del Boca 1996: 9–48).

Emperor Haylä Sellase

After Ethiopia's liberation in 1941, the newly established Ethiopian government returned to fostering the image of Ethiopia as a modernizing state, and of Emperor Haylä Sellase as a reforming statesman. The monarch's numerous state visits to foreign lands served moreover to familiarize people in many countries with Ethiopia and its monarch, thus giving rise to further favorable stereotypes. Critics of the Emperor's government, however, presented a very different scene, by emphasizing the country's backwardness, and the reactionary character of its administration. This critique was well-exemplified by official statements broadcast during the abortive coup d'état of December 1960.

Drought, famine and civil war versus sports and food

These divergent images subsequently gave way in the course of time to new international stereotypes of Ethiopia, most notably to that, fueled by the immense power of television, of the country as the site of drought, famine, and civil war. Such photographic images, seemingly so unforgettable at the time, are being replaced by those of the astounding running ability of Haylä Gäbrä Sellase and his successors, and, in many international capitals, by the growth of Ethiopian restau-

rants – and the unexpectedly spicy taste of *enjära* and *wät*, i.e. Ethiopian bread and stew.

Internal stereotypes

Stereotyping within Ethiopia itself doubtless began early in the country's history. One of the first examples of which we have any record seems to explain the term *bareya*, used in both Tegreñña and Amhareñña for a slave.

Bareya and Nubi

The name *bareya* was apparently first used for a non-Semitic ethnic group in northern Ethiopia referred to by the early Greek authors Diodorus of Sicily and Strabon as the Megabarri or Adiabari. This people were subsequently referred to in an early fourth century C.E. inscription of King Ezana of Aksum, who records that in the course of an expedition in the area he captured numerous slaves (Littmann 1913: IV, 32–42). A royal land charter, supposedly from the same period, states that the church of St. Mary of Aksum was granted various lands, and with them “the Bareya of Demah,” a territory immediately north of the Märäb River (Huntingford 1965: 29). This statement seems to suggest that the “Bareya” disposed of with the land were probably of servile status.

That the Bareya were later a subject people was suggested long afterwards in the chronicle of the fourteenth century Ethiopian Emperor ‘Amda Seyon. It tells of this monarch having a force of Bareya troops, but whether they were slaves or freemen is not specified (Huntingford 1965: 82). Be that as it may, it is apparent from medieval Italian sources that the Bareya had by then become the subject of highly unfavorable stereotyping. The Florentine Egyptus Novelo map of 1454 indicates the existence, north of the Märäb river, of the “Bariasilaus,” or “flat-nosed Bareya” (Crawford 1958: 13, 94). Alessandro Zorzi, similarly quoted an Ethiopian monk, Brother Thomas of Ganget, as affirming, with obvious disapproval, that the Bareya were “blacks with curly hair” (Crawford 1958: 166f).

The Nubi, or Nubians, who lived in the neighborhood of the Bareya, were likewise negatively stereotyped. Brother Antonius of Lalibela thus informed Zorzi that they were a “bad people” of “robbers and murderers” (Crawford 1958: 181). The Portuguese traveler Alvares was subsequently told that they were a “very vile people, very bad and very black” (Beckingham/Huntingford 1961: II, 252). But to return to the Bareya, their subjection (probably dating from early times) led to a

linguistic transformation, as a result of which their ethnic name came to signify a slave. This term is of some antiquity as evident from the fact that it appears in Hiob Ludolf's *Lexicon Amharico-Latinum* of as early as 1698 (see Pankhurst 1977).

“Entirely different from other men”

Unfavorable stereotyping of the Bäläya, another non-Semitic ethnic group to the west of Ethiopia, is evident in the chronicle of the sixteenth century Ethiopian Emperor Särsä Dengel. It refers to this people as *ageberet*, or slaves. It states, once more with evident disdain, that they were “entirely different from other men,” for they were big and strong, went around “entirely naked like animals,” anointed their face and body with white mud, and made use of poisoned arrows (Conti Rossini 1907: 174). Such stereotyping was echoed in the eighteenth century by Bruce, who, describing the people he met in the West of the country, wrote:

They are woolly-headed, and of the deepest black, very tall and strong, straighter and better-made about the legs than the other blacks; their foreheads narrow, their cheek-bones high, their noses flat, with wide mouths, and very small eyes. With all this they have an air of cheerfulness and gaiety which renders them more agreeable than other blacks. (Bruce 1790: II, 438)

Slavery and race

Stereotyping connected with slavery and race also took place in eighteenth-century Gondär. Some of that city's imperial troops, composed largely of slaves or their descendants, came to be known as *weladoch*, a term used for persons of half-slave descent. Preoccupation with slavery and race also led to a complex pattern of stereotyping, as expressed by the use of Amharic terms for persons of half, quarter, and one-eighth, as well as even one-sixteenth and one thirty-second slave descent (Abbadie 1881: 29, 493, 559, 648, 760, 1007).

Guragé

Ethnic stereotyping found expression a century or so later, in the early days of Addis Ababa, when Guragé manual laborers were so numerous and widespread that the name of the ethnic group became synonymous with its occupation. The British traveler C.F. Rey thus wrote of “camels for heavy baggage, Gourages for

light stuff.” Those in need of a porter or manual laborer would cry out “Guragé” until this practice was banned after World War II, when it became customary instead to call “Coolie, Coolie” (Rey 1923: 57; Forbes 1925: 84, 106; Norden 1930: 61f).

Manual workers

Mention may also be made of the traditional Ethiopian stereotyping of manual workers, such as blacksmiths, who were widely believed to turn into hyenas at night. This prejudice caused Ludolf’s Ethiopian informant Abba Gorgoreyos to declare, with a smile, that “the silly vulgar people could not endure Smiths, as being the sort of Mortals that spit fire and were bred up in Hell” (Ludolf 1684: 390f). Among numerous other minority groups traditionally looked down upon on account of their occupation one may cite the Wäyto of Lake Tana who were despised as hippopotamus-eaters, and by implication as bad or at least unclean.

Stereotyping the foreigners

Roman Catholics or Europeans: the *färänj*

Changing Ethiopian perceptions were graphically apparent in the stereotyping of Europeans and other foreigners. The unfolding of political and military events, in the late nineteenth century, resulted for example in changing Ethiopian stereotypes of Italians, who were initially referred to in this period as *färänj*. This was the traditional Ge’ez and Amharic word for Roman Catholics, but by this time had come to be widely used for most Europeans, or “whites” (Eadie 1924: 248, 250). Referring to Italian colonial expansion, a contemporary Amharic poem declared: “The *färänjoch* enter like thread through the eye of a needle, [and then] expand like a *wärqa* tree” [i.e., *Ficus vasta*, or huge fig tree] (Guidi 1901: 874).

The apparent idiocy of the Italians in providing Menelik with arms, which he later used to defeat them, found expression in this couplet:

What kind of fools are these in the country of the Färänj? How? They themselves made the weapons of their own destruction, and gave them to us. With the Wetterly [rifles] which they brought, with bullets which they brought, [Menelik] roasted and burnt this overseas barley. (Cerulli 1936: 569)

‘Alī

Disapproval or contempt for the invader caused, if we can believe Dante Pariset, a nineteenth-century Italian traveler who published in Fascist times, to a “terrible upsurge of hostility” against all “whites.” Europeans leaving their houses without an escort of four or five servants were reportedly liable to be insulted (Pariset 1937: 1, 21, 128).

This atmosphere resulted in the introduction and sarcastic use of an entirely new term for Italians. This was the word ‘Alī, which had earlier been used by the Italians when indiscriminately and insultingly addressing Eritreans, likely because the Italian occupation had begun at Massawa, a place mainly occupied by Muslims (Pankhurst 1983: 487–91).

After the Adwa battle in 1896, the word ‘Alī was used by Ethiopians as an epithet of irony or abuse. Captured Italian soldiers reported that the Ethiopian populace often addressed them mockingly with such phrases as “‘*ali*, the Italians, have they no power?” or again “‘*ali*, [your] generals, have they no power?” (Tedone 1915: 82)

The term ‘Alī was also often used by Ethiopians, once again fairly indiscriminately, in addressing other Europeans. This was because the ordinary Ethiopian, as Herbert Vivian noted, a British traveler of the period, “realizes very little difference between an Italian and any other European” (1901: 213f). Popular use of the term ‘Alī led to considerable indignation on the part of Lieutenant-Colonel Reginald Wingate, a member of the British diplomatic mission of 1897 to Menelik. On being addressed with this epithet, Wingate “bristled,” we are told, “like a gamecock.” He was convinced, as he himself wrote, that the term sprang from the abusive Ethiopian stereotyping for Europeans, and he went on to report that

[w]hilst walking this evening in the vicinity of Ras Mikhael’s camp, in company with Lord Edward Cecil, we were assailed by cries of ‘Alī from several Abyssinians, one or two of whom began picking up stones as if to throw at us. We at once made for the aggressors, and they fled. Feeling that some steps should be taken to prevent the recurrence of these insults we proceeded directly to Ras Mikhael’s enclosure, and whilst passing through the tents by which it is surrounded, ‘Alī was shouted to us from all sides. Noting one tent in particular, the occupants of which were more aggressively insulting than the rest, we entered the Ras’ enclosure and demanded that the guard should at once conduct us into his presence.

On gaining access to the chief, Wingate continues, the latter told them that Menelik had “given very strict orders” that the “practice should be discontinued,” but that “his own men, having just arrived in camp, and being perhaps ignorant of the pres-

ence of the British Mission, had committed this serious fault, which he deeply regretted” (Great Britain 1987: Wingate).

Lord Rennell Rodd, the leader of the mission, subsequently reported to the Foreign Office that his two subordinates had “showed considerable presence of mind” and that their “energetic action was wholly successful,” for they were “conducted back to their quarters by a guard of honor,” after which there had been “no repetition of the offence”. Elaborating on the offending epithet, Rennell Rodd observed: “The cry of ‘Ali, Ali’ is universally recognized as a slighting form addressed to Europeans, who are now all confounded by the ignorant populace with Italians, and even the oldest foreign inhabitants here have to submit to having it called after them.” (Great Britain 1897: Rodd)

Herbert Vivian was no less disturbed by what he considered the unfriendly stereotyping behind the term ‘Alī. Describing a journey from Addis Ababa to Harar at this time, he angrily recalls:

On the way down I heard the expression twice, once from a group of women, for whom there was no answer except to comment upon their surprising ugliness in languages they could not understand. The other time was near the end of my last march back to Harrar. In a narrow path between high hedges of candelabra cactus, I encountered several men in charge of some fifty donkeys [...] They made no sign of moving aside to let me pass. Indeed one of them danced about in front of my mule, and shouted ‘Ali, Ali, Ali.’ I raised my whip as though to strike him, imagining he would at once move aside, but instead of that he raised his hand to mock my gesture, and went on repeating with increasing insolence, ‘Ali. Ali. Ali.’ I lashed him three times across his face with the thong of my whip. (Vivian 1901: 214f)

The term ‘Alī, though undoubtedly often used in a derogatory manner, was not always so employed. The British big-game hunter Percy Powell-Cotton, who traveled across Gojjam at about the same time, recalls that on reaching the market at Däbrä Marqos, he was “well” received, and adds that “one man came up, and bowing, said, ‘Selam Ali’; I glanced at him, to see if it was meant as an insult, but it was evident from the man’s expression and manner that he intended it as quite the reverse” (Powell-Cotton 1902: 209f).

Powell-Cotton’s report is revealing in indicating the difficulty of judging perception. As has been said, anyone looking for an insult may find it anywhere.

Wealthy *färänj*

The arrival in Addis Ababa, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, of relatively wealthy *färänjoch*, or European businessmen and diplomats, created another stereotype: of the excessively rich European, and, by extension, of his poor and worthless servants. This perception was expressed in the following verse: “The Färänj’s servant dressed in white. Carries plates up and down,” that is, does nothing worthwhile (Guidi 1901: 874).

Grék

The coming to Addis Ababa, in the early twentieth century, of numerous Greek masons and road-builders, most of them from Egypt, created another new stereotype, i.e., that of the poor *grék*, engaged in despised manual work.

This stereotype, like that of *’ali* was conceived, as the French linguist Marcel Cohen explains, in general rather than specific terms. The term *grék* was thus applied to an entire occupational group, irrespective of the fact that it included not only actual Greeks, but also Armenian and Italian craftsmen. This category of European manual workers tended to be looked down upon, with the result, Cohen notes, that “the Abyssinians distinguish them by their mode of life and their appearance from other Europeans: diplomats, officials, travelers and merchants,” whom they called *färänj*. The two categories, *grék* and *färänj*, thus designated “classes rather than different nationalities” (Cohen 1924: 30).

The extent of this stereotyping of European manual workers as *grék* was confirmed by the French traveler Jaques Faitlovitch. He recalls:

If a European is seen on foot, the native looks down upon him, and designates him as Greek, a name which the European does not like to hear, for a large part of the Greeks who have immigrated to Abyssinia, mostly the worst elements from their homeland, have acclimatized themselves to the low status of the lowest strata of the Abyssinians and individually stand even lower, and are therefore called *Yefäränj bareya*, i.e. “slaves of the Europeans.” The marked contrast between the way of life and the whole manner of the other Europeans living there and these Greeks caused the Abyssinians to imagine that the latter “served as slaves in Europe. (Faitlovitch 1910: 122; see Cohen 1924)

This difference between the two stereotypes of the *grék* and the *färänj* was dramatically crystallized in the story told by Marcel Cohen of a Greek in early twentieth-century Addis Ababa who had succeeded in life. It was popularly stated that he had been a *grék*, but had become a *färänj* (Cohen 1924: 30f).

Other foreign nationalities

There was also some, perhaps fairly arbitrary, stereotyping of specific foreign nationalities. Marcel Cohen, writing in 1923, recalls that popular Ethiopian perceptions of them found expression in Amharic couplets. In one, the English were stereotyped for their style of clothing, the Germans for their military reviews, the Italians for their horsemanship, the French for their talking, the Americans for their bodily figure, and the Russians for their haughtiness.

The foreign Asian mercantile community was likewise stereotyped for its wealth. Another couplet thus has the wealthy Indian merchant Djivadji exclaim, “I have money,” while the Syrian Ydelbi, describing his lucrative textile trade, says, “I have pieces of cloth” (Cohen 1924: 69). Such stereotyping was, however, irrelevant to much of the Ethiopian public, which generally did not find it useful or necessary to distinguish very precisely between one foreign nationality and another. This stood in contrast to the popular Ethiopian interest in firearms, which in many instances involved an awareness of the countries from which they originated. From this it followed that many Ethiopians, who lumped Europeans together under the umbrella designation *färänj*, were able to distinguish between the principal imported weapons and could cite the countries from which they came. One rifle was moreover known by its place of origin, the *moskob*, or Russian gun, so named after *moskob*, the Amharic for Russia (Pankhurst 1971: 69–79).

Summary and conclusion

Commercial and other contacts between Ethiopia and the outside world, and the unique character of Ethiopian civilization, caused the country and its inhabitants to be known nationally and internationally by a variety of names. These changed significantly over the centuries. Such names often represented striking stereotypes. Some of them carried value judgments, such as good or bad, pious or savage, others referred to the inaccessibility of the land, described the people’s “blackness,” or conflated country and people with their rulers.

Ethiopia in ancient times was thus known as a far-off country, situated near the ends of the earth, whose dark-skinned inhabitants had “burnt faces.” They were praised for their goodness and piety, and presented as the best people in the world. Their country was known as God’s land – a place of righteousness where no-one was wronged. Critics, on the other hand, likened them to wild beasts, and declared them entirely savage. Ethiopia was later identified by reference to its most

renowned rulers, and variously spoken of as the land of the Queen of Sheba, and of Prester John.

Subsequent foreign stereotypes sometimes reflected arbitrary conceptions of a few individuals, for example Samuel Johnson's image of Rasselas' "happy valley," and James Bruce's description of a raw-meat banquet. Other perceptions, more broadly based, were firmly influenced by a succession of political, military, and other events. Those in the nineteenth century included the rise of Emperor Tewodros, his imprisonment of foreign captives and his suicide at Maqdala, and defeat of the Italians at Dogali and Adwa. Conceptions of the country were later molded by the advent of an increasing number of foreign envoys and craftsmen, the maintenance of Ethiopia's historic independence throughout the period of the European Scramble for Africa, and the modernization of the country in the twentieth century. Later events that influenced the view of Ethiopia in the eyes of the world included the Fascist invasion, the Emperor's appeal to the League of Nations, the television reports of the famine of the early 1970s, and, more recently, the successes of the Ethiopian runners.

Ethiopian perceptions of the outside world also underwent many changes resulting from the coming of European envoys, entrepreneurs, and craftsmen. Typical of these changes was the transformation of the term *färänj*. At first signifying Roman Catholic foreigners, it came in the nineteenth century to be used loosely for almost any "white" European, which is still its connotation today. But however omnipresent, stereotypes in Ethiopia, as in other parts of the world, are not sculpted in stone. Without knowing how they will illuminate or distort Ethiopian reality in the future, of their enduring relevance there can be little doubt.

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From empire to airport: on *antika*-painting in Addis Ababa of the 1930s

JÖRG WEINERTH

In the era from about the turn of the nineteenth century up to the 1935–6 Italian fascist invasion, the young capital Addis Ababa fashioned a new and unique type of urban culture. In the Ethiopian metropolis, many things which are regarded nowadays as “typically Ethiopian,” as part of national culture and tradition, or as heritage even, became a convention during this period. Among those cultural achievements were also new genres of painting: For the first time within the age-old history of the Christian-Ethiopian cultural technique, paintings were not produced for the church only, but on a considerable scale for secular purposes as well. Most popular among this new type of painting became pictures of the Biblical encounter between the “Queen of the South” (in Ethiopia called Azeb, Makeda, or Saba, fig. 1) and the Jewish King Solomon, as well as of the victorious battle of Emperor Menelik II (r. 1889–1913) against the Italian troops at Adwa in 1896 (fig. 2). Today, pictures of this type are generally termed ‘traditional,’ ‘popular,’ or ‘folkloristic.’¹ Nevertheless, *antika* was the term common among the painters themselves. The term testified to the significance of foreigners in the affairs of art

1 In accordance with Susan Vogel (1991: 10f), who suggests to reserve the category “traditional” for art with “old functions in non-modern contexts,” I will reserve the category “traditional painting” for church paintings. Concerning early “twentieth-century Ethiopian painting in traditional style” (Biasio 1993, 2006), I agree with critical views on the terminologies “popular” and “folkloristic art,” or in German “Volkskunst” or “Volksmalerei” as Haberland (1983) calls it, or even “volkstümliche Art” (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen 1993). These classifications prove a Eurocentric bias by neglecting the stylistic “continuum” back to older Ethiopian church art and the elite “feudalistic” content of the images (Lanfranco Ricci and Haile Gabriel Dagne quoted in Biasio 1994: 556 [fn. 40]; Silverman 1999: 177). Ricci quotes Ethiopian artists themselves, who placed “secular” painting on perfectly the same level as church art. *Antika* art was transitional in nature: while at first produced exclusively for the gentefolk, at a certain stage of growing commercialization the term “popular art” might be justified. Yet, instead of speaking of “folkloristic art” it would seem more appropriate to use Vogel’s (1991) categorization “urban art.” In this respect the term “metropolitan art” would emphasize the imperial and Amhara location and character of *antika* contents.

as it is probably taken from Italian *antica* ('antique'; Mercier/Marchal 1992: 144) and came most likely at first into use in colonial Eritrea, where the sale of paintings to foreigners was practiced much earlier than in Addis Ababa itself.²



Fig. 1:
The visit of Queen Sheba to King Solomon, painted by Hailu Woldeyes (1935)

While *antika* genres shared elements of both continuity and discontinuity with the past, of 'tradition' and 'modernity,' the comment of Stanislaw Chojnacki (1973: 84) on the status of foreign influence on *antika* art is more or less shared by most authors writing on the subject: "The new trend was most probably inspired and certainly encouraged by foreign collectors, and in the majority of cases the paintings were produced for them." What actually was the importance of cultural contact on *antika* forms and contents? The first section of this chapter discusses the commercialization process of traditional painting style in Addis Ababa, as a historical transit of initially imperial iconography to tourist art. The second section is concerned with questions of continuity with traditional church pictography and of the new functions of painting within the modern urban context. The third section introduces the *antika* collection of the Frobenius Institute (Frankfurt/Main, Germany), created by the painter Hailu Woldeyes, and investigates in more detail

2 I received this information from Prof. Dr. Berhanu Abebe, Addis Ababa, in 2002.

prominent genres of this new type of painting: historical battle scenes, hunting scenes, portraiture of emperors, and the story of Queen Sheba.



Fig. 2:
The battle of Adwa, painted by Hailu Woldeyes (1935)

Painting Ethiopia: imperial iconography and cultural contact

The prerequisites of change in Ethiopian aesthetics lay in new dimensions of cultural contact, which inside the country took place above all in Addis Ababa. As a consequence of the victorious battle of Adwa in 1896, the African empire Ethiopia received much international recognition of its sovereignty, and the world powers established permanent legations in the capital. But along with changes in world politics, the “cultural traffic” (Appadurai 1996) from abroad also increased, facilitated by significant progress in travel technology. The steamboat passage to the Red Sea through the Suez Canal (since 1869) and the subsequent railway connection from Djibouti to Addis Ababa (since 1918) had shifted the region of the Horn of Africa considerably closer to Europe. Within the period under discussion here, not only diplomats, but also missionaries, professional experts, adventurers, settlers, researchers, businessmen, journalists, as well as early sorts of tourists entered in great numbers into the country, most of the time ending up in Addis Ababa.

The new metropolis of the likewise new imperial nation state enabled manifold contacts with foreigners, their cultural characteristics and commodities. People of the capital were inspired by cosmopolitan flavor and international horizons and the growing influx of mechanically reproduced images, photos, films (since the 1930s), works of art,³ and typography had measurable effects on aesthetics and painting styles. Modern life required commercial design, which provided an additional means of income for Ethiopian painters and continued to do so until the very recent past (fig. 3, compare Weinerth 1997). Thanks to the availability of imported pigments in Addis Ababa, the elaborate and extremely time-consuming preparation of traditional paint from plants and minerals became a thing of the past. Though of much poorer quality, the new industrial pigments enabled the painters to react faster and more flexible to client-specific requests.



Fig. 3:
A pharmacy in Addis Ababa 1935. The billboard advertisement for tapeworm medicine is most likely painted by Hailu Woldeyes (photograph: Martin Rikli, 1935)

3 Beside imported art, like official portraits of international rulers presented to the Emperor, foreign artists were resident even to early Addis Ababa. Chojnacki (1973: 84) mentions Senigov, “the Russian amateur,” who produced “royal portraits and diplomatic scenes.”

Addis Ababa became the “location and symbol of the power monopoly” (Janssen 1992: 1499), also in respect to culture and arts. Especially from the northern provinces, many of the important church painters came to town (Pankhurst 1966: 18f). They were mostly commissioned for painting in churches, which in Addis Ababa were sponsored exclusively by the Ethiopian aristocracy (Haile Gabriel Dagne 1987: 57).⁴ Chief patron of the artists was the Emperor, but also members of the royal family, imperial ministers and provincial rulers resident in Addis Ababa were in demand of paintings for their respective churches and city palaces. Within the iconographic program of church murals, types of paintings were composed which deviated from the ecclesiastical canon, but were motivated by imperial and feudal need for representation (cf. Biasio 1994: 551). Portraits of Menelik II and members of the royal family were displayed in imperial churches (Pankhurst 1966: 16) and in audience chambers of the newly fashioned palace architecture (Skinner 1969: 81). The new genre of “official ceremonial portrait,” as Chernetsov (1997: 6) calls it, originated from the court but was taken up by aristocratic residents as well. It included portraiture of the royalty as well as of high ecclesiastical and governmental dignitaries.

Local artists were commissioned by the urban elite, to whom in former Addis Ababa also the foreigners (the *ferenj*)⁵ belonged. But if they were not presented directly by the Emperor, it was generally difficult for foreigners to obtain paintings. Contacts between *ferenj* clients and artists were often not direct but intermediated by agents. Painters were said to be in fear of the Emperor’s complaints (Keller 1904: 33), and early collectors like Alfred Ilg, Menelik’s Swiss advisor and counselor of state, were even to order their paintings in covert and somewhat “illegal” ways (Girma Fisseha 1989: 104). During Menelik II’s reign, painters seemed to have been fully occupied just to meet imperial and feudal demands.⁶ It seems that this situation did not change at least until the early 1920s, when Charles F. Rey

4 Besides, painters were sent from Addis Ababa on their patron’s behalf to paint in churches founded by the latter in the provinces (Pankhurst 1966: 18f).

5 The term *ferenj* addresses foreigners from abroad, in particular Europeans, Americans, also East Asians. The concept is discussed by Pankhurst in this volume.

6 Exceptional was the shop in Addis Ababa’s business quarter Merkato of the prominent Greek Balambaras Giyorghis, who had been living in the country since 1870 and seemed to have pioneered the commercialization of cultural items and antiques as souvenirs for visitors at least since around 1900. The British sportsman Powell-Cotton (quoted in: Silverman 1999: 172) refers to the offer of illustrated manuscripts in the shop of the so-to-speak *habesha*-nized Greek, whereas “good-quality paintings” seemed to have been a rather rare offer.

(quoted in Pankhurst 1966: 39) complained about the scarce availability of paintings in Addis Ababa.⁷

During the 1920s the imperial control over paintings relaxed. Along with the now developing free art market, the demand for secular paintings was growing also among well-to-do Ethiopians. In decorating the walls of their grand salons with paintings, Addis Ababa's upper class followed the example of their Empress Zewditu (Pankhurst 1966: 39). Also the *tej bet* (public houses with home-made mead) kept up with this fashion. As these drinking houses were set up in great numbers in town, for the first time commercial public space was established in urban Ethiopia, which quickly came to provide a new context for the display of art.⁸ The pictures which *tej bet* landlords commissioned from traditionally educated artists were often painted on paper and certainly of cheaper quality. In the second half of the 1920s, in particular the story of Queen Sheba and King Solomon was painted, as well as scenes of heroic hunting. The many foreign visitors who stayed in Addis Ababa on the occasion of the coronation of Haile Selassie I in 1930 brought about the first great demand for paintings. Attracted by the profitable art business, a considerable number of more or less educated church painters came to Addis Ababa, especially from the Abyssinian provinces of Gojjam, Gonder, and Tigray. This *antika* boom at the beginning of the 1930s, stimulated by growing sales to *tej bet*, led to the lasting establishment of the new painting genre. The next boom came in 1935–6, when the prices of *antika* were rising due to the great demand of the journalists who were staying in Addis Ababa on occasion of the Italian invasion.⁹

The prospering business with *antika* changed the old pattern of painting commerce, as painters began offering their products for sale at shops and at the local market. A landmark regarding commercialization was the establishment of the Menen Handicraft School in 1931, which was housing together with a small museum various workshops of cultural handicrafts, painting included (Biaso 1993: 15). The explicit aim of the institution lay in the commercial production and distribution of "traditional art" for tourists and foreign residents in Ethiopia. During the time of the Italian occupation, paintings became popular souvenir articles.

7 Nevertheless, *ferenj* collectors like the Russian medical doctor Alexandre Kohanowski, who was resident to Ethiopia between 1907 and 1913 and had thus many years of familiarity with the country, commissioned their personal portraits and other paintings like battle scenes and hunts from Ethiopian painters (Chernetsov 1997; Pankhurst 1966).

8 Even today *antika* as well as more up-to-date *antika*-like paintings and murals (commonly called *buma bet se'el*, coffeehouse painting) are decorating the walls of Ethiopian public houses and restaurants (Weinerth 1997).

9 PA c.

The Italian appetite for paintings was so great that the former mode of production by freelance artists did no longer prove effective to satisfy it. To ensure the demanded mass supply of *antika*, the Georgian art manager Djougashvilli, who called himself Prince Amiradjibi, set up a kind of painting factory with ten of the period's most important *antika* painters on the permanent staff and receiving monthly salaries (Pankhurst 1966: 39). After World War II, the production of paintings in *antika* style was most exclusively orientated to the demand of souvenir articles by tourists, which came in steadily increasing number to Ethiopia until the early 1970s. While painters like Wondemu Wond¹⁰ or Solomon Belatchew (the latter setting up his own shop for cultural items and paintings) continued the *antika* tradition of the pre-war period, more and more paintings were produced which certainly deserve to be termed "airport art."¹¹ Despite the continuous reproduction of the iconographic repertoire, individual style was a typical and also demanded feature of *antika* art.¹² But in contrast, a uniform stereotyped style was created by the painting workshop of ETTE (Ethiopian Tourist Trading Enterprise), whose products were painted on parchment instead on canvas to further emphasize the "traditional" character of the article. This type of mass-reproduced images became attractive to Ethiopians too, and one can hardly miss them today as the typical wall decorations of Ethiopian restaurants all over the world.

The idiom of traditional art

Within the transitional period to modernity, 'the aura of the art work'¹³ was not lost at once. Instead, quite the reverse occurred: the long religious tradition of the visual media continued to have formative effects on painting. The artistic innovations and experiments in painting took place within the framework of traditional church painting, maintaining its specific characteristics and potentials. These continuities in the new genres of *antika* painting might be explained by religious conservatism of the Ethiopian artists, who having generally attended higher ecclesiastical education did not dare, as Chernetsov (1997: 8) argues, to "violate the canons

10 During several meetings between May and June 2001, I discussed with Wondemu Wond about painting. Wondemu, whom I have known since 1993, was the last representative of Addis Ababa's *antika* artists. The old painter passed away on Ethiopian Christmas 2002 (Weinerth 2003). Girma Kidane's article provides some biographic information on the artist (1989: 72f).

11 An alternative term for tourist art (Jules-Rosette 1984).

12 Girma Kidane (1989) explains the sales problems of the painter Wondemu at the beginning of his career by his paintings' lack of individual style.

13 In Walter Benjamin's (1992) essay "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction," the notion of the aura is related to the ritual function of the art work.

of their tradition.” But Ethiopian church painters used imported models as a convention when composing new iconographies (cf. Pavillion des Arts 2000; Heldman 1984). And, apart from its limitations and restrictions, the canon generally first and foremost also enables artistic creativity. In his book *Art and illusion*, E.H. Gombrich (1977) noted that artistic innovation is never arbitrary, but always conditioned by the specific knowledge and abilities of the artists themselves and by their historical and cultural “language of art.” New types of problems were mastered and new forms of expression were created in art history only on the basis of a certain trained and learned vocabulary of image schemata. Thus, the depiction of a theme new to an art tradition would start from a certain schema from within the learned repertoire of the artist, who in a creative process of modifications and corrections would adapt the original schema to the new pictorial function (Gombrich 1977: 113).

Throughout its long tradition, Ethiopian painting never has been what Nietzsche called a “monological art,” but an “art in front of witnesses” (1988: 616). The traditional artist was a painting priest, doing his job so to speak ‘in the face of God,’ and in terms of historical Abyssinia he was under the direct supervision of the Emperor, who was claimed to be reigning on behalf of God. Like the wording of the Holy Scriptures, sacred art works were canonized and had to be reproduced precisely in every textual detail to ensure the auratic efficacy of the images, or, in other words, to ensure that the Holy Spirit might enter them. Ethiopian ecclesiastical art was not concerned with perspective and anatomic correctness like Western art since the Renaissance. Occidental mimesis of nature went against the principles of Ethiopian sacral art. The purpose of the images was to visualize the beings and events of the sacred texts not from a subjective, but from the divine angle of vision. Traditional Ethiopian painting was not representational but pictographic in nature. Following the British anthropologist Jack Goody (1987: 8f), traditional Ethiopian pictography was not transcribing language (as illustrations do), but suggesting language (as mnemonic media do). Pictorial texts of “image signs” (Chojnacki 1978: 67) were legible and intelligible only as far as the particular texts represented were already known and memorized by the spectator/reader. Narrative contents were expressed by gesture, facial expression, action, and interaction of human figures. The actions depicted were not necessarily consistent in terms of space and time. Yet, the arrangement of figures and actions on the canvas visualized in detail everything essential for the proper describing and memorizing of the underlying text. Characters were identified by their generally known conventional attributes. This could be a particular type of cloth and their specific

color.¹⁴ The images of saints were commonly based on their respective “*Sinkisar* stories,” short versions of hagiographies (*gedl*), which were read regularly in church at the monthly commemoration days of saints (Chernetsov 1997: 15f). On their images, saints were marked by a pictographic formula of the widely known and literally iconic “most graphic episode” of their life stories (1997: 8, 18). The schematic character as well as the conservatism of the traditional painting style resulted from the pictographical function of the ancient cultural technique. Only the stability of tradition, which is tantamount to continuous copying of canonized formulas, could guarantee the accurate ‘reading’ of pictographies (1997: 6).

Traditional church art and *antika* were not meant for the representation of visible reality, but were committed to evoking verbal narrative. The unrealistic, naïve, and exaggerated *antika* style resulted from the schematic character of pictographic formulas. *Antika* formulas generally shared the stylistic elements of church painting but were created on the basis of oral lore instead of church texts. *Antika* were first of all pictorial notations of written and of orally transmitted texts. The painter Wondemu Wond¹⁵ stated that “on our paintings we make stories, history [*tarik*] for our customers. When somebody is buying a painting, we always tell the depicted story in detail.” *Antika* conveyed the narrative essentials of their texts. In some ways, they were comparable to proverbs. Adages were providing the summary, result or essence of a given tale and – similar to *antika* – were therefore a mnemonic technique of narratives. Wondemu also emphasized this ‘synoptic’ principle of traditional pictography: “*Antika* explain the central ideas, the core things [*fre neger*], the forms are concentrated on the most important things.” Consequently, it was not intended to let the pictorial script speak for itself without the storyteller’s presentation of the entire story. Synoptic pictorial formula served as mnemonic devices for actual retellings of “cultural texts.” The Egyptologist Jan Assmann (2000) characterizes “cultural texts” by their demand for heightened social commitment. Cultural texts are articulating moral and social standards and/or knowledge essential for a social group. Cultural texts can be transmitted by different media, oral or literary tradition, by ritual, dance, art, etc. *Antika* pictography is a media to memorize cultural texts which were circulating in former Addis Ababa.

As times went by, the texts which the *antika* were based on fell into oblivion (or at least disregard), and the pictographical capacity of *antika* became weakened.

14 The expensive and always imported paint indigo was even named after the cape of St. Mary (*lipsä Maryam*), as the precious blue pigments were obligatory for her iconography.

15 Wondemu Wond, Addis Ababa, May 2001.

This was due to the shift of collective memory from the medium of orality to that of literacy. Texts technically reproduced by the printing press and later on by other media like radio and TV were replacing oral lore and its texts. Without the memory of their respective texts, the images were devoid of their proper meaning and practical mnemonic use and in consequence “turned from a living cultural phenomenon into a cultural heritage” (Chernetsov 1997: 18).¹⁶

From Orientalism to Africanization: a repertoire of “Abyssinian paintings”

The *antika* collection of the Frobenius Institute in Frankfurt is unique in its kind as it originally contained 26 paintings produced in 1935–6 in Addis Ababa by a single artist, which convey an exemplary spectrum of the repertoire of *antika* themes and genres in pre-Italian Addis Ababa. Even though the selection of visual themes was obviously not complete, in this context the fact is important that the collection resulted from the explicit commission of “the entire *antika* repertoire.” Fortunately the historical circumstances of the collection can be reconstructed from documents of the German Legation in Addis Ababa.¹⁷

In September 1935, Prof. A.E. Jensen from the Frobenius Institute informed the German Legation in Addis Ababa about a planned exhibition on Ethiopia in Berlin in the forthcoming spring.¹⁸ In Jensen’s letter, the Legation was asked to commission a number of “Abyssinian paintings” which should be presented in addition to the items collected by the research expedition of the Frobenius Institute to southern Ethiopia in 1934 (see Jensen 1936, fig. 3). The paintings should serve as cultural examples of “old-Christian Abyssinia” and as such complete and polish up the collection of material culture of the Southern-Ethiopian “Gadavölker” (“people of *gada*”) to a representative “Ethiopia show.” Jensen gave particular priority to this matter, because “the leader” (Adolf Hitler) had already announced he would attend the show. The Armenian dragoman of the German Legation, Johannes Semerjibidian, was tasked with procuring the paintings. In a separate letter to Semerjibidian, Jensen ordered between 50 and 75 paintings.¹⁹ Apart from his explicit wish of “as many hunting scenes as possible,” he gave him free hand in

16 The Addis Ababa Art School educated painter Shebeshe Eshete brings the pictographic *antika* style back into practice. His artistic work is above all inspired by Hailu Woldeyes (Weinerth 2007).

17 PA a-c. Dr. Thomas Zitelmann (Berlin) kindly supported my research by supplying this data.

18 PA b.

19 PA a.

selecting the themes of the images. Evidently Jensen intended to get hold of the entire repertoire of *antika* paintings, and thus he wrote: “The content of the paintings, however, is very easy to define. There are only around 75 different depictions as for example the Emperor, the Empress, the different kinds of handicrafts, the different kinds of executions und legal punishment and some paintings of animal tales.” The Armenian faced difficulties to carry out Jensen’s request due to the great demand on paintings by “about 100” currently present war correspondents in Addis Ababa. Eventually on February 1, 1936, Semerjibidian sent the number of 27 paintings (26 *antika* paintings plus a Hitler portrait on canvas) by freight to Germany.



Fig. 4:
Wohlenberg, Jensen, and Bayerle in Addis Ababa 1935 (photograph: Martin Rikli, 1935)



Fig. 5:
Hailu Woldeyes with his portrait paintings of Adolf Hitler and Empress Menen
(photograph: Martin Rikli, 1935)

Meanwhile, the painter Hailu Woldeyes (figs. 5, 6) was working under pressure, as Mussolini's war of conquest was steadily approaching the Ethiopian capital. The Duce had initiated his campaign against Ethiopia by attacking the northern provinces on October 3, 1935, and finally on May 5, 1936, Italian troops led by General Bodoglio were marching into Addis Ababa.²⁰ At this moment, Nazi 'world politics' were turned around: while for tactical reasons Berlin had assisted Ethiopia with secret supplies of armament throughout the fascist campaign, the now established 'axis Berlin-Rome' naturally rendered the friendship between the German and the Ethiopian state invalid (Zitelmann 1999: 246).

²⁰ Ibid., letter from Semerjibidian to Jensen, January 26, 1936.



Fig. 6:
Hailu Woldeyes painting Saint Giyorgis (photograph: Martin Rikli, 1935)

Subsequent to the Italian victory, Nazi propaganda immediately revised the image of the Abyssinians, and the “Orientals” formerly praised as noble and brave became “wild negroes” (Zitelmann 1999: 459f).²¹ This had the consequence that Hitler should never have a close look at Hailu’s paintings – among them the dictator’s portrait flanked by two lions – as the earlier projected exhibition in Berlin had been called off. Biographical data on Hailu Woldeyes, the painter of the Frobenius collection, are scarce. According to his colleague Yohannes Tesamma, he came from a “high family” in Wallega (Pankhurst 1966: 44), the western part of today’s Federal State of Oromia. When I asked the old *antika* painter Wondemu about Hailu, he praised him to the heavens. In Addis Ababa of the 1930s, Hailu was known for his portraiture of international ambassadors and heads of state, which (as was common in this period) were taken from photos (compare depictions of

21 In the eyes of the special correspondent of Nazi Germany, Martin Rikli, Ethiopian Amhara people were not “negroes” but a “Mediterranean race” (1935: 7). Then as now, the Amhara can be considered politically dominant in Ethiopia.

Hailu's portraits in Zervos 1935).²² Wondemu told me that Hailu was in lively contacts with *ferenj*, and that he spoke Italian fluently as well as some English. He even served as interpreter sometimes. During the time of the Italian occupation, Hailu, whom Wondemu described to have looked like an Italian, stayed for a longer period in Italy. In Wondemu's account, Hailu died under tragic circumstances around the second half of the 1950s. According to Wondemu, Hailu Woldeyes was Oromo. Apart from his foreign contacts, Hailu's particular ethnic and cultural origin might well have been causally related to some extravagances of his painting. Grown up in Wallega and being Oromo, he might have felt less committed to *habesha* traditions than most of his professional colleagues in Addis Ababa, who – as a rule – were Amhara or Tigray. Wondemu did not know any church in Ethiopia that Hailu had worked for. Because he had heard that Hailu painted for a Catholic church in Italy, he assumed that his colleague was educated in church painting in Wallega before coming to Addis Ababa. However, this could also indicate Hailu's commitment to the catholic faith, which was not unusual among Ethiopians at that time.

Antika genres: the great narrative painted

Semerjibidian's list of Hailu's 28 paintings reads as follows [*sic!*]:

1. Hunting, 2. Maskal festivities, 3. Meneliks Guber, 4. War of Emp. Theodoros with the English, 5. Feast of Epiphany, 6. Court in the Street, 7. Country life, 8. Council of animals, [9. Horse race at Jan Meda], 10. Marriage of cats and mouss, 11. War of Emp. Yohannes against Derwishes, 12. War with Mohamed Graan, 13. Monkeys attacking the harvest, 14. Boys playing *gana* (Gold), 15. Ras Gobana fighting against the Shankelos, 16. A love promenade and auto accident, 17. Church burials, beggars, 18. Various artisans, 19. War of Adua under commend of Menelik, 20. Plowing and sowing, 21. Court of Emp. Theodoros,

22 Martin Rikli, the well-known Nazi propaganda film maker and photographer, was in Addis Ababa in 1935 to produce a documentary ("Abessinien von Heute – Blickpunkt der Welt") as well as weekly news reels on Ethiopia under contract to the German Ufa (Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft) movie studio, on the eve of the Italian fascist invasion. His explicit aim was to present an image of the modern civilized side of the country. From his point of view, the world public was not much familiar with modern Ethiopia, as the coverage of Ethiopia was biased by ethnographic reports. However, Hailu Woldeyes seemed to have been well known to Martin Rikli. The Swiss propaganda correspondent reports (1935: 35) that the painter took his inspiration for his portraiture of international statesmen from motion pictures he regularly watched at the cinemas in Addis Ababa.

22. Voyage of Queen Sheba to Solomon, 23. Arrival of the 1st. airplane in Addis, 24. Abouna Tekle Haymanot and Abouna Gabre-Menfes Kedous, 25. Coronation of H.M. Haile Selassie, 26. Hunting, 27. H. Ex. Hitler's picture.²³

To my understanding, Hailu's *antika* paintings as listed above should be classified into seven main genres:

1. Saints' images (25)
2. Historical battles (4, 11, 12, 15, 19)
3. Big game hunts (1, 27)
4. Emperors in ceremonial and formal public contexts (2, 3, 5, 9, 22, 24, 26)²⁴
5. The legend of Queen Azeb ("the Queen of the South") (23)
6. Animal fable and allegory (8, 10)
7. Cultural paintings (scenes of 'traditional' or 'daily life') subdivided in:
 - a. scenes of country life (7, 13, 14 [?], 21)
 - b. scenes of urban life (6, 16, 17 [?], 18 [?])

Most of the 27 *antika* paintings Hailu Woldeyes sent to the Frobenius Institute were historical battle scenes, hunting scenes, and portraiture of emperors in ceremonial and formal public contexts. With few exceptions, as for its "cultural texts" (Assmann 2000) Hailu's repertoire was based on the "great narrative" of the Abyssinian empire. The Ethiopian "great narrative," a concept introduced first by Jan Hultin (1996: 82f), emphasized the Semitic, oriental origin and cultural background of the empire (Zitelmann 1999: 19). Though only representing a partial view of modern multicultural and multinational Ethiopia, Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, literacy, *habesha* imperial history, and Amhara traditions and customs were taken for the "whole" national culture.

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- 23 Ibid., letter from Semerjibidian to Jensen from January 26, 1936. By mistake Semerjibidian left out the number 9 on his list he sent to Jensen. Obviously it was the painting of a horse race at the Jan Meda track in Addis Ababa (fig. 15). Among the current stock of the Frobenius Institute's Africa archives some of the paintings listed by Semerjibidian (the numbers 14, 17, 18, and 26) are missing. Fortunately a photographic reproduction of the lost no. 26, a painting of big game hunting, numbers among the slide archives of the Frobenius Institute, while the missing no. 18, by Semerjibidian labeled as "various artisans," might have resembled one of Hailu's paintings reproduced in Zervos (1935: 245), which Pankhurst (1966: 44) describes as a painting "devoted to traditional life, consisting of three horizontal rows each containing four panels with various scenes, such as ploughing, painting, pot making, carpentry, house-building, spinning, church education and lion hunting." The entire collection of *antika* paintings by Hailu Woldeyes is available online at the image database of the Frobenius institute <http://www.frobenius-institut.de/index.php/en/home>.
- 24 The Hitler portrait is not included here, because it is actually not an *antika*-style painting.

Beside glorious battle scenes and big-game hunts, *antika*-painters were so to speak painting ‘culture,’ themes completely new to the traditional Abyssinian visual media. But with regard to the contents, these images were not simply popular or folkloristic art. They were Addis Ababa urban art, intelligible first of all to the new urban population of the cultural center. Paintings depicting sceneries of country life or traditional handicrafts were representations of *habesha* culture (nos. 7, 13, 14 [?], 17 [?], 18 [?], and 21 on Semerjibidian’s list). In pictographic manner, scenes were depicted which recalled typical aspects of traditional life from a nostalgic and at times ironic urban perspective.²⁵

Historical battles

Battle-scene paintings were presenting imperial historiography (more precisely, popular stories of imperial history vivid in cultural memory), like the death of Emperor Yohannes IV (r. 1872–89) on the battlefield of Metamma against the “dervishes” (the Sudanese Mahdists) (fig. 7, Semerjibidian’s no. 11), the suicide of Emperor Tewodros II (r. 1855–68) to escape the British Napier expedition storming his stronghold Meqdel²⁶ (Semerjibidian’s no. 4), the defeat of Imam Ahmed ‘Gragh’ by Portuguese troops (fig. 8, Semerjibidian’s no. 12), the battle of Menelik II’s general Ras Gobena against the *shankilla* (fig. 9, Semerjibidian’s no. 15), the victorious battle of Menelik II at Adwa against Italian troops (fig. 2, Semerjibidian’s no. 19).²⁷

25 Among the Frobenius *antika* collection are some very inventive compositions of Hailu, which I plan to discuss in detail in a future publication.

26 This painting of Hailu together with his painting of Tewodros’ imperial court is studied in my earlier article (Weinerth 2003).

27 Even though the battles fought by Ras Tafari 1916 at Sagale against Ras Michael (Girma/Raunig 1985: 64, plate 36) or 1929 at Autchem against Ras Gugsu were popular subjects of *antika* painting (Girma/Raunig 1985: 72, plate 45; Bahru 1991: 138f), they are missing among Hailu’s repertoire.



Fig. 7:
The battle of Emperor Yohannes against the dervishes, painted by Hailu Woldeyes (1935)



Fig. 8:
The battle of the Portuguese against Ahmed Gragh, painted by Hailu Woldeyes (1935)

Out of ‘culture-historical interest,’ as Felix Rosen called it (1907: 267), the brother of the German imperial legate to Ethiopia, paintings were preferred from which descriptions of Ethiopian history and culture could be gathered. Pictures depicting the triumphant Ethiopian battle against Italian troops at Adwa were always in great demand by Western collectors (fig. 2).²⁸ But in church contexts, like the Giyorgis Cathedral in Addis Ababa, this kind of image was meant for the memento of Saint Giyorgis’ miraculous intervention on the battlefield in favor of Ethiopia, as well as for the glorification of the ‘holy war’ of Emperor Menelik II and his great warriors.

Images of victorious battles as well as of meritorious hunts also firmly belonged to the church canon. They were displayed right amongst sacred subjects on the inner church walls containing the *tabot*, the consecrated altar tablets. Commenting on the explanations the Gondarean painter Kasa had given the ethnographer Marcel Griaule in 1932, Wilhelm Staude (1958: 306) makes clear that among the iconographic sections of church murals existed a hierarchy of holiness in which also subjects related to emperors and heroic warriors had their proper place. Images in honor and memory of imperial heroism have to be regarded as manifestations of a social order in which sacred and political values were closely interwoven (cf. Biasio 1994). In churches built as burial places for royal or noble founders (Chernetsov 1997: 6), murals depicted emperors on horseback marching up with their followers on victorious military campaigns or lion hunts.²⁹

Such compositions of emperors on horseback were meant to legitimate the theocrat’s “transition to eternal life” (Chernetsov 1997: 6; Taddese 1984). This type of imperial iconography became especially prominent in the nineteenth century, when for example victorious battles of Emperor Yohannes IV against invaders were painted for churches. Biasio (1994: 551) notes that monarchs in need of “propaganda” ordered paintings to “visualize their legitimation of power.”

Images of warfare expose Abyssinian martial pride. Battle-scene paintings were visualizing imperial ‘holy wars’ against intruders into the empire. Zitelmann (1999: 302ff, 315f) speaks of the “antemural myth” being the “political mythomotor” of highland Abyssinia. The popular image of the ‘Christian island surrounded by a sea of Muslims and heathens’ reflects the imagination of constant threat by hostile cultural neighborhoods. In old as well as recent *habesha* history the political mythomotor was not only drawing up cultural frontiers, e.g. to the

28 Paintings of the battle of Adwa are discussed by Pankhurst (1989).

29 See the depiction of Emperor Fasiledes with escorts in a rock hewn church in Tigray from the seventeenth century (Pavillions des Arts 2000: 141).

‘infidel’ *shankilla* of the lowlands bordering on the Abyssinian highlands, but was also legitimizing and mobilizing collective political action (Zitelmann 1999: 302f).

Big-game hunting

As mentioned already, scenes of heroic hunts were even depicted on church murals. In Axum, the Emperor’s killing of lion and buffalo numbered among the rites of enthronization. Ages later, resuming this ritual, newly enthroned emperors of the Solomonic line set off to ritual big-game hunts (Haberland 1965: 146). But meritorious killing of Ethiopian big game was not restricted to imperial prestige alone. It was, according to Haberland (1965: 145f), an important trait of popular culture too. Abyssinians proved themselves heroes by collecting trophies of dangerous species. Successful hunters were honored with the title *adanj* (“sharpshooter”) and other privileges when presenting their trophies to the emperor (Girma Fisseha 1989: 105; Haberland 1965: 194ff).

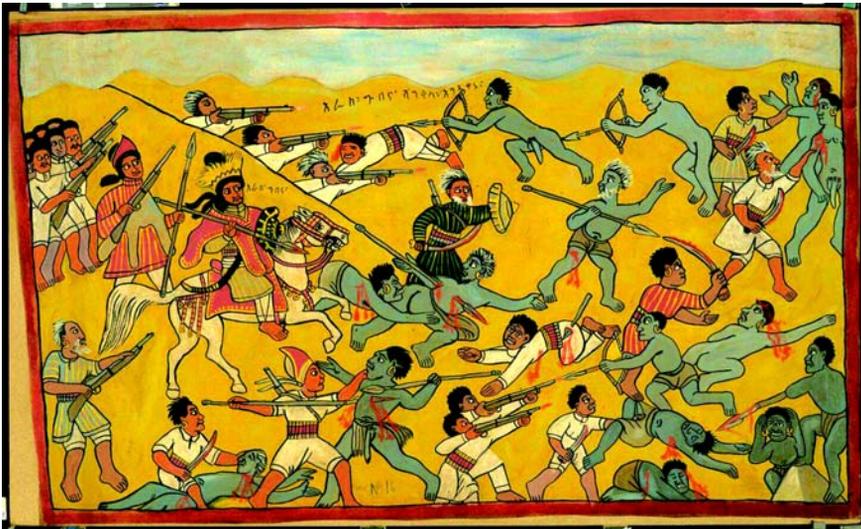


Fig. 9:
Battle of Ras Gobena against the *Shankilla*, painted by Hailu Woldeyes (1935)

Most reputable were the tails of leopards and lions, and still higher ranking in prestige than the testicles of an armed warrior were trophies of buffalos, elephants, giraffes, and rhinos (Girma Fisseha 1989: 106). Achievement of rank and title in return for killing is the basic precept of the “merit complex,” which Haberland (1965: 194f) sees as essential principle of *habesha* life. Jensen’s explicit order of “as many hunting scenes as possible”³⁰ might have resulted from a similar theoretical interest in the “merit complex,” which he saw as original element of the ancient Western Asiatic “megalith culture.”³¹

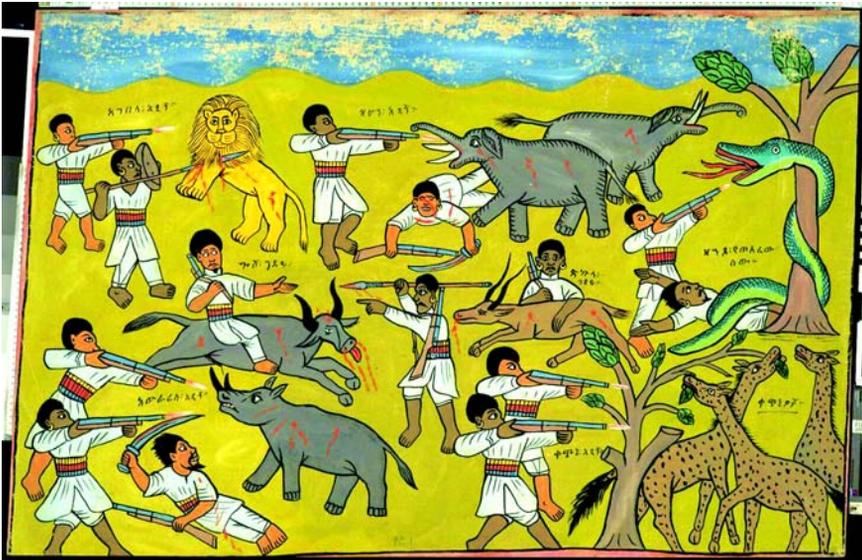


Fig. 10:
Hunting scene, painted by Hailu Woldeyes (1935)

Emperors in ceremonial and formal public contexts

Images of the *neguse negest* Haile Selassie I, sitting enthroned in ceremonial or public context as painted by Hailu in 1935/36 (nos. 2, 5, 9, 24, 26 of Semerjibid-

30 The source for this is PA a. Hailu, however, supplied only two hunting scenes: no. 1 and no. 27 on Semerjibidian’s list.

31 In her book *Das Erbe der ‘Helden’: Grabkult der Konso und kulturverwandter Ethnien in Süd-Äthiopien* (2009), Poissonier provides a very detailed account on Jensen’s concept of the merit complex.

ian's list),³² were meant to represent the contemporary imperial state at that time. Portrayals of the Emperor under the royal baldachin (*agobba*) on his throne (*alga*) surrounded by his princes, ministers, and entourage corresponded with the traditional scheme of imperial representation (e.g., figs. 11, 12). The royal baldachin or umbrella held by servants refers to the "sacred seclusion" and untouchability of Ethiopian theocrats in the past (cf. Perham 1969: 73; Haberland 1965: 167). As Haberland (1965: 163) emphasizes, on the occasion of major Christian holidays alone and in particular at *mäsqäl*, emperors presented themselves in public when honoring warriors' heroism. During Haile Selassie's reign, the church holidays *timqät* and *mäsqäl* were impressive, vivid performances of the Christian Empire which attracted masses of people from the provinces to come to the capital (Norden 1930: 29). The imperial triad of church, state, and army was presented on both of Hailu's paintings of Christian holidays (figs. 13, 14, Semerjibidian's nos. 2, 5).³³ Hailu's other portrayals of Haile Selassie recorded the ceremonial procession on his day of coronation (November 2, 1930; fig. 12) and the arrival of the first airplane in Addis Ababa in 1929 (fig. 16). While these two paintings had the character of traditional imperial chronicle in common, the image on which Haile Selassie I was portrayed attending a horse race at Addis Ababa's race track at *Jan Meda* (fig. 15) revealed the modern report-like character of the genre. The ceremonial and social events, which serve as a background for the portraits of Haile Selassie I, are usually also photogenic events. This found expression on Hailu's painting of the first airplane's landing at Addis Ababa (fig. 16), where on central position a photographer was depicted. It is remarkable, however, that the modern-dressed photographer³⁴ focuses his camera on the Emperor and not on the day's actual sensation, the advent of the first airplane.

32 On Semerjibidian's no. 26, "Coronation of H.M. Haile Selassie" (fig. 12), the Emperor is not depicted on his throne, indeed, but in a ceremonial carriage, a present of the last German Emperor Wilhelm II, who had used it before on the occasion of his own coronation (Girma/Raunig 1985: 149). One of the figures at the back of the carriage is regarded by Girma and Raunig (1985: 149) as the Emperor's double ("der *Liqa Maquas*"). With regard to the pictographic convention of "social perspectives" it is remarkable that compared to the Emperor the double should be depicted clearly taller in his body size. If not by mistake, these unconventional proportions between the original Emperor and his double might be based on rumors which saw them exchanging their proper positions at the imperial coronation day.

33 On Hailu's *timqät* painting (fig. 14) the church is represented by a great number of priests and the ceremonial dance in front of *tabotat* (altar tablets), while on his *mäsqäl* painting (fig. 13) only by the depiction of the cupola of the St. George's Cathedral.

34 Perhaps the photographer as depicted by Hailu was of Armenian identity as first of all Armenian immigrants to Ethiopia had established themselves during the 1920s as photographers in Addis Ababa (Pankhurst 1976: 952).

All of Hailu's pictographic portrayals of Haile Selassie I were certainly in accordance with the Emperor's preferred iconic representation. Haile Selassie I represented himself as a reformer and modernizer and naturally wanted to be represented as such (Wohlenberg 1988: 42). "Conventional attribution" taken into account as a principle of pictographic portrayal (see above), the Emperor painted within the context of modern urban Addis Ababa made him appear as a modern statesman. Addis Ababa was indicated as context on Hailu's portrayals of Haile Selassie I by depiction of eucalyptus trees (the imported species was and is characteristic for the capital's appearance), by the then modern architecture of the St. George's cathedral (figs. 12, 13), by Western horse-racing (fig. 15), and by the already mentioned photographer (fig. 16) and airplanes (fig. 16). Nationwide, the latter became a symbol of the Emperor as aptly described by James Loder Park (1935: 788), the former secretary of the American Legation at Addis Ababa:

There is an often quoted Ethiopian adage: "A man knows his master, but not his master's master." Airplanes, however, are reminding even the remotest peasants of the master of all their masters, the King of the Kings. For Haile Selassie is now sending his winged messengers on errands to the distant parts of the empire.

Wohlenberg's view on the type of modernity demonstrated by the Emperor, which also found expression on his pictography, was certainly shared by other visitors to Ethiopia. Modernity and reformism were for him "atmosphere from Addis, not from inner Abyssinia" (1988: 232), and what he perceived as "talmi civilization" and "varnished civility" in the capital were mere "sceneries" presented to Genf ("Genfer Kulissen," 1988: 270), and thus made "to become the focus of attention of those, from whom judgments are expected; and book authors like us are dangerous people!" (1988: 232, translated from German by the author)



Fig. 11:
Banquet of Emperor Menelik, painted by Hailu Woldeyes (1935)



Fig. 12:
Coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie I, painted by Hailu Woldeyes (1935)

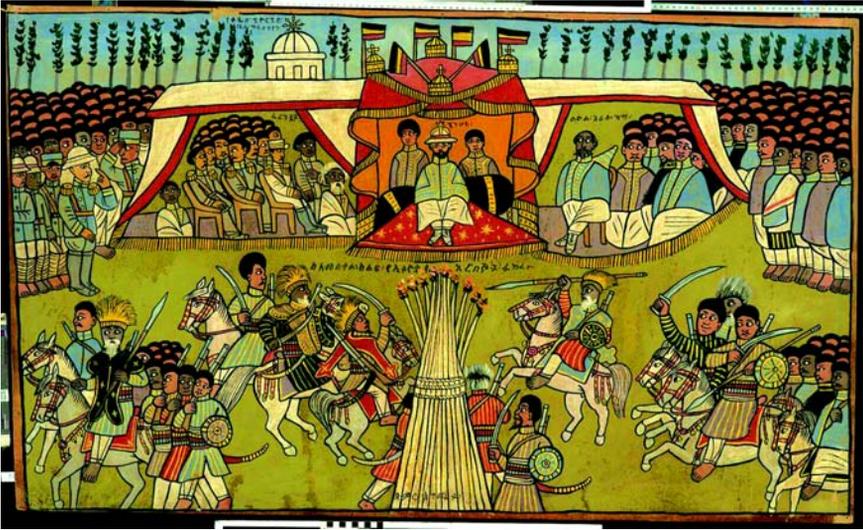


Fig. 13:
Mäsqäl ceremony in the presence of Emperor Haile Selassie I, painted by Hailu Woldeyes (1935)



Fig. 14:
Timqät ceremony in the presence of Emperor Haile Selassie I, painted by Hailu Woldeyes (1935)

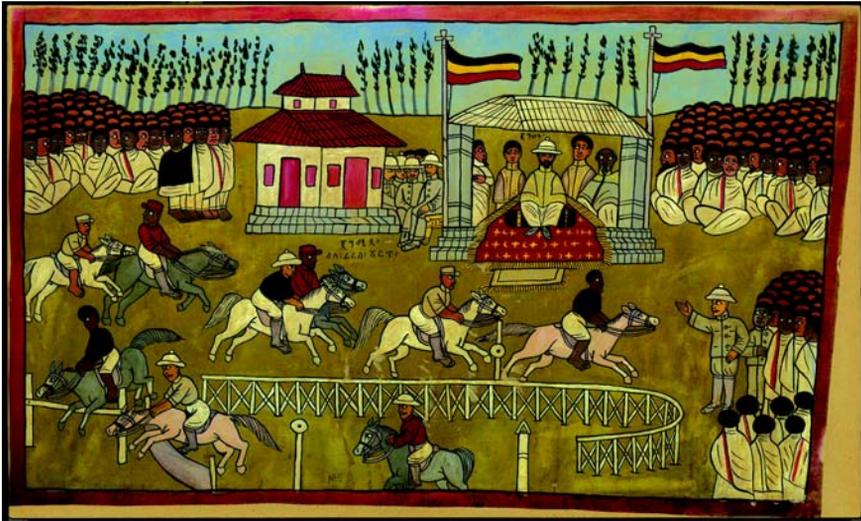


Fig. 15:
Horse-racing in the presence of Haile Selassie I, painted by Hailu Woldeyes (1935)



Fig. 16:
The landing of the first airplane in Addis Ababa, painted by Hailu Woldeyes (1935)

The legend of Queen Azeb

Apart from the battle scenes against Italian troops at Adwa, the Queen of Sheba's encounter with King Solomon was certainly the most popular theme of *antika* painting (fig. 1). The convention of presenting the narrative in a serial of episodes was most probably designed at first during the 1920s, when the comic strip-like paintings seemed to have been of momentous significance in expanding the commercial sale of *antika* in Addis Ababa (see Pankhurst 1966: 39). Images of the subject had never formerly appeared in church art (Chojnacki 1973: 84), when at the turn to the last century "a large picture of the Court of Menelik, the first, the son of Queen of Sheba and Solomon" was described at Menelik II's Entotto Maryam church (Pankhurst 1966: 16f). This iconographic innovation was likely motivated by the Emperor's need of legitimation and representation of his empire in its newly expanded borders (cf. Zitelmann 1999: 150f). Considering the tendency of self-repetition which Taddese Tamrat (1972: 302) ascribes to Ethiopian history, his imperial name (which before had been his personal name, too) has to be regarded as programmatic for Menelik II's empire-building. Identical with the cultural hero and dynastic prototype, the name Menelik alludes to revitalization and recurrence of imperial glory and might, and to re-enactment of the mythically empowered Solomonic kingship. The claim of restoration of the Solomonic dynasty, which had once legitimized the Shewan Yekunno Amlak's accession to the throne in 1270, was repeated in 1889 at the coronation of Emperor Menelik II in Addis Ababa (Perham 1969: 70).

The text underlying Hailu's painting (fig. 1) was not the Biblical description of the meeting of the "Queen of the South" with Solomon at Jerusalem (I Kings 10; 1–13), but a Tigrean variant of the legend of Azeb (the Tigrean name for the "Queen of the South," commonly inscribed on earlier paintings), which existed in various versions in Ethiopia (Jankowski 1987). Compared to the later standard pictographic serials of up to 72 episodes (Pavillion des Arts 2000: 18), Hailu's version of only 24 single scenes presented only 'half' the story. In addition to the legend of Makeda's father (Makeda being the most prominent Ethiopian name of Queen Sheba), the heroic dragon killer Agabo, the extended version referred to the epical circumstances of the theft of the Ark of the Covenant from Solomon's temple by Menelik's Israelite companions, as described in the *Kibre Negast* (Bezold 1909). The *Kibre Negast* (lit.: "glory of kings"), a fourteenth-century monastic compilation of Biblical, apocryphal, legendary texts and commentaries, was the "national epic" (Levine 1974: 100), which provided the ideological basis of the "sacral heightened identity" (Assmann 1992) and holy mission of the Ethiopian empire as

succeeding the Jews as God's elect covenant partners. However, both versions – the Tigrean legend, on which the shorter earlier pictographic versions were based on, as well as the *Kibre Negast* – told of the Solomonic and thus divine descent of Abyssinian emperors. With regard to this, it seems striking that the dynastic founder, Menelik I, did not figure among the characters depicted on the earlier versions. This fact leads one to assume that the original iconography of Azeb's story was influenced if not prescribed or authorized by empress Zewditu (r. 1916–30) herself, who was reigning when *antika* of this type were created first. The first female leader of Ethiopia sponsored research on written and oral traditions of the myth to prove its historicity (Zitelmann 1999: 153).³⁵ Her interest in the Queen of Sheba's Jerusalem trip seemed to have been different in bias to her father's. Interested in epitomizing the imperial restoration, Menelik II first of all focused on his mythical namesake, while Zewditu might have chosen Makeda as archetypal example of her emperorship, as she found herself the first female on the imperial throne of an up to then exclusively male Solomonic line and thus naturally in need of legitimation.

Conclusion

Initially, foreign collectors neither “inspired” nor “encouraged” church-trained painters to produce for non-church purposes (see below the quote from Chojnacki, 1973: 84). Prototypes of *antika* painting first of all originated from the imperial court and were accommodated within the iconographic program of church murals (Biasio 1994; Chernetsov 1997). As a consequence of this, new painting genres were not “folkloristic” but “feudalistic” in content, as Haile Gabriel Dagne states (quoted from Biasio 1994: 556, fn. 40). *Antika* were subject to the supervision of the Ethiopian state. This was an important reason why the themes chosen for *antika* above all gave examples of the “great narrative” of *habesha* imperial tradition.

In respect to both art and business, *antika* painting boomed during the period from the late 1920s until 1936. New themes were designed, which in later times were counted amongst the repertoire of the then so-called “traditional” or “popular paintings.” At a certain stage only, when the aesthetics of imperial representation changed and the style of European-educated artists and photography were

35 According to his granddaughter Mekeda Ketcham, the Ethio-German historian Jakoub Adol Mar was assigned by Zewditu to collect all written records and oral traditions on Queen Sheba available in Ethiopia (Mar 1999: 5).

preferred to the traditional style, *antika* painters began to exaggerate certain details, making concessions to the foreign demand for exoticism. Now, as the most relevant customers, foreigners were influencing painting styles and themes, whether directly in contact with the painters or indirectly, through agencies and the effects of demand. *Antika* painters learned and copied also from foreign images, photos, and prints. But these traditional painters did not copy in the European sense, but instead reformulated certain pictorial configurations of the foreign image in the native idiom. High receptiveness of traditional artists to foreign influence came with a “sense of identity”³⁶ resulting in “Ethiopianization”³⁷ and “creative incorporation” of imported models (Levine 1974: 64–8).

As perfectly made explicit by the generic term *antika* itself, foreign interest in Ethiopian painting reflected, in Silverman’s words, “the strong bias held in the West for things that are old, things that are authentic” (1999: 177). In search for Ethiopian curiosities, for exotic and seemingly authentic items, foreign collectors favored paintings with non-religious, secular character. This kind of images might have appeared as truer representations of “Ethiopian culture” to Western eyes than Orthodox Church painting, which in some regards were even incompatible with Western-Christian ideas and principles of sacral art. Cultural contact thus played a decisive role in aesthetical change in Ethiopian painting, but the first impetus toward non-church iconography was provided by the imperial center. In shifting from imperial and feudal art to popular and tourist art, the transitional character of *antika* became manifest. Pictography of the “great narrative,” first initiated by imperial demand, served finally as souvenir article. *Antika* should be studied as contact media open for evaluations of both sides of the *habesha-ferenji* contact dyad, even if at times these evaluations might have been contradictory.

36 Staude relates Ethiopian skills of cultural assimilation to the work of honeybees. Bees gain nectar from various flower species, which they process into a homogenous final product – honey. Ethiopians likewise adopt foreign ideas which always result in specific Ethiopian creations: “In welchen Blüten immer diese naschen, sie verdauen ihn [den Nektar] und produzieren ein homogenes Produkt, den Honig. [...] Auch die Äthiopier haben geistiges Gut von da und dort aufgenommen, dieses aber immer ‘verdaut,’ so daß das Endprodukt immer spezifisch äthiopischer Art wurde” (1958: 305).

37 The term “Ethiopianization” is frequently used in literature, e.g. by Levine (1974), Chojnacki (1983), Taddese (1972). Asafa Jalata (1993) speaks instead of “Abyssinization,” but he also rejects the concept of “Greater Ethiopia.” From the point of view of Oromo nationalists, Abyssinia and Ethiopia are synonymous, as they claim “We are Oromians, not Ethiopians.”

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Human self and animal other: the favorite animal among the Hamar

JÉRÔME DUBOSSON

The Hamar of southern Ethiopia not only gain a living from their cattle, but they also live together with them. The management of their herds calls for constant attention and daily care, especially because of the environmental conditions of their territory.¹ Their semi-nomadic way of life is an attempt to secure sufficient healthy pastures at all times of the year. Much of Hamar social life revolves around their cattle. The domestication of cattle provides the basis for the expression of relationships between humans and cattle, which are based on pastoral knowledge and techniques, as well as beliefs, representations, values, feelings, and affects. The fact that the relationship between humans and animals has become ‘domestic,’ that cattle are domesticated and controlled in their reproduction for the benefit of humans, who enter into new relations of intimacy with them, strengthens the bonds and blurs the boundaries between human and animal.

In this chapter, I investigate the relationship between ‘self’ and ‘other’ through the interaction of a herder with his cattle, and more particularly with his ‘favorite animal,’ that ‘significant other’ which contributes so centrally to the identity of a Hamar man. The economic role of cattle, often discussed in anthropology, will not be described here.² My research, based on a literature review as well as ethnographic fieldwork conducted among the Hamar, shows that animals are essential members of human society, rather than just objects of domestication. It also highlights certain features linked with cattle aesthetics and symbolism. In the anthropological literature, such features are seen as part of the phenomenon of the

1 As grass depends on rain, which is low and scanty in Hamar land, only a small part of the herds are kept in the hills and mountains around the villages (generally herds of goats and milk cows). Most of the herds (cattle, goats, and sheep) are actually kept in shifting camps in the lowlands on the outskirts of the Hamar country, where herders can find better grazing areas.

2 See for example Dyson-Hudson/Dyson-Hudson (1980), Pouillon (1988), Strecker (1988), Sperling/Galaty (1990), Galaty/Bonte (1991), Fratkin et al. (1994), Spencer (1998), and Hodgson (2000).

favorite animal (Hazel 1979; Coote 1992), which is considered to be a component of the 'East African Cattle Complex' (Herskovits 1926).

The Hamar of southwest Ethiopia

Up until the end of the nineteenth century, the South Omo region was relatively unaffected by the historical, economic, and political events that shaped Ethiopia (Prunier 2007). At the turn of the century, however, the region was conquered by Menelik's troops and forcefully incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire (Lydall 2010; Strecker 2013). Besides some early explorations into the region (von Höhnel 1894; Donaldson Smith 1896; Neumann 1898; Vannutelli/Citerni 1899; Cerulli 1956) and two German research expeditions in the first half of the twentieth century (Jensen 1959), it is only since the late 1960s that anthropologists and linguists have done intensive research in the region, for example Strecker and Lydall among the Hamar, Turton among the Mursi, Tornay among the Nyangatom. Two major linguistic families have been identified: Nilo-Saharan which includes Nyangatom, Mursi, and Surma languages, is found on both sides of the lower Omo Valley, and stretches out to the Southwest, where it meets the Nilotic speaking people of Sudan and Uganda; and Afro-Asiatic with its two branches that are spoken locally today, the Omotic languages spoken by the Kara, Banna, Bashada, Hamar, and Dizi, and the eastern Cushitic languages of the Dassanech, Arbore, and Tsamako (Lydall 1976; Gozábez/Flores 2004). There are sixteen ethnic groups living in the South Omo zone, which has a complex topography and a great variety of climates and natural resources. Most of these groups are agro-pastoralists practicing a mixed economy. They depend, to varying degrees, on cultivation but still consider cattle their most important material possession. They show different modes of cattle-raising, from nomadism to sedentary livelihoods, depending on the environment they live in. Some groups also practice fishing and/or beekeeping, and most of them do some hunting and gathering to supplement their diet.

The agro-pastoral Hamar number more than 46,000 persons living in small communities scattered across their territory in the south of the South Omo Zone (Zekaria 2008: 84). The territory they occupy stretches from the Rift Valley of the Woito River in the East to the hills and plains of the Lower Omo in the West. Its southern boundary goes as far as the Kenyan border. In the north and northwest, it meets the Banna and Bashada territories. These three groups form a kind of cultural entity, i.e. they speak the same language, practice intermarriage, and have many institutions and rituals in common (Lydall 1976: 393). In Hamar land, rain-

fall is low, unreliable, and usually unevenly distributed across the country. In this environment, people exploit all available forms of food production. They herd cattle, goats, and sheep, and cultivate sorghum, maize, beans, or pumpkins. They also produce honey, gather wild produce, and hunt wild animals (Lydall 1993). It is mainly girls and women who undertake cultivation in fields relatively close to their permanent homesteads. The responsibility for livestock falls primarily to boys and men, who herd partly in the cultivation areas, and partly in distant grazing areas, where they have temporary camps. During the course of his life, a herder develops close bonds with a particular bovine. This bovine is known as his *errawak* – his favorite animal. The word derives from the word *erra*, which I was told means ‘decorated,’ and the word *waki*, which means ‘cattle.’ As we will see below, the *errawak* undergoes permanent body markings that distinguish it from the other animals of the herd, and strengthen its aesthetic and symbolic value.



Fig. 1:
Haila, a young Hamar, and an *errawak* at a cattle camp (2011, photograph by the author)

The phenomenon of the favorite animal in East Africa

The phenomenon of the favorite animal is known in many different cultures, although it is not found in all pastoral and agro-pastoral societies of East Africa. In the Sudan, it exists among the Didinga (Kronenberg 1972), the Dinka (Lienhardt 1961; Deng 1972), the Longarim (Kronenberg 1961), the Mandari (Buxton 1967), the Murle (Lewis 1972; Streck 1982), and the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Ryle 1982); in Uganda, the Dodoth, the Jie (Gulliver 1952, 1955), and the Karimojong (Dyson-Hudson 1966); in Kenya, the Pokot (Schneider 1956, 1957), the Samburu (Jones 1984), and the Turkana (Robbins/Robbins 1971); in Ethiopia, the Bodi (Fukui 1996), the Dassanech (Almagor 1972), the Hamar (Lydall/Strecker 1979), the Mursi (Turton 1980), the Nyangatom (Tornay 2001), and the Suri (Abbink 2003).³ This phenomenon generally involves men who develop special bonds with particular bovines, which become ‘objects of prestige’ because of their personality and appearance, and are partners in a complex relationship. Women do not usually have the opportunity to have a ‘favorite animal,’ except among the Bodi (Fukui 1979) and Mursi (Latosky, personal communication 2012).

In the anthropological literature this phenomenon is described as an aspect of the cultural system peculiar to each society, and more generally as an element of the East African pastoral complex (Herskovits 1926). The studies show that the interactions between herders and their animals go beyond a purely economic function. However, only a few studies dealing exclusively with this peculiar phenomenon have been published since the Seligmans’ observations about the Dinka of the Sudan (1932). Today, the main contributions are brought together in a comparative edition by Hazel (1997). He highlighted the cross-cultural elements of the phenomenon, which concern different East African people who are historically inter-related. In the literature, the diversity of names given to cattle testifies to the difficulty of translating vernacular terms and to the intricacy of interpreting this phenomenon:⁴ for example, they include ‘ox of perfection,’ ‘favorite beast,’ ‘name-ox,’ ‘song ox,’ ‘favorite ox,’ ‘song bull,’ ‘bell-ox,’ or ‘dance-ox.’

3 This list is not exhaustive. The study of this phenomenon is not yet completed, but it already reveals that the ‘favorite animal’ is the emblematic expression of complex relationships which bind a herder, his cattle, and his society.

4 The *dil thak* (ox of perfection) of the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1953: 183), the *nyamenat* (favorite beast) of the Longarim (Kronenberg 1961: 258), the *ain gudakba* (name-ox) of the Dassanech (Almagor 1972: 87), the *kiwanghit* (name-ox) of the Pokot (Brown 1990: 60), the *muor cien* (song ox) of the Dinka (Ryle 1982: 93), the *morare* (favorite ox) of the Bodi (Fukui 1996: 361), the *b’ongay kèrègi* (song bull) of the Suri (Abbink 2003: 343), the *emong lo-duwarit* (bell-ox or dance-ox) of the Turkana (Gulliver 1952: 72, 1955: 246).

In my study, the adjective ‘favorite’ is preferred, because it stresses the seduction that an animal exerts on a herder, which is the principal reason for its selection. The reasons for choosing a particular bovine from among the herd are aesthetic as well as symbolic. Anthropologists have recorded those qualities in an ox that please a herder. Evans-Pritchard mentioned “fatness, colour, and shape of the horns” (1940: 22). He said that the Nuer considered a fat ox “a thing of grandeur and beauty” which inspires “emotional and aesthetic attention” (Evans-Pritchard 1953: 185). J. Buxton mentioned that “marking and patterning are very highly estimated in the Mandari visual aesthetic” (1973: 7). J.W. Burton referred to a particular cattle-color configuration as being “the most aesthetically pleasing for the Atuat” (1981: 76). G. Lienhardt said about the Dinka’s oxen that they “are primarily of aesthetic interest” (1961: 20). P.H. Gulliver explained that among the Jie a fat and sleek bell-ox with a large hump is an “object of pride” (1952: 72). J. Abbink said about the Suri that “cattle provide people, especially men, with symbolic elements of prestige and personal identity” (2003: 347). Robbins and Robbins said that among the Turkana, “a man’s ox is symbolic of his deeds and general character” (1971: 233). Lienhardt wrote that the favorite oxen are “the equivalent of young warriors of the camp [...]. They represent the unmated rising generation of the herd and the camp” (1961: 17). Among the Dassanech, Almagor noted that the name-ox was identified with masculinity and the age-set (1972: 92).

The term ‘animal’ is chosen here because it has a general meaning.⁵ Although it is upon oxen that the herder’s ambitions and emotions generally converge, the selection can also include cows, as among the Bodi (Fukui 1996), or bulls, as among the Suri (Abbink 2003), the Jie (Gulliver 1952), the Longarim (Kronenberg 1961), and the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1940). Among the Hamar, if a bull is chosen, it will be castrated. Moreover, before obtaining an *errawak*, the young Hamar men often have a castrated goat (*errak’uli*) as their ‘favorite animal’ during their youth.

The study of the ‘favorite animal’ phenomenon attests that the boundaries between human and animal, and thus between culture and nature, are perceived as dynamic.⁶ Abbink said that the Suri of Ethiopia see their animals as “part of the human social world” (2003: 362) and construct their social persona with reference to cattle as the “mirror species” (2003: 360). Among the Mandari of the Sudan, the ‘favorite ox’ does not belong to the animal kingdom but is considered a person (Buxton 1973: 8, 10). The Bodi livestock concept includes cattle, goats, chicken,

5 Etymologically, the word animal means ‘living creature.’ It comes from *animalis*, ‘who breathes,’ and is related to *animans*, ‘who has a soul within.’ These terms are the translation of the Greek ἐμψυχός (*empsychos*) and ψυχή (*psukhê*). So, by definition, an animal is considered to be an animate being, endowed with the ability to feel, at whatever degree it is (Knight 2005).

and dogs. These domestic animals can be considered as livestock from a western point of view. However, the Bodi call their dogs *gaima*, that is to say ‘human servants’ and include their cattle, goats, chickens under the same term as themselves, *me’en*, that is to say ‘humans’ (Fukui 1996: 322). Among the Pokot of Kenya, Brown noted an intense pastoral ideology: “there is a very strong emotional tie between a man and his *kiwianghit*. He spends a long time training it to be ‘kind and gentle.’ Before marriage he thinks of it as his girlfriend, and after marriage as his wife. At the same time he is regarded as its father, as are all the coevals in his age sub-set who will risk their lives to recover it if it is taken in an enemy raid” (1990: 60f).

Anthropologists generally interpret the herders’ relationships towards their cattle in terms of ‘identification,’ which may become particularly evident with their ‘favorite animals.’ Seligman and Seligman said about the Nilotic cattle that “it was difficult to describe their importance to their masters or the love and care the latter have for their beasts, but it is certainly no exaggeration to say that it amounts to what psychologists would call ‘identification’” (1932: 169). Following this proposal, Deng wrote about the Dinka that “once released from initiation, a man identifies, and is identified with, his ox and becomes known by the metaphorical name derived from its colour-pattern” (1972: 80). Drawing on the Bodi’s naming system, Fukui spoke of “personal identification for life with a colour and pattern” (1996: 362). Evans-Pritchard considered that the Nuer did not identify themselves with a particular ox, but rather with the “idea of oxen” (1937: 185). He spoke about a “moral identification, a participation imposed on the individual by his culture and inextricably bound up with religious values” (1937: 188). Abbink said that the Suri men develop an “emotional identification with their favourite animals” (2003: 357). Gourlay argued from his study of Karimojong songs that “the ox is regarded as separate from, and in no way identified with, the singer” (1972: 247), although a few cases did indicate the existence of an identification between human and animal on a linguistic level, that is to say, that the herder and his ‘favorite animal’ were “conceptualised as one and the same” (1972: 249) in the song. In this case, the name of the animal is used, as a metaphor, to speak about the owner. Among

6 In the societies related to the phenomenon of the favorite animal, the ways of thinking about the relationship between human and animal permit us to reaffirm the arbitrary postulate of a radical discontinuity between nature and culture, which comes from classical rationalism and the philosophy of Enlightenment. Lévi-Strauss argued in the preface of the second edition of *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* that the demarcation line between nature and culture was slim and tortuous and far from being an objective datum of the world, it should be considered as an “artificial creation of culture, a defensive act” created by a part of humankind, in order to assert its own existence, and to claim its own originality (translated by the author from Lévi-Strauss 1967: xvii).

the Dassanech, a herder and his ‘favorite ox’ are also said to be one and the same. There is a Dassanech expression for this: *ma yab oba ain bisiet le tigte* which means “the name-ox is the man” (Almagor 1972: 88). Among the Mursi, a herder is given a name according to the color-pattern of the coat of his favorite animal, and this color-pattern can be the object of an intense personal identification. All these studies show that the possession of cattle is likely to influence the herders’ ideas, values, practices, and their perceptions of themselves.

Human self and animal other

In his introductory book *Anthropology of the self*, Morris argues that “the person as a self is a universal category, but its content and meaning is always in a sense unique to an individual person within a specific social context” (1994: 12). He suggested that the self is a concept acquired by an individual during the course of his life through social interactions. It refers not to an entity but rather to a “process” (ibid.) that organizes the individual’s personal experience according to his or her self-awareness and self-reflection about his or her place in the surrounding world (van Meijl/Driessen 2003). The relationship between self and other seems therefore highly dependent on the cultural milieu in which it occurs. As suggested by Morris, this interaction does not take place “between the individual (as an organism) and society (as in Durkheimian sociology), or between the psyche and culture (as in much psychological anthropology), but rather between the self and his or her environment, mediated via social praxis” (1994: 13). The founder of modern social psychology, William James, already claimed at the end of the nineteenth century that the self was not a single entity. He argued that although an individual experiences his or her self as a unity, he or she does not have one self but many selves. According to him, the self is composed of all that a person can call his or her own,

not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, [...]. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down, – not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all. (James 1890: 291f)

In consequence, people and things in the environment of an individual belong to the self to the extent that they are felt as “mine” (Hermans 2001: 244).

I move beyond the classical definition of ‘other’ as human by focusing on ‘other’ as animal. The term often called ‘anthrozoology’ inspires me. It has gradually developed over the past four decades around the topic of human-animal relationships (Serpell 1986; Belk 1988, 1996; Noske 1989; Sanders 1990, 1993; Podberscek et al. 2000; Brown 2004). This field has shown that culture gives meaning to what an individual experiences via interactions between his/her self and the animals living in his/her proximity. These animal ‘others’ can play a major role in the construction of human identity, for when close bonds exist with their owner they become part of his/her ‘self.’

In Hamar land, an individual grows up in an environment closely connected to cattle. This relation of intimacy becomes evident every day and in diverse ways. I observed that it is perceptible in the spatial organization of the settlements (the cattle enclosures are inside the village, just next to the owners’ houses), in material culture (people sit, rest, and sleep on cowhides; cattle horns are used as containers for ostrich feathers, butter, or tobacco), in dances and songs that conjure up cattle, etc. The relationship is established from early childhood onwards. Soon after birth, children are fed with butter and later also goat and cow milk, and their skin is smeared with butter. They sleep on a cowhide, and day and night they hear the sounds of the bells and voices of the domestic animals. They live surrounded by the animals’ presence, which puts their five senses on the alert. As they grow up they learn about pastoral knowledge and how to observe and understand nature. The children start to imitate their peers by playing with flint stones collected along the paths.⁷ They draw enclosures, rivers, houses, waterholes, etc. on the ground. They familiarize themselves with the animals by herding them with other herders, by calling the animals by their personal names, by feeding them in the bush, by watering them at the river, by taking care of their well-being. All these interactions with cattle have significant effects on the human self.

In analyzing this complex social relationship and its consequences, I start from the observation that pastoral techniques are applied to living animals – complex, endowed with sensitivity and comprehension – and these techniques lead the herders to become emotionally involved in domestication (Digard 1990). Animals see, smell, feel, taste, and hear the world they live in with the senses they have and within their own frame of reference, which are certainly different to those of humans (Noske 1989; Sanders 1993). To establish a relationship with cattle, the

7 These flint stones, coveted for games by the young Hamar, call to mind the Nilote’s mud toys (the Dinka and the Nuer of Sudan, the Mursi of Ethiopia), and those of the Pokot of Kenya, which represent bovines (see for example Coote 1992: 264, fig. 10.6–10.8).

herders achieve an understanding of the animals' characteristics (behaviors, physiology, diet, etc.), which allows appropriate husbandry. This understanding is based on precise knowledge, learnt from others and/or acquired through observation. The herders need to know their cattle, not just as the gregarious animals that they are, but also as individual personalities with distinctive features. Thanks to this knowledge, a harmonious living together becomes possible. Herders and cattle become profoundly used to each other and mutually dependent, the herders benefiting from the products of their animals (milk, blood, hide, etc.), only as long as they provide them with food, water, shelter, and care.

The high level of familiarity with, and personalized knowledge of, animals contribute to effective interactions and communications with them (Knight 2005). The relation between herder and animal finally emerges as a sincere intimacy, which is at the heart of interactions between self and other. Intimacy is here understood as "a two-way relationship, implying a degree of affective mutuality, even if this is unequal and asymmetrical" (Knight 2005: 1).

Cattle are the most valuable possession of the Hamar, and important for their sense of self. This is especially true for the young boys and men who are primarily responsible for husbandry and who often define themselves as 'cattlemen' (*waki edi*). Domestication engenders an attachment, both functional and emotional to bovines, and according to the anthropological literature, the phenomenon of the favorite animal is also considered as a form of identification. This concept, which is drawn from psychoanalysis, describes the process of identifying with others, either through lack of awareness of difference or separation, or as a result of perceived similarities. It is here understood as a construction lodged in contingency, a never-ending process dependent on the milieu where it emerges and on the material and symbolic resources which sustain it (Hall 1996). This process lies at the basis of identity, insofar as the latter is "a junction of identifications by self-conscious actors who make sense of their relationships with other people by constructing an identity, both to distinguish themselves from others, to categorize other people as Other and to identify self as Self" (van Meijl/Driessen 2003: 23). According to this definition, identity seems to be dynamic, multidimensional, relational, contextual, and actually dependent on the relationships between self and other.

The favorite animal in Hamar

Hamar men and women share their life, their space, and their time with domestic animals. However only young boys and men enter, step by step, into an intimate

relationship with one of their animals, one that pleases them very much, and is responsive to them. This relationship becomes important when they start herding with their peers and have the responsibility for the livestock around the villages and, later, in the more distant cattle camps. When they are herding they take time to see how animals walk, behave, eat, drink, and moo. They observe certain parts of the body that are culturally appreciated: the ears, horns, hump, tail, and coat. If one animal pleases a man greatly, he thinks about this 'other' as a possible *errawak*. The choice of the 'favorite animal' is up to the herder himself. It is a personal choice, by which he manifests his difference and their preference in front of the others.⁸ Nevertheless, he can also be advised by elders or a soothsayer, who may say if this animal will bring him good fortune during his life or not.

Chosen for its visual and apotropaic characteristics, an animal is turned into an *errawak* when it successfully endures permanent bodily modifications, which are prescribed by tradition and which sometimes jeopardize its life. These practices occur during the first years of its life. They are meaningful for those who participate, but also for those who will then see the animal with its new appearance. The practices contribute to framing and strengthening the socio-political relations between herders, because they can only be done together with others. At each step in the beautification process, the owner of the *errawak* will give a goat or a cow to the specialist who does the modification, and will slaughter a goat or two for the elders, his age-mates and other attendees.⁹

The first modification consists of the animal's castration when it is still a calf. This practice, which is used mainly to control breeding, also helps to lessen the aggressiveness of the animal, and thus an unnecessary waste of energy for its owner. A further effect is the promotion of fat accumulation in the body. Although some *errawak* are bulls, especially those of married men, most animals are castrated oxen, which are distinguished by a more harmonious appearance, according to Hamar perception, by reason of their stoutness. Their finely proportioned forms and their noticeable fatness are seen as signs of good health by the herders, and as such are especially appreciated. According to my informant Lukusse, such an appearance is also evidence of a herder's pastoral knowledge, for it shows that he knows where the rains have fallen and has herded his cattle into healthy pastures.

The second modification consists in cutting two different parts of the animal with a knife when it is still a calf. First, notches are cut around the edge of the ears

8 I met a few Hamar men who did not have an *errawak*. They say that they just did not want one.

9 I have only taken part in the first and the last operations of what could be considered an embellishment process of the animal 'other.' All the data come from bibliographical research, personal observation and conversations with my Hamar male informants.

(*k'ami*). A Hamar who sees an animal with this notched pattern understands immediately that it is an *errawak*. Second, the dewlap (*aliss*) is cut in such a way that a piece of skin hangs down like a pendant, and space is made for the leather collar and the bell the animal wears later on after the other modifications have been completed.

A third modification concerns the animal's coat, which is generally appreciated for its visual appearance (color pattern) and its sheen. The hide may be superficially burnt with a heated spear in order to produce different lines (*guio*). The design may represent the family sign of the animal's owner. However, some are purely decorative motifs, which only a few specialists are able to make. These motifs are ornaments, called *matchar*, that personalize the animal more deeply. My Hamar informants said that they are made for beauty.

The fourth modification concerns the horns, which are an important element of cattle aesthetics. In southwest Ethiopia, horns show a great diversity of natural shapes, but herders can also artificially deform them. The technique for shape modification varies according to ethnic group. The Bodi, Dassanech (Almagor 1972), Hamar (Chaix et al. 2012), Mursi, Nyangatom, and Suri (Abbink 2003) of Ethiopia, as well as the Dodoth of Uganda (Thomas 1966), the Pokot (Brown 1990) and Samburu (Jones 1984) of Kenya, and the Longarim of Sudan (Kronenberg 1961) use a stone to break the horn sheath. The Murle (Streck 1982), Dinka, and Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Ryle 1982) of Sudan use a spear to cut the horn sheath. In every case, the horns then grow against the fracture or the cut. The direction of the deformed horns depends on cultural norms, on aesthetic criteria and on their significance. In Hamar, young men prefer the shape called *kamara* where the left horn is deformed to point downward and the right one is left to grow naturally upward. This shape resembles the way a man holds his fighting sticks, the left one lowered to ward off hits and the right one raised to deliver blows (Lydall, personal communication). Senior married men prefer a shape of horns where both horns are bent upwards and towards each other, in a sign of peace (*lukuri*, Lydall, personal communication).¹⁰

The deformation of horns is always a social event, which brings people together. It should always involve the owner's age-mates, but may take place at a big public meeting involving senior age sets as well. Horn deformation is the last

10 According to Olisarali Olibwui, the term originates from Mursi and specifically means a person born on the same day, and in a more general sense can also be used for friends, age-mates, hunting-friends, or other egalitarian relations, which fits well with the imagery of the two horns curving up and toward each other.

bodily modification in the embellishment process.¹¹ Typically, this ritualized event occurs during the dry season, in a riverbed close to a village or a cattle camp.¹² The owner of the ‘favorite animal’ invites his male relatives, friends, neighbors, and age-mates (*anamo*) to come to the site and eat the animals (goats or cattle) slaughtered for the occasion. If the occasion is used as an opportunity to discuss matters of importance, an elder will open the meeting with a blessing. The elders (*donza*) are the ones who bless by calling forth good fortune (*barjo äla*).¹³ Thus, they call for rain, abundance, and health both for humans and their livestock (Strecker 1986). In this way the elders ensure that the ritual is done under auspicious conditions. Next, the ‘favorite animal’ is held lying on its side by the age-mates, while an expert deals about a dozen blows to the base of the horn sheath with a smooth stone. The blows free the sheath from its bony base and the expert can thus twist the horn downward. During this procedure, the owner feels great anxiety, for the deformation of horns can be fatal for the *errawak*. He gets worked up, shouting and running around his animal, and in his distress he may take a spear and spear other cattle.

Once the horn is loosened, a piece of twine is affixed to the tip of the horn and then fastened to the muzzle of the animal. The expert cuts two parallel lines on the animal’s muzzle in order to insert a stick that holds the twine connected to the horn, which has previously been incised to make a groove around the tip. This technique produces the tension needed for the desired alignment of the horn and keeps it stable during the time of recovery (approximately one month). Before freeing the animal and letting it rejoin the herd, the expert applies fresh cow dung, which is used as a disinfectant and painkiller, to the wounds. Additional stripes of dung are smeared on the sides and back of the animal, by others in attendance. They are said to be adornment (*gomoxo*). Then, the age-mates (*anamo*) shoot their guns into the air and start singing war songs (*raega*). The owner of the *errawak* provides animals (goats or cattle) which his agemates slaughter and roast. While his age-mates sit together to eat they choose his *errawak*-name. Once he has received his new name from them, the owner of the *errawak* has to go to the elders and to introduce himself. Ayke, a young man from Dambaiti/Hamar explained it thus: “Who are you? says an elder. I am the father of such and such an ox! answers

11 However, this process ends with the gift of a leather collar from an age-mate upon which a herder hangs an iron bell.

12 The deformation I observed occurred in the owner’s homestead.

13 *Barjo* is a complex notion having different meanings (chance, good fortune, destiny, well-being), and certain substances as well as things, ‘invisible beings,’ words, places, water, plants, animals, and humans may all be *barjo* or have *barjo* (Strecker 1988).

the owner. Who are you? says another elder. I am the father of such and such an ox! answers the owner. And so on.” From now on, his age-mates will call him by his *errawak*-name, which will be known all around, as people will go back to their homesteads announcing that the ritual has been successfully performed.

Social significance of the *errawak*-name

The ‘favorite animal’ contributes to the identity of an individual through the beautifying process and the naming system. Throughout his life, a herder is given different names, “each name signifying some specific aspect of [his] persona”¹⁴ (Strecker 1993: 126). Giving a name to someone implies the recognition of his/her social value, but the name also invokes social aspects of the one or ones who bestow it (Baye 2006). Thus, an individual acquires a name that is not only personal but also social and cultural. In Hamar, the importance of cattle means that some names given are inspired by their cattle. This does not serve to ‘bestialize’ individuals, but rather to ‘humanize’ them.

A herder receives a name derived from the animal he has the most intimate relationship with, that is to say, his *errawak*. This *errawak*-name refers to his identity and/or status with regard to this other and to the perception of its color pattern.¹⁵ He is called ‘*imba* of such and such color pattern.’ The term *imba* means both father and owner. The *errawak*-name is in the Bume (Nyangatom) language. For example, my Hamar informant Sago is called Lossiaro: ‘father of the ox with black and white speckles.’ The ‘favorite animal’ also acquires his own special name

14 At the time of his initiation (*ukuli*), after having leapt over the cattle, a man gets a *garro*-name derived from the color pattern of the female calf which stands at the front of the line of cattle. The calf is called a *garro* calf and he is said to be its ‘father.’ These terms derive from *gari* which means ‘grown up.’ Thus, when Lukusse leapt over the cattle and the white *garro*, he became known as Silimba, father and/or owner (*imba*) of the white (*sili*). It is forbidden for a herder to drink its milk, to eat it its meat, or to use its hide as a sleeping mat when it dies (Lydall/Strecker 1979; Lydall 1999). If he has a favorite goat (*errak’uli*), he also receives a name derived from the color pattern and is known as ‘father of such and such color pattern.’

15 The herders are attentive to maintaining a large range of colors on the cattle coats, probably because it is used as a reference system to name people. Besides, the perception of colors in the world around them (birds, plants, stones, shadow, etc.) seems connected to the recognition of color patterns in their domestic animals. Color pattern is also relevant in different rituals and animal sacrifices, as these can be first chosen according to their coat, that is to say, their significance. Actually, the favorite colors for the coat of the *errawak* are the same as those which are considered significant for the diverse substances and elements of Hamar ritual life (like white milk, red blood, brown coffee; Lydall 1978). Anthropologists who focus on color pattern generally think that “human society appears as a tracing of the system of bovine colours” (translated from Hazel 1997: 71; see also Tornay 1973, 1978; Turton 1980; Almagor 1972).

which refers to its color pattern and that is generally in the Hamar or Nyangatom language, but also in the Dassanech language. Lukusse explained that names can be chosen among these three languages but that no Mursi names exist, for “originally, we were not friends with the Mursi, we were only at war with them, only now we have made peace.” Therefore, the *errawak*-name and the name of the favorite animal testify to interethnic relations and modes of communication. The Hamar have alternately been at war and peace with the Dassanech and Nyangatom for over one hundred years.

The manifold interactions between an individual and his ‘favorite animal’ engender mutual recognition. In order to call his *errawak*, a herder says its name or whistles in a specific manner. My informants told me that cattle respond to their call and that each *errawak* recognizes its owner. For example, Sago explained that “if you are away a few days and come back to the cattle camp, your *errawak* will see you when you enter the enclosure. He will cry like a child. Then he will come close to you and start rubbing against you, like against a tree. You will stroke him and, like a child, he will stay next to you for a long time.”

A man’s *errawak*-name evokes not only his *errawak* by way of its color pattern, but also expectations of how the ‘owner’ should act towards his *errawak*. That’s to say, a man should act like a father toward his animal and perceives it like his child. All my informants said: “My *errawak* is my child.” A man’s *errawak*-name indicates the color pattern of his *errawak*, and his relationship to the *errawak* as father/owner. Thus, the name both identifies and differentiates the partners in the human-animal relationship. This is also the case with the name a man acquires when he is initiated, and he is called father/owner of his *garo* calf, which is identified by her color pattern. A man identifies closely with his *errawak* when he sings for him, raising his arms in the shape of his horns. Then he is said to become his *errawak*.

The identification of a man with his *errawak* goes even further, for his fate and fortune (*barjo*) is said to be equivalent to that of his *errawak* and vice versa. Hence a man’s *errawak* is said to be his *barjo* (Lydall, personal communication).

Once the natural features of a ‘favorite animal’ have been modified, the owner composes a song for it, in which he glorifies its qualities. Through his song he also honors his relatives and age-mates (*anamo*), who usually herd with him and help him to ‘create’ his *errawak*. The age-mates take an active part in the beautifying process, contributing by making the leather collar or assisting in modifying the physical appearance of the animal, especially if he has no expertise. By singing for this ‘other’ a herder builds up his ‘social self’ and gains recognition from his age-mates. Sago explained to me: “I sing so that everybody will get to know me. If you

do not have an *errawak*, you cannot sing. If you sing, people will wonder what animal you are singing for, and they will come to see whether you really have one or not.” The singer goes to dances in order to be known by the other men, women, and girls whom he tries to impress with his voice, gestures, ornaments, and good looks, as well as the poetry of his song. Thus, the glorification of the *errawak* is a great opportunity for a herder to boast in front of others.¹⁶

The *errawak*-name is the preferential term of address between age-mates, thereby expressing solidarity and equality between them. Men who share the same *errawak*-name may, in a sense, share the same pastoral identity, as fathers of such and such cattle. Their *errawak*-name stresses similarities between themselves, rather than differences. Besides, as the same *errawak*-name is given to different men, it does not highlight the uniqueness of the individuals but emphasizes social membership. Through this shared symbol, individuals assert their membership in the group of people who have ‘favorite animals.’ It is inappropriate for people other than age-mates to use the *errawak*-name. Lukusse explained to me that the *anamo* should address each other with their *errawak*-name, and that the married women and the young girls should address the men with their *garro*-name.¹⁷ Thus the cattle are one of the mediums through which humans express and define their relations to each other.

Interpretation of *errawak* aesthetics and symbolism

During my research, I noticed how cattle are an essential element of Hamar aesthetic experience. Through domestication, humans exert their power over their cattle by taming them and modifying the animal’s body. The animal’s body is ‘modifiable material,’ which can be adjusted according to human desires and social demands. The markings result from a desire for control, but they are also an expression of aesthetics. This is especially evident in the case of the ‘favorite animals’ which herders personalize by modifying their appearance and by decorating them with special collars and bells, called ‘ornaments’ (*gomoxo*). Such animals have permanent body markings that are highly visible and said to be good (*paya*). These markings, which are often painfully acquired, authenticate a new identity.

16 By praising his ‘favorite animal,’ a herder also attempts to establish a good relationship with nature. It is believed that if the Hamar maintain an appropriate and healthy relationship towards their *errawak*, then rain will fall, grass will grow, and they and their livestock will be well, because they will be protected from any kind of danger (enemies, disease, or starvation; Strecker 1986).

17 Refer to fn. 14.

They denote a categorical shift, for the animals no longer fall into the category of domestic animals (*k'olle*) along with the other members of the herd (cattle, goats, sheep), but are henceforth *errawak*, and belong more to the human world. As Sago said: "They are like people." Indeed, they are considered as the owner's children and treated with great care and tamed with loving gestures, songs, and terms of endearment. They are also the owner's best friends, for he takes them into his confidence. A herder speaks spontaneously to his *errawak* as if it was a human being able to understand his thoughts, feelings, and dreams.

The embellishment process differentiates the 'favorite animals' from the herd, and also one *errawak* from another. The resulting bodily modifications and decorations are said to be *poramo*, the pride of the *errawak* and of its 'owner.' As Sago explained to me, the herders do all this for their own pride, and to make other people jealous. Each herder can increase the beauty of his *errawak* by increasing the number of its decorations. Actually, only a few individuals know how to burn an ox's coat with rich and original motifs (*guyio*). As Haila told me, such experts apply their skill in order to display their own aesthetic expression. The embellishment process stimulates competition to possess the most beautiful animal. The herders compare their *errawak*, each one convinced he has the best. For example, when two bovines provoke each other in the bush, the young herders let them fight, and the owner of the victorious *errawak* will then be able to boast about the very high qualities of his *errawak*, as well as his own talent as a herder for having raised such an animal.

The interactions between human and animal produce a live and loving relationship that contributes to the herder's self-image. The permanent bodily modifications are meaningful for those who participate in the embellishment process and for those who then see the animal. The modifications correspond to certain ideas of how the body of a favorite 'other' should be, which in turn represents a living image of the owner's 'self.' Indeed, each *errawak* is known by its particular appearance (its color pattern, the design of its coat, the shape of its horns, etc.), which gives identity to its owner, giving him a certain presence even in his absence. Whoever looks at an *errawak* will think of its owner, or will ask who the owner is. My informant Guito explained: "Do you see this *errawak*? To whom does it belong? It belongs to this man. Eh! It belongs to this man!" Similarly, Sago said that when you meet an age-mate and address him with his *errawak*-name, you define his animal, because this *errawak*-name is derived from its color pattern. The color pattern is used as a metonym to denote the *errawak*, probably because it is highly visible and recognizable by everyone. Thus, the color pattern and, by extension, the *errawak*, are symbols by way of which a herdsman is recognized by his fellows.

‘Favorite animals’ participate in the self, insofar as the herders say that they are their *siti* (hair). The *siti* are animals that are recognized as ‘outright property,’ and are primarily acquired as gifts made to a man’s wife, or as inheritance (Lydall 2005: 161). This means that young unmarried men and married men who have not yet brought their wives in do not possess their own livestock, and this makes them economically dependent on their parents, relatives, and neighbors, for whom they herd the animals. The only exception to this is a man’s *errawak*, which he receives and owns outright before he gets married. Actually the word *siti* expresses two different things. On the one hand, it refers to a part of the body (hair), and on the other hand to a category of livestock (those owned outright). Thus, when herders say that their *errawak* are their *siti*, they express the idea that these animals belong to them as personal outright property, just as their hair belongs to their head. A human element (hair) is used as a metaphor to denote the cattle that individuals possess in their own right. In addition, the *errawak*-name refers to the color pattern of the *siti* (hair) of the man’s favorite animal, of which he is the father/owner. A natural feature of the animal (color pattern) becomes a social feature of a human, providing him with identity (name).

A man chooses his *errawak* on the basis of its color pattern. The ‘favorite animals’ are companions that provide protection for their owners. The Hamar can turn an animal into an *errawak* only if it has a ‘good’ color pattern. They say that the animal will bring good fortune (*barjo*) to its owner. During daily activities, but especially during incursions into enemy territory, the herders feel protected by their *errawak*. Before a war or a raid, the men draw lines of cow dung on the coat of their *errawak*, shout the animals’ names, and sing for them. Sago told me that the *errawak* is his strength and bravery, and that it protects him. His animal-other enhances his sense of personal power. When the animal becomes old and weak, it can be exchanged with other cattle in order to get a rifle. As my informant Gadi said, “the rifle, like your ox, protects you.” The animal can also be ritually slaughtered by the age-mates in the dry season. At that time, the Hamar show their grief by shooting into the air, as they do for humans when they die. Sago explained to me that for the owner, who raised the animal and watched it grow up, the grief is similar to that which he feels for a person. The age-mates try to calm the owner’s emotions. They will consume the meat of the animal, but the owner refuses to do so. As Lukusse said: “I do not eat my *errawak*. It is my child. My age-mates, they should eat it. If I eat it, my *barjo* will turn bad.” The Hamar decorate and take such good care of their *errawak*, because they believe that ‘favorite animals’ incorporate or are their *barjo* (Lydall/Strecker 1979: 202).

Conclusion

If cattle represent figures of otherness, domestication makes them no longer unknown and threatening living creatures, but brings them into the sphere of human society. Otherness is not self-produced but arises from a relationship. The control of and the personalized knowledge about cattle create an intimate relationship between humans and animals. Their daily interactions generate a high level of mutual familiarity, which inspire humans to confer attributes of personhood on their cattle. However, such a blurring of the demarcation line between human and animal, known among many Nilotic and Afro-Asiatic speakers, is not a common trait of every agropastoral and pastoral society in East Africa. The relationships between herders and their cattle have specific cultural expressions and significances. Among the Hamar, a herder designates livestock which is his personal property as his *siti* (hair). As the owner of an animal, he has the right to modify its natural features according to personal and cultural preferences. Long-term interactions with the animals he herds makes a man perceive each animal as unique, each with its own particular physical features and character. The greater the control he exercises over this 'other,' the more this 'other' helps him to develop a sense of 'self' and the more closely the 'other' is incorporated into his 'self.' This is especially true in the case of his *errawak*, which shapes his very identity. He is named after the appearance of his 'favorite animal,' because this 'other' has the qualities desired in a bovine, and his interactions with the 'other' are emblematic of those he generally has with all his livestock (care, protection, attachment), but in a more intense way.

The daily experience of intimate relationships with cattle not only shapes Hamar identity, but also related aesthetics and practices. Livestock are the most highly valued possession, a focal point of perception in the context of pastoral life. Domestic animals are in a sense the main aesthetic locus of Hamar society. The permanent body marking of the *errawak* expresses the idea that they are a "feast for the eyes" before being a "feast for the stomach" (Coote 1992: 254). The Hamar not only glorify, but also attribute apotropaic functions and other symbolic values to the physical and aesthetic qualities of their *errawak*. These are supposed to contribute to the owners' good fortune (*barjo*), identity, and socio-cultural position. Thus, the phenomenon of the 'favorite animal' attests to the importance of cattle as a medium through which humans can express and define their 'self,' as well as their relationships to each 'other.'

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Songs of self and others in times of rapid change: music as identification among the Arbore of southern Ethiopia

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John Coltrane has described how the audience heard “we”
even if the singer said “I.”

(Carby 1998: 475)

Musical experience can transcend geometric physical experiences of space, says the musicologist Victor Zuckerkandl (1963: 314ff). Similarly, musical expression can transcend stereotypical ideas of self and other, especially when looking comprehensively at the musical repertoires of people and groups. The variety of values conveyed by songs expresses stereotypes as well as making a stereotypical view on the world impossible. Boundaries of identification suggested by one song are not equivalent to the boundaries of identification suggested by another, and the perception of one or the other and the result of the combination of both remains a challenge for interpretation.

The musical repertoire of the Arbore, an East-Cushitic group of around 6,000 people who live as agropastoralists in southern Ethiopia, invites reflection on these contentions. *Modo kure il nakawa* – ‘people are put and stored in song,’ it is said in Arbore. Songs tell stories about the newly born and about men who killed and people who were killed, about the land and about neighbors, about cattle, milk, and the morning, about lovers, mothers, heroes, cowards, innovators, bulldozers, airplanes, and much more. More than that, although value judgments are not regarded as appropriate in speech, songs are the places where praise and condem-

1 I thank the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale, Germany, for continuous financial and academic support of my ethnographic research.

nation find explicit expression and create identification patterns through more or less normative appeals of who or how to be or not to be (Donahoe et al. 2009). Songs, as parts of regular collective performances, create prominent visual and auditory arenas for collective and individual identification and orientation. Especially because songs in Arbore are always performed live, song and identification processes share continuous flexibility. Which songs people perform, their content, and their interpretation are subject to change according to choices within specific circumstances. Most songs are gradually ‘filled’ with more people and stories through the years of their performance. This happens in a topical manner: songs about wrongdoers are filled with more wrongdoers, songs about killers were filled with more killers,² songs about love are filled with new lovers, songs about heroes are filled with more heroes – and here an interesting part of the analysis starts. Who is considered a hero and when? The common men or the heroic killer? When is a song attributed which meaning and by whom? To face these questions one has to know that the Arbore song repertoire is divided into two main categories: music of the Arbore (*kure Arbore*, *kure Hor*³) and other music (*kurelahata*) that I call adopted or imported songs.⁴ One major distinction is that most adopted songs can be freely interpreted and changed, whereas the purity and careful alteration of the few Hor songs is strictly monitored by the community (see Gabbert 2006b).

In the following I concentrate on the content of song lyrics, not on the analysis of performances and sound and melody to provide facets of Arbore identification processes through music. In the process I touch topics such as pastoralism, the good and bad, the right and the wrong, the we and the other and look at these examples as they change along the paths of history and identification, including my role as anthropologist in over 20 years of research in Arbore. Inevitably, written texts make it necessary to turn sounding and resounding experiences into silent stories. The reader might bear in mind that every songline written is a journey in

2 In the past the Arbore used to cultivate heroic pictures of killers and songs of praise were part of the construction of the killer ideal. The abandonment of homicide is part of the Arbore’s successful turn towards a peaceful way of life in the past decade (for a thorough analysis of this transformation see Gabbert 2012). Hence, the past tense is used here.

3 When as in this case the term ‘Hor’ is specifically used for ‘Arbore,’ it hints at the historicity of the songs.

4 For the distinction between Arbore songs and imported songs, see Gabbert (2006b). For my analysis of Arbore music I rely on a large number of my recordings of all musical genres (e.g. working songs, cattle songs, killer songs, praise songs, songs for the favorite ox, songs for grinding grain), songs or variations of songs of specific age-sets (e.g. *murte*, songs of the mother’s generation), individual songs (e.g. love songs, calming songs for babies), old songs of ritual importance and newly emerging leisure songs. I have described elsewhere how music, most of which is performed in combination with dance, is an integral part of Arbore life (Gabbert 2006a, 2006b, 2008).

itself, starting with a hum, maybe at the neighbor's house, when a girl was grinding sorghum or when a mother was calming her baby; or a resonance appearing mostly after sunset and late at night, when bits of sounds carried by favorable winds – near or distant – made me get up, grab my recorder and microphone to walk the savannah, sometimes villages away to find the source of a song. Hours of transcribing the lyrics and years of trying to translate and understand the content inextricably attached me to the songs, their sounds, their moments.⁵ It is with this in mind that I still interpret the songlines born in a contemplative atmosphere of a rural pastoral soundscape, before they will change into remembrances of things past in a time when the soundscape of Arbore is changing rapidly, with heavy vehicles shaking the houses and ears when their convoys pass in the morning, with seismic vibrator trucks stomping the savannah,⁶ with airplanes flying in and out on the new airstrip and with oil drills to be heard in the near future.

Songs about pastoralism ...

My uncle's white cow
The land where the grass is sweet smelling
This is where I take her⁷

These lines from this *gobba* song express the devotion of young men to the family cattle. The Arbore are agropastoralists, yet pastoralism is their 'mode of perception' (Baxter 1987: v). In spite of their extensive agricultural knowledge and production, the Arbore's self-reference as 'people of cattle' (*modo oot*) is the most salient and runs through all spheres of Arbore life, connecting individuals, families, lineages, clans, and ethnic groups. Cattle and also goats and sheep are important means through which kinship, friendship, and bondfriendship are enacted and celebrated in rituals and on a daily basis. Each day in Arbore is framed by *bobba*, the moment when the cattle leave the kraal in the morning, and *galshum*, the moment when they return in the evening. Cattle shape much of the Arbore's material, oral and musical culture, and symbolism. Almost all Arbore songs contain passages about cattle. Cattle are prominent as metaphors and in word games, e.g. in boys' love songs (*faru*) such as the following:

5 Repeated thanks go to Ginno Ballo for his invaluable contributions to this endless task.

6 Seismic vibrator trucks create echoes by stomping the ground with large pads for seismic measurements, in this case for the purposes of oil explorations.

7 Song lyrics that I have transcribed directly into English appear without their Arbore transcription.

The cow with the black eyes
 Where she is there is no grass
 The girl with the black eyes
 When will we be together again?⁸

Cattle connect people and groups, and every important step in a person's life is accompanied by transactions of cattle, goats, or sheep. Cattle are means to establish social networks with an "insurance factor" (Schlee 1989: 402ff). For a child's first hair-shaving ceremony, for marriage, and at a person's death, family members and friends contribute cattle, and social ties are constantly re-evaluated according to these transactions. Items made of sacrificed animals, e.g. the hides of oxen slaughtered at the wedding ceremony, carry practical and symbolical value. Normally, the first children of a married couple are conceived and born on such a cowhide. Some ritually important adornments, such as the mother's belt (*mach*), must only be made from the hides of healthy and properly sacrificed animals, to transfer the strength of the animal and thus increase the belt's mystical powers. The patterns on that belt, which are made of cowries, are divided by a symbolic cattle path. Worn and ragged cowhides can be used to carry away old bones and baby droppings outside the settlement. Cow's milk is of nutritional and symbolic importance. Especially when the harvests fail, children can survive on milk. The most frequently used liquids for blessings are a mixture of water and milk (*err*) and butter from cow's milk. The handing over of the peritoneal fat (*moor*) of slaughtered livestock, a part of every major ceremony, is one of the most prominent symbols for peaceful relations. Cattle terminology is pervasive in the Arbore language, especially in color classification, and many Arbore names are derived from cattle's features, colors, and patterns.⁹ The naming of a child is sealed by placing the umbilical cord on the back of a cow. In their youth, boys can add the name of their favorite animal to their given names.

The pastoralist ideal also determines the socialization and education of children. All Arbore children are taught to care for their family's livestock. To become a good and responsible person is to become a good and responsible herder. This, before marriage, is valid for both girls and boys and is depicted in the songlines of this love song (*faru*):

8 Cows with circular black patches around their eyes are regarded as especially beautiful. The herder who sings this song is far from home in search of good grazing grounds, and is longing for his loved one.

9 Common boy's names, such as Argiddo, Arshal, Armar, Arsirba, and Arnyiero, contain the word *aar* for bull.

There is a cattle camp in Galalsha
My girl is there
If I went there who would tend my cows?
I decide to stay with my cows while missing her

... and their future orchestration

Behind the pastoral melodies described in the passage above lurk the changes induced by massive development plans that concern pastoral areas all over the world and especially in Northeast Africa. Although the productive use of rangelands and “mobile livestock husbandry has long defined the most effective strategy for extracting value out of otherwise marginal lands, and so in doing feeding growing millions” (Galaty 2013: 152), in the past decade we can observe an increasing number of voices that declare pastoralism as outlived, not economically viable or even ‘backwardish.’ In the past decade some the most valuable pastoral lands in Northeast Africa have become subject to large-scale agricultural or other investment, resulting in the loss or fragmentation of rangelands, induced forced sedentarization of pastoralists and a radical reduction of livestock numbers. The development plans of the Ethiopian government have resulted in the ongoing integration of the South Omo region in the administrative, educational, economical, and communication networks of the Ethiopian state and the world. New goods as well as hitherto unfamiliar ideas and practices are introduced into the area with increasing speed and frequency, giving rise to fantasies and hope as well as to fears and feelings of uncertainty. Oil exploration efforts in the Arbore area pose existential questions that still await being sufficiently addressed. Alongside the crucial importance of livestock production for both national economy and local livelihoods, the social significance of livestock in maintaining social relations, exchange networks, and cultural survival provide a sociological feature of stability which remains unacknowledged by current developmental policies (Homewood et al. 2012: 16).

The Arbore cultivate an agropastoralist economy which is well connected to local exchange and trade patterns and to local agricultural and pastoral systems. While the cultural neighborhood (Gabbert/Thubauville 2010) in southern Ethiopia generates cultural diversity through knowledge of familiar and reliable others and through complementary modes of economy, these context-generated local qualities often do not match with the more context-driven processes pursued by national and global actors (Appadurai 1995). The insecurity and fear induced by asymmetrical and therefore unpredictable relations provides reason for pastoral people to activate the synthetic strength of a common identification (Schlee 2003) to save

face against a confusing conglomeration of others. Indeed, pastoralists increasingly face many others: NGOs, missionaries, administrators, national and international investors, and laborers from northern Ethiopia that more than often lack insight into and even basic interest in pastoralist economies, ideals, and beliefs. Conflict induced by new encounters in this rapidly changing national and global market is foreseeable. Realists would contend that it cannot be otherwise because without a history of communication, contact, and exchange there must be a lack of mutual knowledge between new neighbors, which is partly caused by the limited time the two parties have to get to know each other. This leads to an unpredictability of the ‘other’ on both sides, followed by misunderstandings and misbehavior with inherent potential for conflict. In this changing scenario communication and integration are crucial steps on the way. Markakis has issued an appeal to overcome internal frontiers: “Bringing the pastoralist realm into the state without destroying it” poses an extraordinary challenge to the process of nation-building in Ethiopia if it shall not result in mere extinction of pastoral livelihood and knowledge (Markakis 2011: 17). This form of mutually beneficial integration would take into account the positive contributions that agropastoralists have to make (African Union 2010: 24ff). It is too early to say whose song will be heard in these developments, but within this scenario the “task of the academic” is not to conserve cultures but to reflectively listen to and describe rules and generate solutions for merging “interests or intentions that seem often at least partially incompatible” (Zitelmann 2004: 47). I dearly hope that future compositions integrate pastoral cultural neighbors thoughtfully and respectfully in a truly joint orchestration.

About a girl. A condemnation song ...

As favorable traits and values are praised in songs, deviance can be explicitly scolded. Dakara, a song about an Arbore girl, is a song of condemnation (*midada*). Reasons for condemnation can be the breaking of rules of good behavior and the negligence of Arbore customs (*aada Arbore*). The range from the acceptable to the unacceptable becomes clearer when looking closer at their respective evaluation in songs. Unlike multifaceted and thematically heterogeneous songs where single lines express wrongdoing, the song described in the following is used exclusively to scold female wrongdoers. I recorded the Dakara song at a grinding party. About fifteen girls at a time were grinding large amounts of sorghum. One girl was singing the solo part from which the lines are extracted and the other girls joined in the (wordless) refrain.

<i>Dakara manasuudi</i>	Dakara did not get married
<i>Dakara iyya magurguri</i>	Dakara was not traded [to her husband] by her father
<i>Esse iy walgurgurte</i>	She traded [gave] herself away

The story of the girl Dakara took place in the 1970s when she decided to live with her Borana boyfriend without the permission of her father. *Iyya magurguri* literally means “her father did not trade her away,” but in this context it indicates that she circumvented the whole traditional marriage procedure. In this way she became a ‘spoiled’ girl who in former times would have been given away to become a wife of a man in Hamar, Borana, or Tsamai because no Arbore would want to marry her anymore.

<i>Dakara iy walsuudite</i>	Dakara married herself away
<i>Harate tollo makobagatto</i>	The [Arbore] girls did not know this before
<i>Dakara tollo nesse</i>	It was Dakara who taught them

In these lines we hear that after Dakara, other girls followed her example and chose their husbands without permission. The reason was simple – individual love that did not take socio-cultural norms about communal order into consideration. In this understanding Dakara’s age-mates question her egoistic decision:

<i>Moh Dakara eete Gossa Dula</i>	The man who took Dakara is Gossa Dula
<i>Jimma “Gossa Dula bedda” gedde</i>	The age-mates of Dakara said: “Gossa Dula is bad
<i>“Meh kehe a suuda?”</i>	Why would you marry him?”
<i>Esse “Niibay korumm deerate,” geete</i>	She said: “He has the straightest nose
<i>“Ilko nibay eseta workida,” geete</i>	He has the whitest teeth, shining with gold.”

Here Dakara counters her family’s and her age-mates’ objections by praising his beauty. Yet, of course the end of the love story is part of the lesson:

<i>Dakara amma Ganna</i>	Dakara, the older sister of Ganna
<i>Heyi barday toko da eyi</i>	Her fill she had for a day
<i>Heyi Kaliko eyi</i>	Her fill she took from Kaliko
<i>Heyi Kaliko djobbo kabba</i>	The fill of Kaliko had evil in it
<i>Heyi wa barday tokoda</i>	It was a fill for only a day
<i>Esse heyi wa barday bulli kaate</i>	She thought that her fill would last forever

Dakara and her lover ate from the good harvest from the Kaliko fields (an area in Arbore) before they left together to Borana. They did not realize that evil and finiteness were hidden in the sorghum they ate and in the relationship they pursued. Dakara in the end only stayed in Borana for about a month. After that she left

Gossa and returned to Arbore. Later she married another man from Borana with whom she still lives in Arbore.

Most lines of the Dakara song are rather descriptive and factual with some prosaic elements.¹⁰ Only one passage is different:

<i>Tabia indiy galshum dayte</i>	The city turned into galshum
<i>Tabia iy bobba dayte</i>	The city turned into bobba
<i>Harake iy eenu dayte</i>	Liquor turned into milk

This metaphorical turn expresses the symbolic evaluation of Dakara's wrongdoing. As described in the first passage, the daily cycle in Arbore is framed by *bobba* and *galshum*, the cattle leaving and returning to the kraal. Milk is the nutritional symbol of a pastoral life. To have exchanged everything for the values of the city (*tabia*, Amharic for 'police station/control post') and its nutritional symbol of evil, the strong liquor *arake*, which caused so many people to neglect their life and duties and lose their health,¹¹ is a clear value judgment. If a person loses certain values and appropriate behavior according to *aada*, he or she is not regarded as respected Arbore anymore. Dakara therefore is a song about wrongdoing and about crossing the boundaries of the acceptable. Regularly repeated by groups of age-mates, the song's clear moral message mainly serves as a source for collective identification. Yet it also provides the less obvious possibility for individual identification for other girls in a similar situation. Besides condemnation, the Dakara song contains a story of passionate love. This story within the story makes one wonder whose ears might find a hum of pleasure (or refuge) in what Dakara taught the girls to do: to, for reasons yet unsung, decide to dare ending up in this song themselves one day?

... and new compositions of old values

As stated above, I recorded the Dakara song at a grinding party. The sorghum being ground was a gift of one to the girls' boyfriend's mother. On such occasions a girl asks her age-mates for help and the grinding takes place at night after she and her friends have finished their daily duties. Since they might be very exhausted and the grinding takes several hours, the energetic scorning songs are very suitable

10 For a longer description of the song see Gabbert (2008).

11 Alcoholism is an increasing problem in Arbore with resulting cases of impoverishment, domestic abuse, and even death because of liver cirrhosis.

for keeping on grinding. The scene of the age-mates grinding and their singing of Dakara's negligence of her age-mates' warnings mirrors the relation of age-mates on the situational, performative, and discursive level well. One has called for help and they have come. To reject an age-mate's call is an offense. Everybody can expect help and protection from the age-mates as well as criticism and even punishment. In all cases the age-mates act as the major supportive and corrective collective. In this setting, the singing of the Dakara song clearly shows the constitutive role it plays in forming a collective consensus, a moral which becomes a means for identification both in content and through its performance. Dakara did not listen to her age-mates, she left and thus failed badly enough to have a song made about her and others who act like her. A message is remembered in every performance: "We dislike what she liked." Just as in the Arbore punishment ritual (*yakka*), the explicit scolding serves as a reminder of Arbore values.¹² Along these dos and don'ts one recognizes the living routines of Arbore identity. The parable underlines this message, and yet there are undertones. Ten years after its recording, one can reflect on the meaning of the song anew:

During the time when I first analyzed the Dakara song, girls who circumvented the traditional marriage ceremony were still social outcasts. Additionally, arrangements between families were made more often on the basis of communal and economic rather than individual considerations, often leading to the breaking up between former teenage lovers. This affected grooms and brides alike. Some of these cases carried much emotional hardship for the separated lovers. Marriages were firstly rational arrangements to organize reproduction, social succession, and to build ties between families and clans and only secondly were they emotionally grounded. As one Arbore friend told me: "Loving a person does not mean that I can manage a family with that person for a lifetime, as a wife I'd rather choose someone with whom I see a good chance to grow old together. These are two different things." In the past decade much has changed about this perception. To skip ritual steps in the marriage procedure is still not regarded as acceptable, but exceptions for marriage arrangements have increasingly been negotiated, as when girls in boarding schools chose their husbands outside Arbore. The first marriages of that sort required difficult negotiations before they were accepted, especially by

12 An age-set arranges the *yakka* ("mess up") ritual to prevent one of their members being beaten as punishment for bad behavior. Instead of severely beating an offender, the age-mates sacrifice an ox and call all the men to a place outside the settlement. There, in a daylong meeting, the men eat the meat of the sacrificed ox and the elders hold long speeches. In these they hold forth about all the offenses they have observed among the Arbore people (and the world) and remind their audience to hold on to Arbore moral values. By means of a sacrifice, blame is shifted from the individual to the community and thus becomes a communal lesson of morality.

ritually important members of the genealogical *luba* system of Arbore. Today, like in the past, it should be respected that one should not act single-handedly in a social framework that is built on genealogical and patriarchal structures, family bonds as well as on age-set solidarity. The increasing number of love marriages and marriage arrangements with non-Arbore though, show that the Arbore's traditional framework is flexible enough to invite change to reach mutual agreement and in many case sounder solutions for love stories, which for one makes the Dakara example sound less condemning than in former times and secondly provides more obvious emergent meanings in between the lines.

About the casual hero: the evergreen



Fig. 1:
Aar performance during a wedding ceremony (2003, photograph by the author)

Within the already distinguished genre of Hor songs, the song called *aar arangyalle* belongs to the oldest Arbore songs and thus is one of the favorite and most impor-

tant songs for nightly dances, age-set dances, and weddings.¹³ *Aar arangyalle* is mainly sung and danced by girls, boys, and men together at the *naab*, the central assembly place of the Arbore villages. Male and female dancers alternate in a circle, each holding the waist of their neighbor; while singing they jump up and down, with the clinking of the girls' anklets forming one of the rhythmic layers. Some boys, who stand in the center of the circle, accompany this rhythm with clapping woods (*k'anka*). The base sound layer is created by the boys' and men's voices; the leading parts, from which the lyrics are drawn, are solo parts sung by boys and men (*konkach*). One verse is as follows:

<i>Au Duba nib aygumita</i>	The motherbrother of Duba sings so well
<i>Au Duba meel manadoya</i>	When the motherbrother of Duba sings one does not pay attention to the country
<i>Usuka nadoya</i>	One only pays attention to him
<i>NEEK aykadeyya</i>	Look, even the lion listens to him
<i>Angasse Hamu</i>	The older brother of Hamu
<i>Rub'u biyelahat girro</i>	The sorghum from another country
<i>Ba biyetanno koon</i>	He brings it to our country

The beautiful singing of the man – the motherbrother of a man called Duba – overwhelms everyone who listens, even the lion as the ultimate admirer. The elder brother of a man called Hamu is praised for having brought sorghum seeds from his travels. Similar to these song lines, in *aar arangyalle* that which is praised are the skills of good singers, those special nights when dancing achieves splendor, bravery demonstrated over the course of lengthy travels, the value of age-mates, someone who has found love far away, someone who has dared to do something first, and so on. Having been repeated in these songs for years, the names and the accomplishments of their bearers become immortalized. Even if half of the lines of a particular passage are omitted, singing or hearing parts of it evokes the whole and verses do not have to be sung in chronological order.

As I transcribed other song lyrics of the *aar arangyalle*, I was able to reflect on the meaning of the song in the wider musical repertoire. To find more casual values so clearly formulated in one of the most cherished Arbore songs is interesting in many respects. Unlike the large body of killers' songs of the *gobba* and *meerat* genres, where the vigilance of the killers and the hunters is praised,¹⁴ the song *aar*

13 For a lengthy analysis of *aar arangyalle*, see Gabbert (2008).

14 *Gobba* and *meerat* songs played an important part as supportive musical elements in the construction of the Arbore's former killer ideal. Their use and partly deconstruction in the course of the peaceful transformation is described in Gabbert (2012).

arangyalle belongs to the few genuine Arbore songs whose purity in language, form, and performance is carefully monitored and protected by the community. The observation that *aar arangyalle*, as one of the most ‘traditional’ songs, praises virtues that are more casual than outstanding and whose tenor is more innovative than traditionalist, deserves attention. The prominent quality of *aar arangyalle* is not only the reinforcement of the existing values that praise always implies, but also its sensibility with regard to aesthetics and innovation in general. As music expresses attitudes, it potentializes thought and actions, and thus *aar arangyalle* opens an imaginary dimension to be creative, virtuous, or innovative in a positive way. As an antipode to the songs of hunters and killers, *aar arangyalle* adds to the potential for a peaceful self-understanding which the Arbore have successfully cultivated in the past decades.

Conclusion

I would argue therefore that music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognise identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them.

(Stokes 1997: 5)

The songs mentioned above, except *aar arangyalle*, the oldest song, have changed their meaning and interpretation in the course of history. The song about the girl Dakara has smoothed into the melodies of social change, the fatal meaning of the killer’s *gobba* and *meerat* songs is muted in the new context of peace, and the pastoral *gobba* resounds with melancholic sadness in the face of pastoralism being targeted or silenced as an outlived way of life. Only *aar arangyalle*, the song about the casual hero, might continue reverberating with ageless significance.

When Born and Hesmonhalgh (2000: 36) describe “techniques of the musical imaginary” to show the mutual constitutive relation of music and cultural identity, they show how the same song might work as a reinforcing agent for collective cultural norms as well as providing possible places of more imaginary individual and innovative identification with potential effects of action and behavior towards change. “[N]ot all forms of musically articulated ‘identity’ are the same,” not even in a single song (see also Blacking 1995: 38ff). Cross (1999: 10, 2009: 3) describes how songs can provide comfort and raise aggression at the same time in a ‘floating intentionality.’ In this sense songs display a range of possibilities for reinterpretation by different people at different times. Here we recognize music as a tool in the

individual and the collective forming of identification, with aesthetic, reflective, and constitutive qualities, a dynamic becoming, in the sense Frith (1998: 109) describes: “Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics.”

Songs that are sung and danced collectively provide communal experiences that form “social synchronies” (Turino 1999: 241). In their capacity to manifest a “range of emotional – motivational – and intentional states” (Cross 2006: 7) they are platforms for explicit or implicit modulations and evaluations of Arbore values, norms, and attitudes. Praise songs reinforce positive aspects of Arbore identity, whereas condemnation songs reflect on the violation of Arbore morality. In whichever way songs represent and remind, they reflect and constitute at the same time. And they are processual, constantly subject to change. They work constitutively, as invitation, temptation, and threat through imaginary identification and collective experience and provide a forum to identify the norms and values through which a self-understanding is created. Songs are the means where this constantly reverberates. Through endless repetitions and re-evaluations songs become common knowledge. To reach a deeper understanding of certain meanings of Arbore song is the challenge when first contextualizing songs within a musical repertoire, and then when deconstructing the songs and tracing back the historical context of the lyrics in detail. An assessments about “why and how certain texts are sung” (Feld/Fox 1994: 31) is a long procedure that requires intensive observing, listening, transcribing, evaluating, and analyzing before the song, its lyrics, and its evocative qualities can be evaluated. When performing, listening to, and analyzing music, we move from the song to people, events, and sentiments and then to a broader historical perspective, and while some threads of the song allow a relatively stable interpretation, others remain separate, creating multi-vocal expressions that are impossible to translate, and the sources of which remain hidden in the past while the potential meanings remain hidden in the future.

Let me close this essay with some thoughts of musicologist Bruno Nettl who said: “In the life of a music, some components always change while others do not. [...] Radical change and the kind of gradual, allowable, intrasystemic change that is always with us each claims its due, to different but balanced degrees. The hypothesis remains to be tested” (2005: 289). In this sense one needs to remember that the quality of the future of the pastoralist Arbore in the course of fast-track development also remains to be tested including the future of their musical repertoire. This repertoire is remarkable, in its artistry, variation, and content. My first humble exercises as young anthropologist were soundwalks across Arbore, in which I

tried to understand the social composition of Arbore by following the songs that connected people and places (Gabbert 2006a). Later, in my evaluation of the Arbore's experiences of war, I was able to reconstruct pieces of Arbore history only because they were kept in song lyrics for centuries. Having recorded and transcribed the lyrics of almost all Arbore musical genres, I was overwhelmed time and again by the richness of fact, philosophy, poetry, and sentiment in the Arbore's songs. More than anything I was struck by the musical eloquence of all Arbore, from children to elders. Some polyphonic pieces sung *en passant* by a quartet of three to six year old children resembled pieces of an *a capella*-choir of at least a sextet of trained vocalists at a western music school. Some songs, like *aar arangy-alle*, could not be classified by experienced musicologists because their style and patterns were so unique. Yet the songs about bulldozers and corrugated iron also speak of the flexibility and openness not only of a musical repertoire but of a group of people who do not deserve to be labeled as 'backwards' as so often happens in the present discourse about development when speaking about "people of southern Ethiopia." With purpose I stress virtues of Arbore music here, as I believe that, among other things, they have not been sufficiently acknowledged, nationally and internationally. This lack is part of a puzzle, of a sadly stereotypical view not only on the Arbore but on other pastoralists in East Africa, showing that something has gone wrong in the due appreciation of their way of life and their cultural integrity. I do not regard myself as conservationist when I remind readers in this context that everywhere in the world music is one of the precious places where cultural heritage has played a respectful and respected role for the expression of people's culture, knowledge, and sentiments. Not only concerning musical identification, future interventions in southern Ethiopia should be implemented with a fair balance of own and other, innovation and change, while seriously integrating the people's long-proven expertise, their knowledge and culture into the planning of changes. Music, or simply taking a moment to listen, is helpful for avoiding hasty mistakes in important times of changes and to remind us of the wisdom of sensitivities. This can give fertile ground for compositions and variations in due respect for the existing repertoires, whether they are musical, social, economic, or humane.

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Images of Mursi women and the realities they reveal and conceal

SHAUNA LATOSKY

It is a pity that the beauty of the simulacrum [proliferation of images] is intentionally to replace reality, to implode the demarcation between the aesthetic and the truthful...

(Huimin Jin 2008: 148)

Mursi girls and women are represented most frequently in the forms of images which bear no relation to their current realities. An appreciation for the everyday experiences and predicaments of Mursi women, as they struggle to make sense of a rapidly changing world, thus remains restricted in an age where digital media increasingly provide forums which focus almost solely on primitive representations of the Mursi, especially Mursi women. As glossy coffee-table books, travel blogs, websites, and photo journalism magazines continue to satisfy consumers' needs, the proliferation of exotic Mursi imagery has meant disengagement from reality. In this paper, I highlight the potential of women's stories as a strategy to "tighten that tie with reality" (Jin 2008: 148). Although it is beyond the scope of my paper to explore the platforms from which women's stories can be communicated in the future,¹ for now, I suggest that the lively debates and discussions that popular images of Mursi women provoke reveal a part of the truth that is otherwise con-

1 The internet, for instance, is an important tool for communicating women's stories. One useful online resource for sharing Mursi stories is the website "Mursi Online" created by anthropologist David Turton. Pilcher and Vermeyen's (2008) work among the San also suggests the innovative use of narratives within online museums. Other innovative ways of creating social and political spaces for Mursi women might be through participatory media production as exemplified by international digital storytelling initiatives (Lambert 2010; see also <http://www.silencespeaks.org>) and Tacchi's "Finding a voice: digital storytelling as participatory development in Southeast Asia" (Tacchi 2009; see also <http://www.findavoice.org>).

cealed. More specifically, they reveal the predicaments that Mursi girls and women are facing today with respect to their bodies. Further, I consider whether outside attempts to intervene in women's bodily practices, particularly the practice of wearing lip-plates, make women hostage to contingent facts concerning what best promotes progress, or the well-being of Mursi girls and women.

Popular images of “the Mursi” evoke ideas of aggressive-looking warriors,² of a people with “primitive” and exotic practices like wearing animal skins or piercing and stretching pubescent girls' bottom lips. This primitive labeling began in the hands of explorers.³ The published account of the Italian Geographical Society expedition to the Lower Omo Valley in 1896, which was led by Vittorio Bottego, gives the following description of the Mursi:

The women are ugly and dirty, completely naked except for their sides, which they cover with a straight piece of leather. We met some who had large holes in the ears and in their bottom lips, in which they inserted wooden discs, with a circumference of 5 to 6 centimetres. This primitive tribe has despicable tendencies and bestial habits [...]. (Van-nutelli/Citerni 2006: 323)⁴

Over the last century, primitive depictions of the Mursi, and other ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia, have had – and continue to have – power and vitality. Such exotic representations have been exploited by government administrators from northern Ethiopia, especially during the Derg regime, and, more recently, by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Even though the Mursi were never colonized by outsiders or by the Ethiopian Government, evidence of a strongly paternalistic attitude towards them is found in everything from government reports, to speeches delivered by local administrative representatives of the current EPRDF – whose mission it is to “strive to incorporate peripheral groups like the Mursi into ‘structures of control’” (Turton 2005: 270). In his unpublished MA thesis *A history of Jinka from its emergence to 1991*, Teferi (2007: 145f, 157) makes reference to government reports from the 1960s which depict the Mursi as backwards and in need of “civilizing.” In one report issued by the Ministry of Interior Magazine (1957 E.C.), it is stated that:

2 See especially Giansanti (2011, cover photo) and Sebastião Salgado's black and white photographs of “Ethiopia's Nomad Warriors” in *Rolling Stone Magazine* (2008).

3 For an overview of the historiography of primitive imagery in Mursi (and southern Ethiopia in general), see Tamás Régi (2013).

4 Translated from the original by Federico Guzzoni.

The Mursi decorate by mutilating their lip and ear by inserting a circular plate made of clay which resembles a saucer. Since it is not possible to make them quit the custom only by [government] order, [it is essential] to educate and make them realize [the harmfulness of] their custom. (Negash Roba, translated by Teferi 2007: 146)

Similarly, some non-governmental organizations also exploit the backward image of the Mursi in order to achieve their own development goals, from healthcare to gender equality. Evidence of this is found in the various ways in which a number of groups endeavoring to work with Mursi communities portray and interpret images of Mursi women with lip-plates as a kind of “imposed disability” (Russell 2010: 18). For instance, in 2009 the Ethiopian-Canadian-based charity organization “Friends of South Omo” included the following information on their homepage:

In some tribes in South Omo, one of which is the Mursi Tribe, decorative lip plates dictate a woman’s value in marriage. For instance, the larger the plate, the more cows she is worth at the time of marriage. The lip plates make day to day functions that we completely take for granted, such as eating and drinking, extremely difficult, as you will see in these videos.⁵

A spectacular YouTube video, which included archival footage of Sara-Kaba women with labrets in both top and bottom lips, originally taken by explorers visiting southern Chad in 1908, was used to support the claim that lip-plates were “harmful” since they “make eating and drinking extremely difficult.”⁶

Images that thrive and survive

However, the most ubiquitous of all Mursi images are those generated and exploited by the tourism market, photo journalism, and magazine journalism. The popular media began to introduce primitive images of the Mursi to the general public in the early 1990s.⁷ It is only within the last decade that the Mursi have

5 See <http://www.friendsofsouthomo.com/WOMENINSOUTHOMO.html>.

6 After contacting the organization in 2009 to report the misleading information contained in their website, some of the information was removed, including the YouTube video link of Sara-Kaba women which claimed to represent Mursi women and the supporting claim that the lip-plate makes drinking and eating difficult.

7 See for example Beckwith and Fisher (1990) or Chris Rainier’s infamous National Geographic photograph of a Mursi woman (<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/tattoos/photo9.html>), which was also later published in his *Ancient marks: the sacred origins of tattoos and body marking* (2004).

begun to appear more prominently on the Internet and in other forms of mass media, from television game shows to Reality TV.⁸ This is also where we find the most striking evidence of the continuing widespread appeal of “noble savage” rhetoric, or what anthropologist Serge Tornay refers to as the revival of the “primitivist myth” (Tornay, quoted in Abbink 2010: 894).⁹ Turton makes a similar claim when he identifies one of the most exoticized features among the Mursi to give strength to such primitive labels:

Judging by its ubiquitous appearance in travel brochures, advertisements and on postcards, the lip plate has become, for those organizing tours to the Omo lowlands, a symbol which encapsulates the quintessentially ‘tribal’ and ‘untouched’ existence of the Mursi. (Turton 2005: 274)

That “primitive” images of the Mursi continue to thrive and survive, particularly in the exotic portrayals of women and lip-plates, is demonstrated in the following entries. The first entry is from a travelogue published in German called *Äthiopien: Im Land der Mursi*; the second is from a travel guide book, the third a travel blog, and, the fourth, a website featuring the work of a well-known photojournalist.

[...] the most impressive thing about them were their faces with the discs! Like plates, they hung from their bottom lips... no doubt, they were Mursi. I had reached my destination – we had arrived in the land of the duck-billed women! (Cropp 1990: 177, author’s translation)

Contrary to what the publicity shots might have you believe, Mursi women do not actually wear their lip plate all that much – it’s far too heavy and uncomfortable.¹⁰ Instead, the wretched ladies wander about in what appears to be a monumental sulk, with their distended lip hanging limply below the jaws. Call me a culture-bound git, but a Mursi woman *sans* lip plate is not, by any standards a pretty sight – one can’t help but feel for the teenage girls who will soon be mutilated in a similar fashion! (Briggs 2006: 520)

8 In 2005, I met a Japanese film crew at the South Omo Research Centre in Jinka. They were collecting “exotic” Mursi objects for a game show in Tokyo. In 2006, a Belgian film crew filmed the first Reality TV show in Mako.

9 The spectacular ways in which Mursi women “dress up” for tourists feed the desires of the increasing number of tourists and photographers who travel to Ethiopia to capture that “visual allegory of a timeless African primitivity ...” (Roberts 2000: 11). Freelance photographer Ingetje Tadros’ exotic images of Mursi girls and women are another good example of this (2010a).

10 This will also depend on the age, marital status, and personal views of a woman.

Why, you may wonder one goes into this remote piece of Africa? Because of the tribes. MURSI lip-plate women and others [...]. No one comes for such an empty park. Only the MURSI they want to see. ("Over the Horizon," August 2007)¹¹

Fortunately for me, the next day we were able to make it 4 hours upriver, to a far more remote and inaccessible Mursi village. The people were just as mercenary but easier to control. The women of the Mursi often choose to have large lip-plates as part of their aesthetic allure. The plates are bizarre and can easily be the size of a side-plate from a dinner set. The women who choose this modification begin the process at puberty [...]. I had always thought there must be some kind of mystical spiritual element to this lip-plate but it seems it is done for purely aesthetic reasons. After a few shots with people at the riverbank, I began walking to the village, whereupon I chanced upon the bizarre sight of a young woman with a full lip-plate walking along with a bright red parasol and a clay handbag for her lip-plate.¹² She was just as surprised to see me and after calming her down I was able to shoot some simple but *truly surreal* images of her along with her parasol on the savannah. (Stirton 2010, author's emphasis)

By now it is probably fair to say that the Mursi have had little, if any, control over exotic representations of themselves.¹³ This became particularly evident when, in 2006, I took with me the cover of the German media magazine *HörZu* (2006), which featured a European business man with his arm slung snugly around the backside of a woman with a lip-plate and leather dress, and showed it to a group of Mursi women and men. Whereas most outsiders that I interviewed prior to this assumed that the woman was from Mursi, none of the Mursi individuals that I talked to identified the photo as resembling that of a Mursi woman. Several of the senior women responded that "a Mursi woman would never wear a lip-plate with her hair like that."¹⁴ She looks like a baboon!" While several Mursi thought that the

11 See "Over the horizon: Ethiopia" (weblog), August 5, 2007 (Norhayati/Harun 2007). The same blog also claims that the beehives which hang from acacia trees are actually "coffins" in which "they pack their dead up in the trees." This is further evidence of how many people who visit the Lower Omo Valley are on a mission to find the "primitive" in everything.

12 This photograph appears on numerous weblogs and photography sites. The original is from Stirton's website (<http://www.brentstirton.com/feature-omo.php#>). It should be mentioned that Stirton is likely referring to the woven food basket (*garchu*) she is holding, since clay handbags are not used by Mursi women. Food baskets, on the other hand, are frequently used by girls and women as props when posing for tourist photographs.

13 Even if the Mursi help to perpetuate exotic images of themselves by "play[ing] the part of archetypal primitives, eager to be photographed" (Turton 2005: 274), they have no control over the commodification of such exotic images. As Turton argues for the Mursi (2004), and Abbink (2010: 919) for the Suri, "there is a moral problem of power difference, harassment, exploitation, and excessive commercialization." See also the film *Shooting with Mursi* (Young/Olibui 2008), in which Mursi women in particular complain about being exploited by tourists.

14 To let one's hair grow is generally an indication that someone is in mourning. If this is the case, a woman will not wear her lip-plate.

photo might be of a Chai or Tirma woman (western neighbors of the Mursi) because of the size of her lip-plate, most people thought that she was from Baale (northern neighbors of the Tirma and Chai), with whom the Mursi are less familiar.¹⁵ In the midst of these responses, Olisarali Olibui, the first Mursi filmmaker, asked: “How can we control these bad photos being shown outside? If there is a way, we should do something! This is very bad!” While we considered some of the possible ways in which the Mursi could respond to such degrading images, in the meantime, anthropologist David Turton responded by sending a letter to the editor of *HörZu* magazine.

No doubt without realising it, your advertising agency has produced an image which strikingly illustrates the long tradition in European image-making about Africa which sees the bodies of the non-European ‘Other’ (especially the non-European female ‘Other’) as commodities. To recognise the way many people are likely to interpret the image, and yet to leave it on display until it has run its intended course, seems to me indefensible. (David Turton in an email to the author, November 17, 2006)¹⁶

While it is primarily through the work of individual Mursi and anthropologists, especially David Turton, that exotic representations of the Mursi have been critically evaluated,¹⁷ essentialized images of Mursi women continue to dominate the mass media. That is, despite attempts to correct many myths about the Mursi, in particular the myth that lip-plates were historically a way to disfigure Mursi women so that slave traders would not want them (see Turton 2004), Mursi

15 Abbink (2010: 903) further claims that “[t]he picture was not taken in the Suri or Mursi country, and is most likely a photo montage (the lip-plate photo-shopped in?).”

16 In 2010, I received an email from a customer service representative of *HörZu* informing me that the cover was no longer available to the public due to complaints from customers (email to the author, September 21, 2010).

17 In 2006, I worked on a collaborative ethnographic photo exhibit with a group of Mursi women. This exhibit was displayed at the Goethe Institute in Addis Ababa. My intention was to highlight the different reactions of Mursi women to the exotic representations of them by outsiders. In this case, most women rejected the images that outsiders used to portray them in the numerous coffee-table books made by photojournalists. This was made particularly clear in one woman’s response to a photograph on the back cover of *Vanishing Africa* (2004): “The photographs people take of us, like this one, do not show our true culture. Why does she have a *lalang* (brass bracelet) in her lip! A tourist gave her money to do this, but it is not our culture. Do you put your bracelet in your mouth like that? No, you don’t? Then why would we?” (LaTosky 2006: 41). In recent years Mursi individuals have begun to respond in their own ways to such exotic representations of themselves – either by rejecting, correcting, or perpetuating them. In 2006, for instance, Olisarali Olibui attempted to have the first Mursi billboard removed from a main intersection on Bole Road in Addis Ababa (though without success). The image portrayed a partially clad Mursi man and woman sitting in front of a computer. To paraphrase Olisarali Olibui, it “made a mockery of the Mursi” (personal communication, July 6, 2006). In 2008, filmmaker Ben Young made a film, together with Olisarali Olibui, called *Shooting with Mursi*. This collaborative documentary, which

women remain frozen in a mythologized past.¹⁸ Further evidence that popular depictions of the Mursi continue to rely on static images that feed into primitive myths is indicated in the following response to a photographer's request for feedback on photos for her book *Tribal Ethiopia* (Tadros 2011):¹⁹

What you have chosen seems to pair well with a number of other exotic coffee table books on the Mursi. Indeed, the images are stunning in their own way, but I [...] wonder if there is still a way for you to lay bare the truth behind the images in your book. Wouldn't it be more useful to be self-critical of them? It seems to me that a more reflective look at the aims of your project – for example, why it is you have selected these particular images – would make your book stand out from the others. At least it would make readers think twice about the realities behind these popular images. (Excerpts from email from the author to Tadros, January 21, 2011)²⁰

Pornographic representations

Even though most people are intuitively aware that an exotic portrait, like the one above, “denies the political complexity of the indigenous experience and completely ignores the struggle that is really lived [...] in the moment of the picture-taking/making” (Paakspuu 2009: 191), portraits like this continue to be praised

received worldwide recognition in 2010 (including an honorable mention at the Jean Rouch Film Festival in Paris, and best documentary at National Geographic's “All Roads Film Festival” in Washington), was created with the intention of enabling Mursi self-representation and challenging encroaching wildlife conservation and tourism interests in Mago National Park. See <http://www.shootingwithmursi.com>. In 2009, Milisha Olibui created his own tourist brochure (with the help of missionaries and anthropologist Jean-Baptiste Eczet) in order to include images and information from a “Mursi” perspective. Also, in 2010, the first Mursi “Tourist Community Website” (<http://www.mursicommunity.org>) was posted online with images and information selected by the Mursi; it is defunct at this point of time.

- 18 See for example Chenevière's book *Vanishing tribes: primitive man on earth*, in which he writes: “Was it [the lip-plate] designed to protect the Mursi women from raiding enemy tribes who might abduct and sell them to European slave traders? (A woman thus mutilated would have been of little value, thus of little interest.) Or could it be merely a question of aesthetics? The most conservative ethnologists lean toward the theory that the Mursi practice this strange distortion simply because they consider it beautiful.” (1987: 75)
- 19 For a sampling of Tadros' exotic portrayals of Mursi women see also <http://injetjetadros.photoshelter.com/gallery-collection/Ethiopia/C0000J1pHnNYuDQ> (accessed May 19, 2014).
- 20 On the back cover of *Tribal Ethiopia* Tadros claims to tell “[t]he truth about tribal Ethiopia” by mentioning the Gibe III hydroelectric dam. As she writes: “Have a look inside and feel the threats by the Gibe III Hydroelectric Dam.” However, this issue, serious in its own right, leads us to a further issue of whether human rights rhetoric is misused to advance the “truth” about images that are themselves exploitative and misleading.

and credited in the media.²¹ Lured by the commercial value of exoticism, the majority of tourists, photo journalists, freelance photographers and filmmakers who travel to Mursiland continue to ignore the hidden costs of appropriating the photographic stage for voyeuristic spectatorship (see for example Kok and Timmer's documentary *Framing the other*, 2012). What we are left with are "pornographic representations" (Braidotti 2011; cf. Turton 2004) like Brent Stirton's now famous photo of a Mursi woman wearing warthog tusks.²² In his description of the image, Stirton writes:

This is a woman of the Mursi tribe, wearing boar's tusks, which traditionally would be considered men's decoration. The Mursi women are famous for their clay lip plates, a symbol of beauty. A woman would literally have a little hand bag with three or four of them featuring different designs. Sort of their own version of Prada.²³

I use the term pornography in the sense suggested by Susan Kappeler (1986) and feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2011: 200) "as a system of representation that reinforces the profit-making logic of the capitalist-market economy."²⁴ What makes an image like Stirton's "truly surreal," if not pornographic, is not so much that its textual description is wholly inaccurate – neither do Mursi men decorate themselves with warthog tusks, nor are the girls' lip-plates commoditized like luxury hand bags²⁵ – but rather that it cannot be located in time and space. That is, the image is a commodity more real than the woman in the photograph. To adopt Braidotti's phrase, "[t]he obscenity rather resides in the status of the image itself, its circulation in a money frames space and the overall structure of presentation" (2011: 200).

In this negative appraisal of the role of tourists, photographers, and photojournalists in disseminating falsehoods, and this often involves representing the Mursi as exotic objects, a contradiction emerges. While such essentialized representations

21 Tadros' first-place photograph of "a young Mursi Warrior" from Flickr's global photojournalism contest is a good example. The black and white photograph is of a young, prepubescent Mursi girl with her face framed by massive cattle horns (2011). Various of her Mursi photos can be purchased online for anywhere from 15 to 700 AUD (see ingetjetadros.photoshelter.com).

22 See the image here: <http://www.pinterest.com/pin/523402787913385539/> (accessed May 19, 2014).

23 See LIFE 2010.

24 Turton also refers to Mursi women's encounters with tourists as a kind of prostitution. However, it is not the act of standing in front of tourists to have one's picture taken that is the problem, but as Turton also reminds us, it is the background conditions under which Mursi women (and men) must display themselves to have their photos taken (Turton 2004).

25 It is worth noting here that some lip-plate "collections" are later sold on eBay for a price sometimes equivalent to that of a Prada hand bag, while the Mursi receive roughly 20 ETB, or 1 US dollar per lip-plate.

have the power to persuade people that all Mursi women adorn themselves with animal skins, lip-plates, and warthog tusks, they also have the potential to reveal the realities concealed within this previously fixed essence, especially when interpreted through the lens of Mursi women. During discussions with Mursi women about such exotic imagery, lively stories about their encounters with tourists and transformations in dress and appearance emerge.



Fig. 1:
Domgoro Dumalo discusses popular images of Mursi women found on the internet (2008, photograph by the author)

In 2008, I shared over a hundred photographs, mainly from the internet, with Mursi girls and women in Mako, northern Mursiland (see fig. 1). As women identified themselves and others in the photographs, they recalled the various contexts in which the photos were taken and their experiences with tourists and photographers. Women also explained the different ways in which they displayed – and continue to display – their bodies in order to compete with other women (and men) for tourist money and to ensure that tourists pay. Others shared more sobering accounts of how the very things which Mursi women and girls were proud to display, especially labrets and animal-skin skirts, were disappearing as a result of gov-

ernment pressures to eliminate lip-plates and to ban hunting. In what follows, I draw on several excerpts from the narratives of Mursi women as they relate to their varied and often contradictory experiences of becoming spectators of and “collaborators in strange and staged poses in combinations of vanishing noble savages” (Paakspuu 2009: 185).

Selling Mursi aesthetics

Tourists come to shoot us – the clay, clay, clay [lip-plates] is what they want!

(*Ngatui Sabakorro*)

Mursi women are increasingly aware that their image has become an object of foreign desire. Ironically, this growing awareness has led to an understanding that this image offers a representation of reality more compelling to outsiders than reality itself. As one Mursi elder described in 2005 during the first workshop on “Socially Sustainable Tourism in South Omo” at the South Omo Research Center in Jinka, “We want the tourists to stay longer so that we can treat them like our guests. But they don’t want to stay; they only want to know us through photos, photos, photos that they shoot and take back to their countries” (Dogdog Olibui Tongolu). Indeed the majority of tourists that travel to Mursi spend an average of 20 minutes to take photographs, as if the images are a better representation than the people. While there are other reasons for these short visits, such as a lack of infrastructure for accommodating tourists in Mursi, whatever those reasons might be, the Mursi have had to come up with innovative ways to try and capitalize on these photo frenzies. One rhetorical tactic, used mainly by women, is to create spectacular images of themselves in order to captivate tourists. Mursi women have thus become increasingly aware of the importance of dress and appearance in negotiating their changing identities.

We [women] wear certain things because we know the tourists like them, but that’s only when we go to the place of the tourists. It’s like the Aari: they don’t really wear lip-plates, but they make them [Mursi-style lip-plates] and sell them to the Museum [in Jinka]. It’s the same in Mursi, even some men might wear [Hamar-style] bracelets because the tourists really like them. (Unpublished fieldnotes by Marchana Olibui, Jinka, October 16, 2011)

Photographs from the coffee-table book *Vanishing Africa* created much discussion about the changes in women’s dress and appearance, and the loss of female-specific

traditions. In particular, one photograph of a young girl with a metal apron (*sira*, pl. *sirrên*) on her head, provoked discussion about the exchange value of metal aprons in the past and their disappearance in the mid-1980s due to government pressures to abandon them (see LaTosky 2010: 185). Far from being a “strange ‘hairdo,’ which consists of cascades of metal curls instead of hair” as described by the late Giansanti (Giansanti/Novaresio 2004: 230), unmarried girls and brides used to proudly wear the *sira* around their waists, especially during men’s stick-duelling competitions and dances, rather than on their heads as they do now only to attract tourists.

Ngatui: With a *sira* you were a real *bansanai* (mature girl).

Bikalumi: The *sira* comes from Chai. When we lived in Mara the government came and told us we had to start wearing cloth. They said that they would give us cloth if we threw our [metal] aprons and animal skins in the bushes. Many [women and girls] did. Some were given cloth but it didn’t last. Instead, we just continued to wear animal skins.

Ngatui: Only a few women still have them. If a woman has one, she will wear it on her head like this [*pointing to the photo*] when the tourists come. I don’t know why they [tourists] like them. (Conversation with Bikalumi and Ngatui Sabakorro, unpublished fieldnotes, September 22, 2008)

In my discussions with Mursi women about maintaining or altering their own images of themselves by displaying those images that they know are spectacular, I began to understand that for the Mursi, there is a coherence to it and a consensual agreement among women that it is “appropriate” for attracting tourists. During two separate discussions, two young married women talk about their experiences of attracting tourists:

Nyabisse: When I go to Megantu or Dilldille, I put the *ngila* (warthog tusks used to adorn cattle) on my head and clay on my face. I don’t have a lip-plate to attract the tourists. I’m like a widow. Once you are a widow, the lip shrinks back like this. One thing that the tourists also like is the *sira* (metal apron). [...] Some women will even stretch [the bottom lip] again [to fit a lip-plate], like Bamille. That’s why she always has fresh goat skin skirts – she buys them with money from tourists. (Nyabisse Sabakorro, unpublished fieldnotes, Mako, June 14, 2004)

Bamille: When you first came to Mako I always went to the place of tourists. I would decorate my animal skin [skirt] and sell it to tourists. They pay a lot of money for a woman’s skin – the price of a cow. The girls with big lip-plates make the most money, but they also take my picture because I had the most beautifully decorated skirt. In this photo I stretched my lip again. Now I don’t want to go. Now they cheat us with their

‘television[s]’; they shoot photos, photos, photos, and then say that they only shot one or two. They are liars! This is bad. Now I have a young child again and prefer to stay here. (Bamille Sabakorro, unpublished fieldnotes, Mako, September 22, 2008)

Nyabisse and Bamille live in Mako, which is just outside the border of Mago National Park so few tourists flock to this area compared to the so-called “tourist villages” in Megantu (Haile Woha in Amharic) and Dilldille closer to the Omo River. Women from Mako must therefore travel roughly six to eight hours on foot to reach one of the tourist villages. While most girls will stay for many days (and sometimes weeks), most women only stay for a few days, as they must return to their families and the work waiting for them at home and in their fields. Those who do make the journey must compete with other women (and men) to have their pictures taken. This is one of the reasons why women will go out of their way to decorate themselves in spectacular ways. One woman explained that she was more motivated to enhance the scarification on her stomach and back, which had faded, in order to improve her chances of attracting tourists (personal communication with Luke Kirinomeri, Mako, September 20, 2008). Another woman, Gomana Sabakorro, was unhappy to see herself as a young girl wearing the afore-mentioned metal apron on her head.²⁶ She explained how the *sira* was an important item for attracting tourists, especially for girls who were not as popular among tourists because they had not yet pierced their lips, or had chosen not to pierce and stretch their bottom lips.

While Mursi girls’ and women’s appearance, especially for tourists and photographers is obviously “fabricated,” and meant to be noticed, it is central to women’s understanding of themselves and their understanding of how others see them. They understand that their spectacular appearance has an exchange value and that it becomes more valuable when an object or action is displayed or performed, which is why girls and women might walk around carrying baskets, earthenware pots, or metal aprons on their heads in exchange for more Birr. Two unmarried girls, Ngonta Biochaga and Maibirru Oliholi, explain that their experiences of “dressing up” for tourists have been positive since it allows them to earn their own money.

26 See the virtual coffee-table book at http://petergasser.info/a_visual_journey/index.html, p. 120/121 (accessed May 19, 2014).

Ngonta: Now we always go to the tourists.

Maibirru: If many tourists come in one day and shoot [photos] we can make 100–200 Birr (10–20 Euro).²⁷ She makes a lot because she has a lip-plate. We will stay in Dilldille for 10 days.

Shauna: You can make a lot of money. Do you give it to your father?

N: No we keep it separate (*kolom bi*). I have my own money. I buy cattle with it.

S: How many cows do you have?

N: Only five.

M: ...they will multiply and soon she will have ten.

S: Will you also buy grain?

N: Hee! I only want to drink milk!

M: One cow is 600 Birr (roughly 50 Euro)

S: So after just three days [in Dilldille] you can buy a cow?

N: Eeh! The tourists are great (*a chali hang hang*)!

M: I don't get as much Birr, but they still take my picture. They are good for us. Tell them to come here to Mako. (Interview with Ngonta Biochaga and Maibirru Oliholi, unpublished fieldnotes, September 19, 2008)

For some women, like Bamille and her mother Ngachibo, creating spectacular images are also described as a way to resist established patterns of government discrimination:

Bamille: These photos are found in places all over the world – in Arba Minch, Addis Ababa, Canada, Germany. They show the government that foreigners come all this way to see *us*!

Ngachibo: Why else would they pay all that money? To come and shoot photos, photos, photos of our girls and women! If the government understands this, maybe they will

27 In early September 2008, 1 Euro was roughly 14 ETB. Today, five years later, it is about 24 ETB.

leave us [women] alone. Now all they [government officials] do is come here and scare us and tell us not to cut our girls' lips, to go to school, and to stop wearing animal skins.

(Conversation with Ngachibo Regge and Bamille Dorowa, unpublished fieldnotes, September 19, 2008)

Elsewhere, I have explained further how “dressing up” for tourists creates a predicament for women:

On the one hand, many girls and women regard it as a good way to earn their own money, on the other hand, many complain that they are often treated unfairly by tourists and tour guides, who either do not pay enough for the photographs that they take, or do not stay long enough to take photos or purchase souvenirs. Furthermore, whereas some tourists greedily take their share of photos, others may suddenly feel uneasy about photographing such “spectacles” and choose not to take photos at all. As one woman asked me: “Ngamargo [Shauna], why else do they come then? Don't they know that they must pay if they want to come and stare at us!” Felix Girke made a similar observation among Kara girls who felt insulted and unmotivated to dance for “reluctant tourists” who did not want to photograph them (Girke 2010: 5). What many tourists do not realize, however, is that one lasting mark of the modern world on Mursi (and presumably Kara) women is the coexistence of these many different styles, including a “touristic” style. (LaTosky 2010: 213)

While not all Mursi would agree that “dressing up” for tourists is an effective way for women and girls to assert their rights against the government, since what is at stake is the reinforcement of Mursi stereotypes which label the Mursi as “backwards” and “aggressive,” women's stories about exotic imagery of themselves nonetheless point to a major concern for Mursi women today: the freedom to proudly display their bodies, either with or without lip-plates.²⁸

To stretch or not to stretch one's lip

In Mursi, lip-plates are rhetorically praised as a symbol of strength, beauty, and womanliness. When describing the conventions of courtly advances, for example, Mursi woman will playfully discuss the subordinate position that men find themselves when courting girls, especially ones with brass bracelets (*lalanga*) and lip-plates (*dhebinya tugoyin*), since such “mature girls” (*bansanaanya*, sing. *bansaanai*) are said to have the power to grant or deny their suitors' requests. Lip-plates

28 Once a woman is married and has children she seldom wears her pottery lip-plate. If a woman becomes a widow, she will no longer wear her lip-plate (LaTosky 2006).

are more frequently worn by unmarried girls and newlywed women than by older married women with children. They are generally worn on three main occasions: when serving men food; when milking cows, and during important ritual events (such as weddings, *dônga* competitions, dances, etc.). Unmarried girls, especially those with large labrets, might wear them whenever they are in public (e.g. when fetching water or visiting friends). New brides will live with their in-laws (or in some cases will remain with their mothers) during their first year of marriage or until the lip has fully healed before sharing a cowhide [i.e. sleeping together] with her husband. It is expected that a boyfriend or husband will not sleep together with his girlfriend or his bride until her lip has fully healed. However, today, more and more men sleep with their girlfriends or brides even before they have pierced their lips. The lip-plate not only symbolizes beauty, it is also a commitment to one's husband and is worn with great pride when serving one's husband food. If the husband dies, the lip-plate is removed since a woman's external beauty is said to fade after his death.

When my husband died, I threw my *sarnyogi* (leather cord fastened to the women's front skirt) into the fire. I threw my lip-plate into the bushes and removed all of my [arm and ankle] bracelets. If you are [a widow] like this [holding her bare arms in front of her], you are eternally bare (*gidhangi dhog*);²⁹ you are no longer beautiful. (Interview with Bikalumi Sabakoro, unpublished fieldnotes, Mako, April 12, 2009)

The choice of girls and women to continue or abandon the practice remains a contested issue. Some people, particularly men, feel that a stretched lip without a lip-plate is meaningless and even inappropriate. During a workshop on "Mursi Youth Perspectives on Change" held at the South Omo Research Centre in 2008, several young men commented that girls should not continue the practice if they cannot live up to its specific aesthetic intention. One young man even expressed disgust at the thought of a woman's drool dripping into the flour that she is grinding for the porridge that he will eat. Similar comments are made by senior men as well:

It was better when they pierced their lips in the past. They would wear the clay [lip-plate] forever... They always served their husband with it. The clay [*dhebi*] was only removed if the husband died. Now they get married and the women just stop [wearing them]. Even the girls will pierce their lips and after two days they will just stop like that. Now the drool comes and comes and we don't like this. The women didn't drool like this in the past because they always wore their big beautiful lip-plates. I told [my daugh-

29 This is similar to the practices of widows in Bodi (see Buffavand 2008: 79).

ter] Luke to just leave it. Now they just let their lips dangle like that. I don't know why that is. (Recorded conversation with Kirinomeri Tokô, Mako, April 17, 2009)

To what extent the size and shape, as well as the specific aesthetic intentions, have changed over time is linked to both internal and external cultural pressures. For example, more recently, people have begun to talk about two broad categories of lip-plates: 'lip-plates for tourists' (*dhebinya turusinyawng*)³⁰ and 'real Mursi lip-plates' (*dhebinya Muniiny*) worn by girls and women. While tourism has created a demand for lip-plates, thus changing the aesthetic look of them, other outsiders are said to have a more negative impact. As one Mursi man explains:

In my opinion it's the [Ethiopian] Christians who tell girls not to pierce their lips. The Highlanders dislike our custom. They tell us to wear clothes, to not kill animals for skins, and some even say that the government will throw us in jail if we keep piercing our lips. I don't know if this is true. This is our custom; these are the ways of our ancestors. I want my daughter to pierce her ears and lip, but if she is afraid of the pain I will tell her to leave it. (Conversation with Olisiowa, Belamer, April 14, 2009)

Although it is still too early to determine the extent to which external pressures are influencing the ritual practice of wearing lip-plates, especially given the fact that outsiders working with the Mursi tend to vary in their support of traditional practices, education appears to be having the greatest impact. Evidence of this is found in the increasing number of school girls in Arba Minch, Jinka, and Mako who are choosing not to pierce their lips.³¹

Lip-plates: harmful traditional practice or paternalistic prohibition?

The concept of harmful cultural/traditional practices originates from UN concerns to identify and eliminate forms of harm to women and children that do not easily fit into a human rights framework (UN 1995). In Article 2 of the *UN Declaration on the elimination of violence against women* it is stated that:

30 These are alternatively referred to as '*dhebinya katalcha turrussi*' (literally, 'lip-plates tourists buy').

31 Within the first years of going to school, many Mursi girls are now replicating hairstyles and dress similar to highlanders and foreigners. This includes not piercing and stretching one's bottom lip. They are using these new style markers to not only distinguish themselves from their peers, but to ask for acceptance by outsiders.

Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

(a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation [...] (UN 1993)

Harmful cultural or traditional practices in UN terms are identified as: being harmful to the health of women and girls; arising from the material power differences between the sexes; being for the benefit of men; creating stereotyped masculinity and femininity which damage the opportunities of women and girls; being justified as tradition (Jeffreys 2005).³² However, many of the so-called “harmful” practices, like wearing lip-plates, are only contingently connected to the interests and lived experiences of women. For instance, claims that lip-plates mark women as subordinate (see especially Russell 2010 on Suri women) remain unsubstantiated.³³

In southern Ethiopia, a relatively new priority for state and non-state parties is the management of women’s bodies through education and public health. Mursi women’s bodies have become a primary target in the takeover of culturally entrenched practices. Stories that mark women’s experiences of the violation and loss of bodily integrity have to do with the progressive re-emergence of so-called “harmful traditional practices.” Although Mursi women do not label them as such, the perception that their freedom to continue to choose to wear lip-plates is being severely compromised is indicated in conversations, like the one below between two senior Mursi women and a schoolgirl named Mabirroiyn:

Laikurri: The school girls come and tell stories. The *mengisi* (government) says that if the girls continue to pierce their lips they will be thrown in jail.

32 One common critique of the UN definition is that there is no recognition of practices that fit people into gender stereotyped categories in the west, such as genital cutting, labiaplasty, gender reassignment, as something harmful (see especially Jeffreys 2005, Wynter et al. 2002).

33 In a recent announcement for an international seminar on “Harmful Practices and Human Rights,” organized by The International Institute for the Rights of the Child (IDE), lip-plates are included as an example of a harmful traditional practice (HTP). In the announcement it is stated that: “there are many forms of HTPs in the world, and a high prevalence of certain forms. We can mention: female genital mutilations (FGM), early or child marriages, forced marriages, honor killings, children’s witchcraft, scarification, infants giraffes, lip plates, force-feeding [...]” see http://www.childsrightrights.org/html/documents/formations/sem2010_Programme_E.pdf, accessed August 14, 2011.

Mabirroiyn: Yes, the woman who does the piercing and the girl with a fresh wound will be thrown in jail. That's what the *mengisi* say. Those who already have lip-plates will not [be imprisoned], only those with a fresh wound.

Shauna: Is this true?

Girrai: We don't know if it is true or not. If it is true, let them come and find us. I will tell them that these are the ways of our ancestors. I will tell them that the lip-plate is very powerful! (Interview with Laikurri Dorowa, Mabirroiyn Oliholi, and Girrai Dorowa, Mako, September 19, 2008)

The survey on harmful traditional practices was commissioned in 1987 by the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC). In 1997, the National Committee on Traditional Practices in Ethiopia (NCTPE) conducted a national baseline survey to assess the prevalence of all harmful traditional practices (Spadacini/Nichols 1998: 50). This survey has since been adopted by various government institutions such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Within the Sala-Mago *woreda*, an administrative district which includes Mursi, Dime, Bodi, and Konso resettled in Bodi territory, the list of traditional harmful practices includes: abduction into marriage, seclusion of mothers after childbirth, cutting of women's lips (Mursi and Bodi), and cutting a woman's stomach if a child is born breach.³⁴ Although government campaigns to eliminate harmful traditional practices have been in place since the 1970s, only recently have renewed attempts been made to enforce such programs.

As I have indicated above, the lip-plate has come under sharp scrutiny as a symbol of female disfigurement, oppression, and even poor health. It is important to emphasize that efforts to eliminate such "harmful" practices in Mursi (as well as Bodi and Suri) are also supported by non-government organizations currently working in southern Ethiopia. As one spokesperson for the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF), explains, changing Mursi attitudes about lip-plates has been an important achievement:

In the neighbouring Moyzo village, AMREF has catalysed a process to get the conservative Mursi community to stop the cultural practice of lip lengthening. Women in the community traditionally have their lower incisors removed and lower lips pierced and stretched until they are hanging way below their chins, putting them at risk of infection and denying them the use of their lower lips. At a meeting organised by AMREF and the

34 It is unclear which traditional practices are being targeted and why. The latter is especially puzzling since caesarian sections are not performed locally in Mursi.

Department of Women's Affairs in June this year, community leaders agreed to stop lip piercing but insisted that they would continue to pull out the incisors as it was the only way they could feed sick people who were unable to eat.

'Getting them to agree to change the practice was a very big accomplishment. It takes time to change attitude and behaviour, particularly if [it] has to do with culture. But we always listen to the community – so that decisions are made based on their needs and priorities,' says Ibrahim.³⁵

AMREF's claim that women's lip-plates are a threat to women's health because they put them at risk of infection and deny them the use of their lower lips is similar to claims that they are an "imposed disability" that impair women's speech or their ability to eat properly. However, since lip-plates are something that girls have the liberty to choose for themselves, such claims run the risk of denying women agency over their own bodies, and ignoring Mursi knowledge of traditional medicine and treatments used to prevent the infections of wounds. This also appears to contradict one of AMREF's goals in South Omo, which is "to examine the possibility of using traditional healing techniques alongside modern treatment methods."³⁶ Here the medical gaze clashes with women's experiences: not only is the lip-plate taken out to eat, drink, and talk (though all three are still possible while wearing a lip-plate), lip and earlobe infections are treated using local remedies.

The constant care with which Mursi women treat infected wounds is rhetorically articulated by Mursi women as revealing a girl's commitment and courage to follow through with her choice to become a *bansanai*. One can frequently observe women and girls carefully applying *lômmai*, a plant-based substance that when made into a white paste is used to heal wounds or applied to a chapped or freshly pierced bottom lip or earlobe.³⁷ Since a fully healed bottom lip and fully stretched earlobes embody a sense of beauty and womanliness, women and girls take great care to ensure that both remain healthy and intact. The claim, then, that lip-plates are harmful to women's health suggests that few efforts have been made to bring Mursi women together to share and extend their understanding of the healing methods involved and what it means to wear a lip-plate. Furthermore, at a time when lip and especially ear labrets are becoming an ordinary component of beauty in the west, arguments that depict the lip-plates of Mursi women as posing a risk

35 See <http://www.amref.org/personal-stories/bettys-story/> (accessed May 19, 2014).

36 See <http://www.amref.org/what-we-do/south-omo-pastoralist-health-programme-ethiopia/>.

37 The *lômmai* tree (*Ximenia americana* L., Olacaceae) is also used to treat the feet of animals with foot and mouth disease (called *baga* in Mursi; Turton 1995: 24).

of self-harm, expose the arbitrariness and thus inadequacy of constructing Mursi women's rights within a space of harmful cultural/traditional practices.³⁸

While the public discourse in Mursi would have us believe that the pressure for women to have lip-plates comes from men and that piercing and stretching a Mursi girl's bottom lip at puberty marks her as subordinate, my research shows that lip-plates are considered to be a personal choice, as well as, a material and social resource that can earn women social respectability, self-esteem, and the right to move confidently and freely within their own environment (LaTosky 2010). This is not to say that women with lip-plates necessarily have wealthier husbands or healthier cattle – just as “rhetoric does not always succeed” (Carrithers 2009: 7) – but that in the grounded experiences and social practices of the Mursi, strength is commonly expressed as bringing social and material advantages (LaTosky 2010: 171).

Considered an important part of female identity, a Mursi girl who chooses to endure the painful procedure of stretching her lip is believed to be “doing the right thing.” This is not because of the glorification of bodily pain, but because of the social consequences that such physically and emotionally demanding practices can have. A fully stretched lip means that a girl is competent, sexually mature, and can walk proudly when she enters her husband's cattle compound or serves his guests food. She will be admired by all for everything that it symbolizes: a sense of beauty, a good disposition, fertility, diligence, commitment, and virtuous behavior. Lip-plates, then, have a double force, for not only is a girl with a lip-plate considered brave and competent, but from the outset she is destined to marry a good man, since the lip-plate is a kind of guarantor of strength. Conceptually, strength is tightly bound with goodness, pride, and well-being.

Mursi women and men still admire the physical beauty and virtues of strength and competence associated with the lip-plate, despite external pressures to ban the practice. This is evident in the rhetorical prescription that a man should marry a woman with a lip-plate, as exemplified in the taunts that he will receive from his age-mates if he does not marry a girl with a lip-plate. Olilori Sabakoro explains his own experience of this:

My first wife did not have a lip-plate so my friends would tease me and this really upset my stomach. I always told you that I would eventually marry a girl with a lip-plate, and now I have. Her name is Ngatuaholi. She is tall and has a beautiful lip-plate out to here

38 Lip-piercing and stretching causes as much physical harm as body piercing and branding, yet such forms of body modification have become common place and socially acceptable in the west (Donohue 2000: 18).

[*stretching his arms in front of him as he would to indicate the shaped horns of a bull*].
Eeb, now my stomach is cool and my friends have stopped bothering me. (Conversation with Olilori Sabakoro, unpublished fieldnotes, Mako, April 20, 2009)

Although today many Mursi girls, especially schoolgirls are experimenting with new looks, including growing out their hair or choosing not to wear lip-plates, it is also expected that when they finish school, they will go back to looking and behaving like Mursi. From my observations, however, it is unlikely that girls, especially those who attend residential schools outside of Mursiland, will continue with the practice of wearing lip-plates.

Concluding remarks

Today, Mursi women are represented as “the visual double of the ‘real thing’” through homogenized images constructed by mainstream media (Braidotti 2011: 204). These images not only send a message of spectacularization, which attests to the fact that consumers like to be seduced by exotic images, but of misrecognition of the current realities of Mursi women. The present paper has highlighted the need to consider women’s stories as a valuable strategy for communicating the realities concealed in the exotic imagery of Mursi women. Women’s testimonies can be used as a way to shed light on the “untruthful appearance” (Jin 2008: 147) of images that present themselves as a presumption of the primitive world.³⁹ By foregrounding Mursi women as narrators, rather than exotic commodities, we begin the process of recognizing and appreciating the shifting, contradictory, and lived experiences of Mursi women today.

One of the truths obfuscated by popular images is the extent to which women’s bodies are being controlled. A troubling example of this is found in campaigns in southern Ethiopia to eliminate so-called harmful traditional practice such as wearing lip-plates. As practices aimed at adorning, beautifying, and modifying women’s bodies become normalized in the west, and this includes everything from labretifry (i.e. wearing labrets) to labiaplasty (i.e. labial surgery), the elimination of lip-plates among the Mursi in southern Ethiopia remains ambiguous.⁴⁰ Nussbaum, however, provides a likely rationale for understanding why such unpopular habits such as

39 Pithouse and Mitchell (2007: 141–51) make a similar case for studying change through visual methodologies such as photographs. This involves, as I have begun to do here, looking at how the participants themselves engage with their own photographs.

40 The same also applies among Suri women who wear lip-plates, and Bodi women, who wear lip-plugs.

lip-plates are being singled out as posing a risk of self-harm, namely, disgust and shame (Nussbaum 2004: 339; see also LaTosky 2006). As Nussbaum explains, “there are types of ‘self-harm’ that are only called that because of phobic reactions based on disgust and shame” and that “without the backing of such emotions the claim of harm falls to the ground” (2004: 338).

The elimination of harmful traditional practices in southern Ethiopia, especially the lip-plates worn by Mursi women, appears to be more of a paternalistic prohibition than an example of gender justice and equality. To pursue this argument would obviously take us well beyond the limited space of this paper.⁴¹ For now, I only suggest that evidence of this can be found in women’s own narratives of bodily rhetoric, that is, the persuasive ways in which women display their bodies to different audiences and for different reasons. Women’s stories express the significance that Mursi women attribute to their own bodies and a new awareness of shame for some who continue to pierce and stretch their bottom lips or wear animal skins. Their stories also help to show that women’s own perceptions of risk and bodily harm have little to do with fears of becoming a commodity and more with women being made hostage to universal rights-based discourse that does not include the lived experiences of Mursi women.

While it makes sense that some Mursi women are hopeful that the global scope and range of their spectacular images in the international media might help to safeguard their rights, the reality is that most of what is found in the mass media does little to recognize and express Mursi women’s ideas of a life with human dignity, mutual respect, and the freedom to display one’s body, with or without a lip-plate. One of the practical implications of this paper thus lies in my suggestion to look more carefully at the mechanisms by which the Ethiopian state, non-state organizations, and individuals impose their will on the bodies of Mursi women and how Mursi women are experiencing and in some cases resisting such impositions.

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41 For relevant discussions of disgust and shame as bases of discrimination against Mursi see LaTosky (2006, 2010).

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Metaphors of the Moguji: self-defining othering in Kara political speech

FELIX GIRKE¹

Stereotypes and images are not immaterial mental constructs or ephemeral discursive elements, but social instruments used in discursive contestations. To illustrate this, my text revolves around a specific event, throughout which strong symbolic images were invoked, notably by members of two ethnic categories about members of a third one.² The objects of this joint imagination were allowed neither to object to this vivid othering, nor were they granted the right to use any images they might have held of the other two, and I draw out the underlying conditions which allow such lopsided relationships to emerge and be sustained. ‘Images of self and other’ which we encounter in the world, are hardly innocent, superficial judgments, or that common bugbear, ‘mere rhetoric,’ or ‘only discourse’ – often, they are direct functions of systems of domination and subordination, and as such warrant our full ethnographic and analytical attention. As ‘group relations’ are not as such accessible to our observation, one cannot afford to *not* assess what work images are made to do in observable interaction, especially as they shape and naturalize power relationships (see Meyer 2008: 152 for the methodological argument). With this, I now briefly introduce the Kara, their country and their neighbors, as some such context is necessary for the material I present in the main part of this text.

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- 1 I want to thank Judith Beyer, Susanne Epple, Serge Tornay, and David Turton for their comments on draft versions of this text. I gratefully acknowledge that fieldwork in Kara was financed first by the SFB 295 (University of Mainz, see the Introduction and afterword to this volume), later by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale (Dept. 1, Integration and Conflict).
 - 2 As will become more clear in later parts of the text, in the analysis of interethnic dynamics in southern Ethiopia I distinguish between ethnic categories and ethnic groups, the first referring to a cognitive model of “kinds of people” (see Brubaker et al. 2002 for an extended discussion), and the second referring to tribal political organization. This differentiation is more fully explored, both conceptually and empirically, in my PhD thesis (Girke 2008b).

Kara, Moguji and Nyangatom

The villages of the Kara are found along a stretch of the lower Omo River which runs nearly straight from North to South. The three large settlements (Labuk, Dus, and Korcho) and a number of small ones are all located close to the river, as cultivation of sorghum on its banks provides the basis of the Kara's livelihood. Today, the largely agriculturalist Kara only live on the eastern shore; constant warfare and encroachment by their western neighbors, the Nyangatom, led them to abandon the settlements they had on the other bank. Still, whenever conditions are sufficiently peaceful, they try and cultivate their riverbank farms on both sides, able to produce a year's supply of sorghum in about five months of labor.

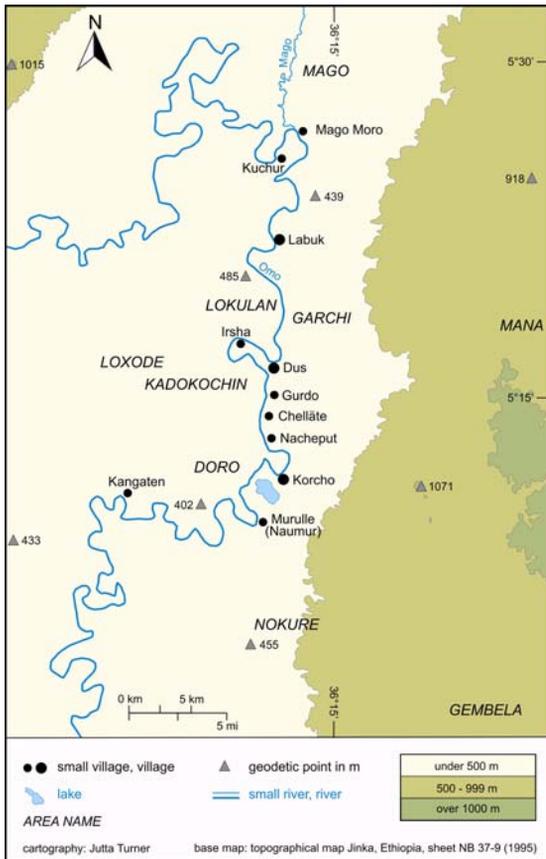


Fig. 1:
A map of Kara settlements

When I use just the term ‘Kara’ here, I use it generically, as a reference to all the people who live in Kara country and who are acknowledged as belonging there. Such acknowledgement is easily assessable, because there are only around 1,500 Kara, who have rather full knowledge of one another. Among these, upon closer inspection of kinship, ritual rules, and narratives of origins, one finds a surprisingly large number of social categories which can usefully be called ethnic: first and foremost, ritually as well as numerically, there are the ‘true Kara,’ whose ancestors probably reached the Omo Valley early in the nineteenth century. They are the major land-owners, and generally dominate politically. While they never act as wife-givers for men not categorized as ‘true Kara,’ true Kara men are strikingly eligible to marry women from the other ethnic categories. They often do so, at least as second or third wives, and mostly from the other ethnic categories which are also counted among the Kara: the Bogudo, the Gomba, and the Nyangatom-Kara. While this practice has been in decline in recent years, many ‘true’ Kara men even marry women from neighboring, politically separate groups – but never from the Moguji, who also live with the other ethnic categories as part of one larger Kara polity. Even casual sexual contact is proscribed, and multiple other restrictions on interaction (such as commensality, joint tool/object use, etc.) serve to reinforce the basic principle that while “we are all Kara,” as is sometimes proclaimed in political speech, the Moguji are the one ethnic category within Kara which always – while partly co-residential – stands a bit apart, and well below. Arguably, the position of the Moguji in the totality which is Kara is largely defined by their relationship to the ‘true’ Kara (rather than the Gomba and Bogudo) and vice versa, so in the following I will exclude the other ethnic categories of the population from the debate: in most cases, they tacitly follow the ‘true’ Kara’s lead. It needs to be pointed out that there is no native word which references the category ‘true Kara’: this denomination is mine, and it serves to underline that the polity Kara (often called Karo by outsiders) is made up of people of a number of ethnic categories, under the clear but rarely explicitly voiced control of the true Kara. Some Kara, it turns out, are more equal than others.

In oral tradition, the histories of true Kara and Moguji, however, are inextricably entwined. As I present a comprehensive analysis elsewhere (Girke 2008b), a condensed version must suffice here. Its cornerstones are the following: the arrival story of the true Kara (who were ‘late-comers’ to the Lower Omo, compare Kopytoff 1989) and their subsequent occupation of all available farmland, the discursive quotidian othering of the Moguji by the Kara, and the recent political events of what I call the ‘schism,’ as well as the administrative reorganization of the region.

I will address each in turn, as these aspects of the (true) Kara-Moguji relation always refer to one another.

The true Kara reached the Omo Valley from the hill ranges to the East, as the (with some certainty untrue) story goes (see Girke 2008b). Following a truant bull, they found the river – and not only that, they (seeing with their agriculturalist’s eye) found that the fertile riverbanks were completely unused. In fact, the people they met there, who called themselves the Moguji, neither knew what fields were, nor were they familiar with domesticated cattle!³ Note that this narrative very fundamentally establishes that the late-comers, the true Kara, were cultivators reaching an uncultivated area, which was not appropriately used by the Moguji. The latter were only interested in gathering fish from the river, but neither bred animals nor farmed the land. This again is largely in tune with how Kopytoff (1989: 25ff) describes a typical story with which the occupation of an area is justified in the African context. The story ends, in most tellings, with the true Kara requesting the Moguji to assist them in staking out claims, as each Kara took possession of a given stretch of the riverbank. This ritual act, which was supposedly still carried out within living memory whenever there was a disagreement between true Kara as to the exact boundaries of their plots, highlights the ancestral connection of the Moguji to the land. At the same time, by turning them into numinous arbiters of land disputes, it removes them from the competition itself (compare Bailey 1978): while true Kara, Bogudo, and Gomba all can own land plots, the Moguji were forced into clientelist positions if they wanted to secure their livelihood. Of course, despite Kara (and sometimes Moguji) claims, the Moguji are no mere fishermen/apiculturalist/hunters and gatherers, who would technically not really ‘need’ fields, but do cultivate sorghum themselves, wherever they can get access to a riverbank plot or some inundated flats further inland (compare Matsuda 1996).

Still, the image of the Moguji as the non-cultivators (neither herders nor farmers), as non-productive people who just lived off the land without transforming it, sticks until today. Their relation to the true Kara is in many ways comparable to the relation between Kwegu and Mursi (see Turton 2002) or Kenyan (agro-)pastoralists and the variously denominated Dorobo groups (see Cronk 1989; Galaty 1979, 1982) the Moguji are the Kara’s “mirror in the forest” (Kenny 1981). This

3 The story of this migration, and the leaving-behind of the Bashada it involves (compare Epple 2010), is not central for the purposes of this chapter. In fact, while a full telling of the narrative would include it, due to the current political circumstances in Kara, no great emphasis is laid on the “travel” part – all narrative attention instead focuses on the arrival in the valley. David Turton (personal correspondence) notes that the Mursi also hold that they followed some bulls to the river, but in fact claim that they learned agriculture on the floodbanks from the Kwegu, a population similar to the Moguji. This shift accords with the Mursi’s stronger pastoralist ideology.

is particularly marked by the way in which they are talked about by the Kara, talk often heavy with metaphors. These largely evoke alleged (and often narratively perpetuated) aspects of their lives which are (in the symbolic universe of the Lower Omo) rather uncouth, unwholesome, and generally more appropriate for animals of the forest than for human beings. These metaphorical constructions mostly concern livelihood (they eat fish, compare Almagor 1997), ways of procreation (they have hardly any birth-related rituals), and (inter-)personal conduct (they are loud and violent), and in each case insinuate insufficient sophistication and the lack of any signs that the Moguji attempt to better their lot.

Take note that Kenny's metaphor of the mirror is to be taken quite literally – the Moguji provide a contrast which brings out in sharp relief the value the true Kara place on their own way of life. To talk about them as uncultivated and non-cultivating inhabitants of the forest, sharing more features with animals than with human beings, while simultaneously refusing commensality and sexual relations with them, goes a long way towards establishing an unimpeachable moral and ritual superiority. This is then adduced as the fitting legitimization for the Kara's mythical take-over of the riverbanks. This again accords well with the model proposed by Kopytoff (1989: 27). Still, the metaphORIZATION of the Moguji as 'animal-like' does not preclude amicable interpersonal relationships. Kara and Moguji live and farm side by side, and are age-mates, hunting friends, and members in the same clans.⁴ Most social practices and rituals of the true Kara that the Moguji are excluded from are also barred to the other local ethnic categories.

With an eye on terminology, I would suggest that the Moguji can be said to have been dominated by the true Kara, in that the Kara have been able to exploit the labor of the Moguji (who had no farmland of their own) and maintain unidirectional patron-client relationships over decades, and to impose a definition of the situation which justifies their control over the means of production, i.e. the fertile riverbanks and livestock. The Moguji also used to perform a number of negatively valued ritual services for the Kara, which all served to cement their position as a group which was removed from political contest (see Turton 2002 for the assessment of a comparable situation in a nearby place). As far as I can tell, these rituals have fallen entirely by the wayside in the latter half of the twentieth century.

In the early 1990s, though, this apparently rather stable situation was disrupted by a series of events which I call 'the schism.' Tensions arose between the

4 Clanship, here, is obviously not based on joint descent only. While the specifics remain unclear, I assume that at some point in the past Moguji were inducted into their respective true Kara patrons' clans. Kara clans – unlike among many of their neighbors – do not commonly trace their origin back to a neighboring group either.

Kara and the Moguji, and some cases of violence between members of these two categories occurred. Many Moguji, spectacularly outnumbered in Kara country proper, moved away – either northwards, to the Moguji settlement at Kuchur (see fig. 1), or straight across the river towards the Nyangatom, where Kara rarely ventured in these days.

It is still difficult to trace the exact reasons or triggers for what occurred. It was the Japanese researcher Matsuda who first wrote about the schism (1994, 2002) from the perspective of the Moguji. He explained it in terms of the larger picture on the Lower Omo, that is, by pointing to shifts in the balance of power. After the Nyangatom were the first group to acquire automatic weapons, and after their display of their newfound power by massacring around 600 Mursi in one horrible raid,⁵ it fell to all the neighboring groups to show that they were still capable of action. This development, according to Matsuda, offered a new option for allegiance to the Moguji, to escape from the increasingly felt “annexation” (by the Kara) and instead submit themselves to a seemingly more egalitarian “assimilation” (by the Nyangatom). In Matsuda’s analysis, this shift seems motivated by growing frustration on the side of the Moguji, who in a sense politicized their position: allying themselves with the Nyangatom, they became contenders for the resources of the Omo Valley. Whether their relationship with the Nyangatom would indeed turn out more egalitarian in that sense was beside the point: just to break with the Kara was already a powerful assertion of their agency, one of the first decisions ‘the Moguji’ had taken in a long time. Among the Kara, they had been too dispersed and too individually attached to their respective Kara patrons to act much in a corporate way. In a manner of speaking, only by removing themselves from co-residence with the (other) Kara could a number of people categorized as Moguji become ‘the Moguji,’ as a collectivity endowed with agency. Indeed, it is one of the features of the way the true Kara dominate the territorial-political group that they deny that the different ethnic categories had any but ritual significance. That is, to ignore the taboos which separate them is less rendered in moral terms than in terms of prudence – if one ate together, one would surely fall ill. The status quo, in this claim, is beneficial for all, and any provocations and challenges of it are dangerous subversions.

5 See Turton (1994) for an account of the events, and (2003) for his struggle with this for South Omo unprecedented act of violence. But he also indicates that in the struggles between Mursi and Aari, the acquisition of automatic rifles by the Mursi did not lead to higher casualties among the Aari. Similarly, I can report from the Kara-Nyangatom warfare that automatic rifles on both sides seem to discourage people from open battles, and from attempts to slaughter entire villages, which had been done in the 1970s with little more than spears, knives, and ancient bolt-action rifles.

The schism, then, is a manifestation of the Moguji as a seeming whole managing to challenge this fundamental claim, this ‘basic lie’ (see Bailey 2003) of the Kara. Whether strategically (as Matsuda claims) or through a contingent conjunction of circumstances, many of them defied the true Kara, in the process weakening formerly defining ritual practices, in that the services they provided to the true Kara fell by the wayside. This process found a culmination in the early 1990s (Matsuda 2002: 173, 182) with the establishment of a *kebele* for Kuchur, a small administrative unit which was first a section of the Kuraz *woreda* (a district, here comprising Nyangatom and Dassanech), and since 2006 a section of the Nyangatom *woreda* when the older district was administratively divided.

Up until today, this incident is troubling for the true Kara. Especially being entangled in violent conflicts with the Nyangatom over the last few years, the position of the Moguji – many of whom know Kara country intimately, and could very easily act as spies and infiltrators – is a recurrent topic of concern when war rears its ugly head.

However, despite their numerical inferiority, the Kara have been able to by and large hold their own against the Nyangatom, and – since 2003 at least – have actually inflicted more casualties on them than vice versa. On both sides, though, people would much rather live in peace: many Kara elders grew up on the other side of the Omo River, speak fluent Nyangatom, and cultivate an extreme fondness for Nyangatom culture. When Kara and Nyangatom managed to meet in peace, the mutual cordiality always seemed to me much more pronounced than in Kara’s interaction with members of yet other ethnic groups. Matsuda saw the Moguji exploiting the rift between Kara and Nyangatom – so where does this leave the Moguji once Kara and Nyangatom reconcile? In the terms of this volume, what impact do the actions of the Moguji have on the image of them held and propagated by Kara and/or Nyangatom? This question is the focus of the rest of this paper. I will answer it by exemplar, certainly neither exhaustively nor with any claim to permanent validity, but in a way which still shows the structural predicament of the Moguji, and how imagery enables, manifests, and aggravates othering and domination.

Blaming the third: a meeting in southern Kara

On October 2, 2006, I attended a meeting (a so-called *osh*, see Strecker 1976 for a discussion of such speech events in Hamar), as the Kara from Korcho were host-

ing a group of Nyangatom of the Ngikumama section.⁶ This was a short while after Kara and Nyangatom had performed a peace ritual at Kibbish in Nyangatom territory (see Girke 2008a), where they had formally laid to rest the “spear” (i.e. war) which had troubled them for nearly a year. This day’s occasion now was a display of rapprochement, and a demonstration of mutual good will. A goat was slaughtered, the elders sat down behind a long sickle-shape of leafy branches on which the dripping hunks of meat were laid out, and a number of spokesmen from either side got up in turn, cursed war and illness, called forth rain and fertility, and proceeded to discuss the current situation of the land.

As the very jovial *osh* went on, one topic came to dominate the discussion: a specific Moguji man had started operating as a trader between the two groups, commuting between Korcho and an area known as Doro on the other side of the Omo River. When war broke out, Kara who were seeking ammunition were too afraid to cross the river, so the trader took their money and *arake* liquor, and used this to buy bullets for them in Nyangatom. He, as a Moguji whom people knew well, could freely cross between the front lines. It turned out that he had made a very good cut from his activities: he was able to purchase two rifles from his gains over one year, which was decried as excessive profit for such brokerage. This, then, was framed as typical Moguji behavior, and all around condemned, as one speaker after the next added their comments to the layers of oratory.

While addressing this case, before a mixed audience of Kara, Nyangatom, and some Moguji even, the metaphorical constructions linking Moguji to birds and hyenas, two symbolically problematic animals, as they are destroyers of crops and flocks respectively, were resoundingly prominent.

This sounds not surprising at first, as I have discussed earlier how Moguji are often likened to animals. However, I suggest that the metaphors encountered in the speeches transcribed below reflect the political relations between true Kara and the renegade Moguji ever since the schism, and are accordingly temporally restricted, explicitly situational and political. They found their occasion in a very specific place, at a very specific time, as will become clear when following the transcript below. This metaphor, then, is not to be hastily conflated with the ritual metaphor ‘Moguji are animals’ presented above, which is used to legitimate the Kara’s con-

6 The Kara call them “Kumama.” Of all the Nyangatom sections, this is the one which was described to me as most conciliatory and close by the Kara (see Tornay 1979: 100). The section is relatively small, and has been reticent in joining others in their attempts to besiege Kara land. Significantly, the Kumama are the peace-makers on the side of the Nyangatom when it comes to the Kara, the ones to perform the rituals which ceremonially end a state of war. Having riverbank fields of their own, they are probably also less motivated to displace the Kara.

quest of the Omo Valley, even though the source domain draws on animals in both cases. Consider the following sequential excerpts, taken from the *osb* on the hilltop of Korcho. I provide some explanatory notes in between the transcripts:⁷

Nyangatom elder 1:

1	Now you, Kara, you and I are the same.
2	Loxorio, and Lammah, I have heard from Loxorio that we are one village.
3	In this village, there should be no bad talk.
4	You Nyangatom boys, that bad talk, have you heard it? That bad talk from over there, I don't like it.

Notes:

In 1, the word “Kara” was used in the specific singular (i.e. *karta* in Kara language). It is common to refer to social categories in this form, emphasizing the unity of interest, the agency and accountability of the group, and the ontological identity of its members.

In 2, Loxorio is the *bitti*, the ritual leader of Labuk (the northern part of Kara). Due to their own ritual power, the Kumama are described as being related to the Kara *bitti*. Lammah was a very famous Kara elder, renowned for his exemplarily skillful and morally upright handling of affairs, both internal and external.⁸

In 2 and 3, “village,” *moro*, also stands for a patriline, indicating a claim of kinship and intimacy.

Kara elder 1:

5	We have opened up a new road: Ekiri, one, Bonko, two, Lecheria, three. We have given them canoes.
6	At Kolua, they will pick up the people, and help them exchange their goods.
7	Those three shall watch over the goods, and thus they shall not disappear.
8	And our wealth will return to us.

7 Except for the last speech by “Kara elder 2,” all speeches at the Korcho *osb* which I present here were made in the Nyangatom language, which I do not understand. In March 2008, I invited Kara friends to the South Omo Museum and Research Center (SORC) in the zonal capital Jinka to listen to the recordings, help me in translating from the Nyangatom, and discuss with me the context of the speeches. Thus, the excerpts presented here have been translated twice, from Nyangatom to Kara to English. The linguistic competence of the Kara involved is unassailable.

8 Serge Tornay has confirmed in personal communication that the ritual status of the Ngikumama (whom the Kara call Kumama) is significant: they are likely “foreigners” within Nyangatom, an “offshoot of the Kumam of Uganda,” and provide essential services also within the generation-set transition process.

9	This practice of asking for a profit in facilitating trade, I have refused it.
10	The Nyangatom shall go all the way to Korcho, ...
11	... also the Kara, when he says, I want to go to Doro, he shall go, no-one will rob him of his goods.
12	You Moguji, this bad talk, you, between the Kara and the Nyangatom, what sort of place are you in?
13	Are you Nyangatom, are you Kara? I and the Nyangatom, when we have fought, ...
14	... we reconcile, stab each other's goats, and wash our hands clean of the bad talk.
15	Have you heard how we washed our hands recently in Kibbish?
16	Even if we have spilled blood, we wash our hands later.
17	You Moguji, this gossip, this bad talk, where is your father?
18	My father, once, he bought fields with his gun, with cattle, with goats.
19	Where is your bondfriend, Moguji?
20	For what do you start this bad talk? The bad talk had been washed away.
21	I can handle my fields, my father's gun-fields, my father's goat-fields.
22	Are you also people? You are birds! You sit on trees! Where do you come from?
23	You used to be Kara. I – look at me, I am in my father's land.
24	The bad talk, it shall meet me in my land.
25	Are you also people? You are birds, sitting in trees. With you I don't discuss.
26	The discussion of before, is it not in your belly?
27	Slowly, after this meeting, you need to understand our debate.
28	What has made you drunk?
29	If there is talk from you, leave us and the Nyangatom alone when we are together.
30	If you have anything to discuss, discuss it with me.
31	You are dirt. I don't consider you.
32	Was your house there before, was there your field?
33	Did you raise goats, cattle, buy a gun, did you erect a house, a grain store, did you lay out a hide?
34	This is me, look.
35	Now, you have refused me, and even more, there you didn't cultivate fields.
36	Now you are back, and again that bad talk surfaces.
37	Think of this, being between the Nyangatom and me. We have made peace.
38	But you, having poured back in between us, you rumor-mongers, you instigators!
39	Now from within the Nyangatom, a problem has come back. What is that? That is you.

Notes:

In 5, three men are named, a Nyangatom-Kara, a trusted Moguji elder from Kara, and a true Kara elder with very good relations to many Nyangatom. These had been selected by the Kara and given the task of ferrying people seeking to visit the other side across the Omo without asking for compensation.

In 6, “Kolua” is a site on the Omo River, different from the anchorage C. had used.

In 14, the speaker points out that Moguji have no specific rituals to make peace, as they do not act in war or peace as an autonomous group. The Kara have specific peace-making ritual procedures for each of the neighboring groups. As a rule, Moguji might join attacks when invited by other groups, but lack the ritual and numerical capacity to wage war on their own.

In 18 and 21, the fact that the Moguji own no fields, and cannot even acquire them, is used to disparage their way of life – a stance which, as Serge Tornay notes, echoes the “primitivist myths” which abound about the inhabitants of South Omo and which are most revoltingly peddled in coffee-table books (see Tornay 2009; compare LaTosky in this volume).

In 19, the question after the bondfriend, the *bel*, insinuates that Moguji have no bondfriends, no true friends who acknowledge them as autonomous equals, as the institution exists elsewhere (see Girke 2010). Rather, in this view from Kara, Moguji are seen as something like “natural clients.” Among the Nyangatom, bondfriends are called *lo-paakang* (also used for an inner-tribal friend). Serge Tornay reports that – identical to how the Kara would see it – Nyangatom owe their bondfriends protection and hospitality. “Even in an open fight between ‘enemies,’ if a warrior recognizes a bondfriend, or the son of a bondfriend of his father, he will protect that person from any injury” (personal communication).

In 22, a bird metaphor is first used: birds have no proper home, no place where they belong, no place which is their own.

In 23, the allusion is to the schism (see above); the accusation is that the Moguji have renounced both kinship (*āda*) and amity (*ādamo*).⁹

In 32–5, the reference is again to the schism, and the claim is that even having shifted loyalties, the Moguji had not been productive. Even worse, someone who does not cultivate is by necessity amoral, a thief.

In 33, the pointlessness of a non-productive existence is emphasized.

In 34, this sharp comment provides the counterpoint to 33, as it depicts the Kara as the ones who cultivate and better their lot.

9 These two terms are comprehensively discussed elsewhere (Girke 2008b).

Nyangatom elder 2:

40	Those traders, those who eat the goods of people.
41	Those who with their cleverness eat the goods of people, they shall die.
42	You Nyangatom, this one man, from there he eats the Kara, from here he eats the Nyangatom.
43	This man who eats people, do you stand for it? That is weakness.
44	He is alone, he eats there, he eats here, how dare he see a profit? Does he help me in my need?
45	This is something bad. It is good that this discussion was started.
46	That one, he is a hyena. It will go bad. If we chase him away, it will all turn good.
47	This is bad; to eat here and there, this is not right.
48	If this happens again, we now know it and it will go badly for him.
49	Those who eat from the trader's road, they shall stop.
50	Those others, who talk [other Nyangatom], some have eaten such profits before.
51	Those who ate through their cleverness, for free, they have all died.
52	That Moguji, he will also die, he will die. He who eats for free, will die.
53	Before, land was given to people.
54	Lokuta... Alko gave it to him, saying, 'eat.'
55	So to C., who has given this land to him?
56	Having grown up here, he is now close with me, the Kumama. I have now seen.
57	Now, I say, you Kara, leave him alone, I will track him.
58	T., before, X. and the elder brother of Y., ... T. is now Kapung.
59	They enter here, they enter there, and they enter there.
60	Now they are Kapung.

Notes:

In 40, the term "eat" (*itsa*) is first use. It stands for seeking (illicit) profit in general, but the resonance with carrion-eating and amoral gluttony is strong.

In 41 and 52, the curses issued are of consequence, since the spiritual power of the Ngikumama is said to be efficacious.

In 41, the use of *paxalmamo*, "cleverness," was one of the few times when I encountered it as a negative. Usually, cleverness is an extremely praiseworthy attribute.

In 42, the reference to indiscriminate carrion-consumption is powerful.

In 43, "weakness" was rendered as *malgintamo* in Kara, which is both incapacity of body and the opposite of cleverness, and often refers to deficits in decisiveness to boot.

In 44, "alone" indicates that traders such as C. do not respect the bonds of friendship or kinship.

In 46, the metaphor of “hyena,” the despised destroyer of small stock, and a carrion-eater, supplements the image of the birds which eat without sowing.

In 47, it is suggested that people like C. profit from others’ generosity, yet hold no loyalty either way.

In 51, “for free” was rendered as *simm* in Kara, indicating a lack of appropriate compensation or effort.

In 54, the reference is to the proper way of dealing with one another: a Kara invites a Nyangatom to use one of his fields for farming, and nobody encroaches on others’ property uninvited.

In 55, C. has not been “given land,” and yet he prospers; this is not proper.

In 58–60, the reference is to some Moguji who display considerable shiftiness, in that they even switch allegiances between the different Nyangatom sections, one of which is “Kapung.”

Nyangatom elder 1:

61	You Nyangatom, those Moguji, their way of being, is it good? You children, look at this talk!
62	I am the <i>bitti</i> of the land.
63	I alone fix the land. You, bring him back.
64	For me, his way of being is bad, the one who is called Moguji. What is he doing?
65	He has no one place, he enters here and there.
66	Not like this! I don’t like it.
67	At the place where the cattle come to drink, there shall be no bad talk.
68	Everything shall be as good as it used to be.
69	The Nyangatom, if he will, shall go seek his kin.
70	The Kara, alike.

Notes:

In 61 and 64, “way of being” was expressed as *denta* in Kara, as close a term for “life,” “existence” as the language has to offer, but also “livelihood.”

In 61–3, the speaker indicates that he would support efforts by “children,” i.e., young and active men, to see to it that activities such as C.’s would be stopped.

In 67, the “place where the cattle come to drink” is also the place where conversations between Kara and Nyangatom across the river are mostly held, and also where most sniper attacks take place; thus, a very important place which needs care and protection.

In 69, the term *äda* was used for “kin,” and indicates a bondfriend or another such intimate, interpersonal relation.

Kara elder 2:

71	Hey, Lo., and those others ... what do they do?
72	What's going on here?
73	How have they turned into eaters of the field?
74	Is there any food left?
75	<i>Dikka</i> .
76	Those Moguji, those from over there.
77	I will take hold of them, bind them, and beat them.
78	At the place where the cattle drink, the Moguji, those buying ones, they will waste your things!
79	He doesn't know! He has laid down the bullets to buy Birr, and doesn't know that the other is eating.
80	For what do they impoverish us?
81	This talk doesn't stop!
82	This guy with his <i>serkserk</i> hat, how can he lead the people here?
83	Those who finish us, it is they.
84	The Kara ask, what is this? Is there anything bad from the Kara now?
85	We hear at night the <i>pilpil</i> of this other guy on the other side, telling lies.

Notes:

In 71, “Lo.” refers to a Moguji elder who had left Kara in the past, and now had come with the visiting Nyangatom. He was also sitting among them during this speech.

In 75, *dikka* refers to people who have never eaten enough; the suggestion is that Moguji are greedy and without moderation.

In 77, the reference is to an event after the schism, when some Moguji wanted to return to Kara without acknowledging that they had initially transgressed. They were caught, bound and beaten, and only then allowed to settle in Kara again, which they promptly refused, instead returning to the Nyangatom for good. These are the same people who had been mentioned in 58–60.

In 79, the example is of a Nyangatom man who wants to “buy money” with his bullets, but does not know the exchange rate which the Moguji middle-man uses, and who is cheated as a consequence.

In 82 and 85, the speaker uses ideophones to issue some personal insults which had my Kara friends laughing out loud when re-listening to the recording: *serkserk* points to a particularly inept angle at which Lo. was wearing his hat, and *pilpil* mocks the chronic coughing of another well-known Moguji, here accused of rumor-mongering.

In 84, he claims that despite the gossip spread by Moguji, the Kara will keep the peace.

The meeting ended shortly hereafter – first, the elders moved into the shade, as the sun had been rising, and a bit later they, both Kara hosts and Nyangatom guests, dispersed into various households throughout Korcho.

These excerpts indicate the depth and convolutedness of the situation, as many old grievances are brought up, and one also notices the high degree of familiarity among the attendants, as everyone recognizes the names of individuals used, and everybody is assumed to ‘get’ the allusions to specific events. The blaming of the Moguji is explicit and direct, face-threatening even, especially considering that some Moguji elders were sitting there with the Kara and Nyangatom. Over the rest of my text, I want to discuss these speeches from three perspectives: 1) in regard to the metaphor “Moguji are birds and hyenas” which recurred throughout the meeting, 2) in regard to the greater political situation obtaining along the Lower Omo at the time, and 3) in regard to the question of images of self and other, as it is revealed here.

The metaphorical imagination

So what emerges from this discourse in the way of figuration? First and foremost, the denial of a proper home, a place and land of their own for the Moguji stands out. They are not likened to domestic animals, but they still congregate around human habitats. This is connected to the complaints of “eating here, eating there” – not only does the culprit “eat in two places,” but he also “eats the bodies” of the hosts, i.e., is parasitical and bent on destruction in both places. Also, in being present in both places, and not even that reliably (see the “Kapung” remark in 58 and 60), puts the Moguji in the situation where they can easily spread rumors and destabilize the relations – nobody on either side can falsify their claims. As the maligned trader C. exemplifies, in the understanding of Kara and Nyangatom, the Moguji profited from the mutual distrust, as they came to hold the monopoly on trade. Thus, they supplanted the ‘proper’ relations between households and individuals, who should be able to transact without a middleman who profits from their needs.

Beyond simply feeding off the misfortune of others (see Sapir 1977: 30 on vultures in metaphor), they cause it in the first place, not only by being instigators and middle-men, but by also being voracious and greedy, never being content with what they have received. This serves to evoke the behavior patterns of hyenas (see line 46), who are especially adept at slaughtering large numbers of sheep due to the panic response of the latter: they tend to stick together, whereas goats scatter. Having thus killed more sheep than they can eat, the hyenas will then hide the torn-up carcasses which they did not manage to devour. Put in terms of intentional behavior, they not only steal, but they also despoil the order of things seemingly out of spite.

The alleged tendency of the Moguji to act clandestinely was dwelled upon as well: like weak and cowardly animals they do not do their killing themselves, but feast on the carrion provided by others, on the carcasses of animals (i.e., other people) which they – and this is significant – could not have killed themselves.

Here, both hyena and birds were mentioned explicitly, where “birds” is an open term in metaphoric usage: vultures are evoked, but also the swarms of smaller birds which threaten to destroy the harvest along the riverbank every year. Neither of these two possible interpretations needs to be specified, as the term “birds” sustains both in parallel. They provide striking images: one through the vulture’s unwholesome livelihood and connection to death and malignancy, the other through the endless and pointless battles they occasion when people try to protect the fruits of the fields, the recognized basis of all Kara livelihood.¹⁰ While the word *kuutso*, ‘vulture,’ was not specifically spoken during the Korcho *osh*, the euphemistic use of generic term for specific species is common in Kara. I have heard the word used for Moguji on other occasions.¹¹

The speakers, then, both used literal metaphors, and through the cumulative impact of the imagery used they jointly construct a “conceptual metaphor” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003). What does this mean? Conceptual metaphors derive their power precisely from being not literal. Instead, they trigger thought processes on the part of the ‘victim,’ the one exposed to a metaphor, who basically takes over all the cognitive work of meaning inference and intention attribution from such a powerfully suggestive claims as that Moguji are (like) birds. We are “compelled [...] to consider each term in relationship to the other” (Sapir 1977: 9). The speakers, in turn, build up the conceptual metaphor by highlighting specific aspects of this image – having no home, eating without sowing, etc. This is a cumulative process, rhetorical *repetitio*, which works especially well since the underlying narratives are so familiar to the audience. Accordingly, from among the various forms the “work of metaphor” takes, I understand the use of tropological figuration here to be rather a “Proclamation of That” or a “Prescription of This” than a “Persuasion of You” (Crocker 1977: 38). Neither was the metaphor used during the meet-

10 Galaty’s discussion of “avian imagination” among the Maasai also brings up the interstitial position of birds between human (agropastoralist) society and the animal kingdom (1998: 229f).

11 Writing this, I am called back to my early days in Kara. Sitting in the village square one unidentifiable evening and chatting quietly, one age-mate asked me, “tell us, you have read many books, do you know where the vulture lives? We always see it, but we have never seen his house.” (‘Nest’ translates literally as ‘birdhouse.’) I dutifully replied that I assumed vultures lived in the mountains, in inaccessible places; that this bird ranged far and wide in its search for food. I was asked that same question a few months later, in a similar setting, and again the questioner was a young true Kara. Now, sitting behind my desk, I wonder whether I was the stooge who provided the correct answer to the ambiguous prompt provided by the questioner, namely, that “vultures” (Moguji) do not live in Kara land but only come there to feed. I cannot resolve this suspicion either way. I do not recall any Moguji being present, nor that either of these incidents took place in close temporal proximity to a debate on Moguji. Both might have been the case, but as I had not yet encountered the ‘Moguji are vultures’ metaphor, I was oblivious to possible tropic dynamics. This is the power of metaphoric allusion – it is difficult to pin down, and easy to deny.

ing in Korcho new to the audience, not Nyangatom, not Kara, not Moguji, nor was there any need to be circumspect – despite the fact that Moguji were present. No new meaning-interpretation was forced; the idiom of the unproductive, opportunistic, unsocial animal was simply recalled as a vivid image of the Moguji, one that reduced this other, who stood accused, to a few appropriate traits. This is what Fernandez calls a “performative metaphor,” which expresses the speaker’s feelings or to “declare his intentions vis-à-vis the subject” (1977: 104).

In summary, this principally familiar (but often dormant) trope was activated by connecting it to the recent political upheavals. The result was a strong situational condemnation and ostracism of the Moguji, opposing them to both Kara and Nyangatom who *have* a home, who *are* productive, who are *not* opportunistic, and who fight their *own* battles and make up afterwards. This connection of metaphorical othering with simultaneous political rapprochement (between Kara and Nyangatom) and scapegoating (of the Moguji) is further analyzed in the next section.

The political situation on the Lower Omo in 2006

I argue that the speeches, with their imagery and their other claims analyzed in depth, reveal a great deal about the dynamic interrelations of the three groups directly involved. To unravel the drama, I start by asking the most basic question: what was at stake?

First of all, the meeting at Korcho, like most *osb*, was not an occasion at which anything was decided, or where the events took any surprising turns. Participants were by and large very familiar with one another (note the specificity of the many allusions), and the formal peace ceremony had been performed some weeks before. Kara and Nyangatom had thus agreed to stop killing each other, and publicly assured one another that they would respectively strive for amity and cooperation. The meeting in Korcho was also in principle devoted to the latter purpose. But why did speakers belabor the subject of the Moguji so emphatically? And who was the audience at whom these speeches were directed?

In a nutshell: the Moguji were put in their place. That place, then, is exactly the place they had among the Kara, as a politically muted category of people, who irrespective of the schism and their subsequent shift of alliance (and residence) to the Nyangatom could not lay claim to the same kind of corporate autonomy as Kara and Nyangatom – and respected elders from both groups told them so, in not unclear terms. Kara and Nyangatom, even as they fight and make up and fight

again, have in some sense acknowledged each other's right to act, their ontological agency. The audience, I suggest, was twofold. On the one hand, the Moguji were reminded that their ambiguous status would neither go away, nor be rendered unproblematic. To be Moguji, they were told, was to be betwixt and between, and simply to try and ally themselves with the Nyangatom would not remove that stigma. On the other, the Kara and Nyangatom assured each other that neither of them had been influenced by the supposedly poisonous words of the Moguji. This of course entailed the mutual reassurance that neither considered the Moguji as equals who were entitled to an opinion and a similar degree of agency as they themselves granted each other (lines 29f). Jointly disparaging the Moguji gave them a third party to blame for their own failures to keep the peace. The Moguji's act of cutting their ties to the Kara, it was made clear, even as it gave them some traction with the Nyangatom, did not garner them the respect or acknowledgement they might have wished for.

But is this all that was at stake? Recognition of the Moguji as equals, as acknowledged actors on the narrative stages of South Omo? I think that indeed this was the main prize, as it seems to be the precondition for even being granted the right to join the competition over other resources. It is no secret that there are some among the Moguji who have started propagating the claim that the riverbanks of the Omo rightfully still ought to be theirs. How people react to this claim is revealing.

Some months after the meeting in Korcho, representatives of the three groups again met (this time in Hamar territory). When the debates turned to the issue of the occupation of the western riverbank by the Nyangatom, which was hotly contested by the Kara, a Moguji speaker got up and stated that he did not understand the discussion, because the Kara never had any fields in the first place: in the past, the only inhabitants of the Omo Valley were the (by now nearly extinct) Murle (see Tornay 1981), they, the Moguji themselves, and the baboons of the forest. This was a calculated provocation, which took a stab at the great 'saving lie' at the heart of the Kara; and unsurprisingly, he was shouted down and threatened by the Kara who were present. Interestingly, I was told that neither the Nyangatom nor the NGO workers who had facilitated the meeting supported the man's claims, or even maintained his right to be heard.

At Korcho, no Moguji spoke either. There was not even an attempt to contest the images of the Moguji which were used by Kara and Nyangatom, and no alternative imagery was suggested. Again, any attempt to do so would have met strong resistance, and probably would even have engendered reprisals; still, it is worthwhile to reflect on whether such counter-images even exist, and what they would

entail. To go a step further even: what might be the Moguji's images of the true Kara, or the Nyangatom, and of themselves?

Whose images of self and other?

To preempt my conclusion: the example of the Kara, Moguji and Nyangatom shows that one cannot assume images of self and other to be evenly and mutually constructed. My ethnographic material gives no indication that any alternative images other than those proclaimed by Kara and Nyangatom have any great currency in the discursive and narrative conceptions of the relationships between them. To clarify: I mean to say that the Moguji cannot openly present such a loaded image of the true Kara or the Nyangatom comparable to the ones the true Kara (or the Nyangatom) hold of the Moguji. I also suspect – uncomfortably – that there might not be a self-image that the Moguji might hold which would fundamentally contest the ascriptions others impose on them. This refers back to the nature of images and stereotypes: they have most relevance as they are voiced, and assented to by any audience. Anthropologically interesting images of self and other do not exist in people's minds only. Instead, they are expressed to achieve something in the world. Collective representations, to use an old term, must be collective and represented, that is, they need to be communicated, and they need to be endorsed. Moguji do not seem to have that option in the same way true Kara and Nyangatom do.

So even if we could unearth a Scottian “hidden transcript,” a certain way the Moguji spoke about their relationship to the Kara amongst one another when there was no Kara around, the difference to the epistemic status of the Kara's image of them is marked.¹² The image ‘Moguji are birds and hyenas’ can be voiced by Kara with impunity, simply as there seems to be no practical alternative, no real option for the Moguji to be free from domination by one group or the other, Kara or Nyangatom. This is even true for individuals, who would have to migrate far indeed in order not to be treated as ritually problematic lacklands. Ironically, the most convenient way for Moguji to escape the harsher forms of othering might be to accept their position within the Kara (or Nyangatom, as the case may be), and let go all aspirations of autonomy.

12 It is also not surprising that Moguji identify with the alleged Moguji ‘cause’ to highly variable degrees – I have met many who quite plausibly expressed happiness and pride regarding the position they hold in Kara. An incidence of false consciousness, or a genuine and deliberate choice?

In the previous section, I discussed the question of group autonomy and corporate agency. Here, I expand this view to not only encompass the right to – for example – wage war or make peace as a corporate group, or to occupy and ‘own’ arable land (in local notions, not according to state law), but also to the practice of imagination.

In this sense, the domination of the Moguji is of a pernicious kind, in that it denies them the capacity to voice alternative visions of their position in the world.¹³ James Scott asserts that subordinates do not suffer from an “inability to *imagine* a counterfactual order. They do imagine both the reversal and the negation of their domination” (1990: 81, his emphasis; see also discussion in Lukes 2005: 128). I find it relevant to add that this imagination has rarely found a social outlet, and in that, it differs from the imaginations held by Kara of the Moguji, which constantly find rhetorical space.¹⁴ Another puzzle piece is the initially mentioned fact that there is no local term to refer to the category of people whom I call the ‘true Kara.’ To speak about only the true Kara one would have to use the term “Kara,” and then either invest some rhetorical effort to make clear that not the entire polity (including Gomba and Moguji, etc.) is meant, or one would have to explain further, which is awkward and a “bald on-record,” as politeness theory would have it (see Strecker 1988), attack on the social order and its saving lies. I do not think that this is a coincidence: for the dominant ‘true Kara’ it is one of the bases of their power that already by name the entire polity is identified with them, and it is so much easier to single out the other ethnicities than them.

As can be gleaned from the speeches held at the Korcho *osh*, the undesirable position of the Moguji is subscribed to by both the rock (Kara) and the hard place (Nyangatom), neither of whom acknowledge the former as their equal. Matsuda (1994) has made the following distinction between choices open to the Moguji: “annexation” by the Kara and “assimilation” by the Nyangatom, and one could certainly point to differences between the ways in which the Moguji are incorporated by the Kara and by the Nyangatom which reflect this distinction. But the one

13 David Turton (personal correspondence) remarks that this should be considered a natural feature of domination, understood as a kind of social relation in which the subordinate believes that they actually profit from their own subjection. I am not sure about what people believe; I can only deal with what they publically voice.

14 I desist from making any more farreaching claims as to the (double?) consciousness of the Moguji; as Lukes reminds us earnestly in his discussion of the third, consciousness-forming dimension of power, “[s]ince Mill there have, of course, been many attempts to open up the ‘black box’ of what Mill here calls ‘the formation of character’ and others have come to call ‘socialization,’ ‘internalization’ and ‘incorporation,’ in ways that promise to illuminate the mechanisms of domination” (2005: 139). Precisely these mechanisms cannot be explored here, as I accept the methodological limits imposed by that very black box.

continuity, the one aspect which the Moguji could not escape, not even by triggering the schism and by shifting allegiance towards the Nyangatom was the fact that they are still conceptualized as a non-entity, an ethnic category but not an ethnic group, if you will, as they are not allowed to develop a corresponding autonomous political organization.

As it turns out, to inquire into images of self and other is to open up issues of discursive hegemony, power, and domination – and this is not only true for the social scientist who researches such a situation, but also very much for the Kara, Moguji, and Nyangatom themselves, who all realize quite clearly that some people have the power to name and to define others publicly, and some do not. Every attempt to proclaim one's image of an other is an attempt to assert one's power vis-à-vis that other, and each successful attempt constitutes a step towards actually 'feeling' the agency which springs from one's assertion of self, whether as an individual or as an assembly of people categorized the same way, among whom "groupness" (Brubaker et al. 2002) becomes more and more felt.

At any rate, the story of the Kara, Moguji, and Nyangatom is not over yet. Moguji have been seeking recognition by state structures as well, and are increasingly finding it under the Ethiopian policy of ethnic federalism (see Matsuda 2002), and despite the massive transformations of the Lower Omo Valley due to dam building and the introduction of foreign-owned commercial farms, it is too early to assume that the warfare in the Lower Omo Valley has subsided for good. I do not expect that entangled lives of Kara and Moguji will be disentangled, for better or for worse, anytime soon. As the second meeting revealed, briefly discussed above, some Moguji were testing the rhetorical waters and trying to find a space from which to speak as a group, to speak as a collective actor of consequence.

The Moguji, being the Kara's "mirror in the forest," are in many ways important for the Kara. As individuals, as I mentioned above, they are neighbors and friends, and as I tried to make clear at the beginning of this text, what it is to be Kara can hardly be explained without reference to the Moguji. This leads me to the conclusion that in all their one-sidedness and their crude bias, the true Kara's images of self depend on their images of other, and vice versa; just as the othering of the Moguji justifies the denial of their autonomy it also assigns them a stable place within the political unit which is Kara. True Kara and Moguji are not two independent groups or categories which one could just separate, neither conceptually, nor pragmatically – both have emerged in mutual constitution, probably over the last 200 years or more. Their entanglement cannot be seen normatively, as a deficient, dysfunctional, and deplorable way of being; they are who they are because they are entangled. The imagery I have discussed bears witness to that: in

daily life, Moguji are depicted as pathetically unsophisticated brutes by the Kara, not in an aggressive, but in a rather benevolent paternalistic way. It is only when this benevolent paternalism is contested, when attempts are made to sever the ties that oblige – the Kara being obliged to care, the Moguji being obliged not to make a fuss over their marginalization – that the imagery takes on the dark taint that comes up again and again in the speeches made in Korcho. This serves to show that what truly is at stake here, when the Moguji try to assert their autonomy, are not the images of self and other, but the demarcation of self and other, and at the end of the day, the very definition of what is Kara.

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The pure, the real, and the chosen: the encounter between the Anywaa, the Nuer, and the Highlanders in Gambella

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This chapter examines the changing perceptions of self and other in the Gambella region of Western Ethiopia. It documents and analyzes the nature of the encounter among people belonging to three groups – the Anywaa, the Nuer, and the Highlanders – in the *longue durée*. Although they form distinct ethnic groups, the Anywaa and the Nuer both belong to the Nilotic language family, prominent among the various languages spoken in Ethiopia's borderlands. According to the 2007 census, the Nilotic-speakers make up around 68% of Gambella's population of a little over 300,000, of which the Nuer account for 46,6% and the Anywaa 21,1% (CSA 1994). For the purpose of this paper, the Anywaa and the Nuer represent the peripheral part of Ethiopia in social, cultural, economic, and political terms. "Highlander" is a generic term for groups of people who come to Gambella from various highland regions of Ethiopia, and speak Semitic, Cushitic, and Omotic languages. They are also known by the name Habesha. The majority of these Highlanders are Amhara, Oromo, Tigreans, and Kambatta. According to the same census, the Highlanders constitute 27,1% of Gambella's population.² Although ethnically differentiated, the Highlanders speak Amharic as their everyday language and they primarily identify with an Ethiopian national identity. For the purpose of this paper, the Highlanders represent the mainstream Ethiopian society.

The social boundary between the Nilotes and the Highlanders is constructed in various ways; from skin color, cultural practices, language, and religious affiliations, to relative distance to the Ethiopian state. In a discourse about skin color, Anywaa and Nuer are categorized as 'black' Nilotes in contrast to the 'red' High-

1 This chapter contains some text from the author's book *Playing different games: the paradox of Anywaa and Nuer identification strategies in the Gambella region, Ethiopia* (Dereje 2011), published by Berghahn Books in the series "Integration and Conflict Studies." We are grateful to the series editor Günther Schlee for permission to use this material.

2 The remaining 5% are speakers of the Koman language such as the Majangir, the Komo, and the Opo.

landers. Social practices such as marriage also constitute the social boundary. Nuer and Anywaa practice polygamy, they do not circumcise, and they eat porridge, aquatic foods, and rodents as their staple food. The Highlanders practice monogamy, circumcision, and eat *injera* (pancake) with *wot* (stew) as their staple, the quintessential of Ethiopian national identity. Patterns of religious affiliation have also reinforced the social boundary. Nearly all Anywaa and Nuer are either followers of traditional religion or Protestant Churches, whereas the majority of the Highlanders are followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

The distinction between the Nilotes and the Highlanders is also based on their standing vis-à-vis the Ethiopian state. In fact, the term used for the Highlanders by the Anywaa and the Nuer stands as a metonymy for the Ethiopian state itself: similar to many other groups throughout the peripheral areas of Ethiopia, they use the same terms (here: Gaala and Buny, respectively) to refer to the Ethiopian state as well as to the Highlanders as a category of people. The term Gaala as used by the Anywaa originally referred to the Oromo, the first Highlanders they have come in contact with. They have extended the term to other 'red' peoples on the basis of, in their perspective, similarity in physical complexion and cultural affinity. The term Buny means in Nuer language 'to bow down,' a term used in reference to the first encounter between the Nuer prophet Ngundeng and Highlanders when the latter bowed down as a sign of deference to authority, assuming that Ngundeng was the king of the Nuer. This is so because the Ethiopian state was introduced through, represented by, and identified with the Highlanders from the start, and still has retained that connotation. The bulk of the Highlanders came to Gambella through the activities of the Ethiopian state, either as state functionaries or during the course of the resettlement program of the 1980s.

The paper discusses the nature of the encounter in various socio-political contexts. It begins with a brief description of the self-image of each group of people. In this section I will show that the Anywaa, the Nuer, and the Highlanders each have a strong, ethnocentric sense of uniqueness, albeit differently conceived. The Anywaa base their sense of uniqueness on their cosmology, and are especially proud of their model of political organization. The Nuer on the other hand take pride in their assimilationist genius and warrior identity. Both these identity projects are regional or even transnational, but in the context of the Ethiopian state today marginal. The Highlanders on their part subscribe to the 'Great traditions' of imperial Ethiopia and the national identity connected to that. In the second section of the text, the nature of their encounter is discussed, how it has changed from mutual cultural irritation and contestation to the cultural hegemony of the Highlanders. In section three I discuss the changing perception of the Anywaa and the

Nuer towards regaining self-esteem in the context of the new political order in post-1991 Ethiopia as well as the new sets of social experiences in the diaspora. In the last section, these relations between self and other are in turn linked to the power differential between the actors.

Three ethnocentric cultural worlds compared

The *luo* (pure): the Anywaa's self-image

The Anywaa's self-image is primarily based on their cosmology. In Anywaa cosmology, the relevant 'other' serving to help orient self-understanding are Jwok as well as animals, which is expressed in the concept of *luo*. The term *luo* refers to human purity and is contrasted with Jwok, the world of spirituality. Jwok is the principle of creation and is represented by its dual nature, the forces of creation (*nyingalabuo*) and the forces of destruction (*nyidungu*). The Anywaa do not subscribe to the concept of a supernatural being that 'governs' the natural world. They acknowledge the precedence and primacy of Jwok, but the dominant pattern of relationship between Jwok and human beings is oppositional. In most Anywaa creation myths, human beings appear to have been an accidental product of Jwok's creative work and to have survived not because of Jwok's will, but despite of it.³ In Anywaa identity discourse, therefore, human existence, particularly that of the Anywaa, has to be defended against 'encroachments' by Jwok. Any source of human suffering is attributed indirectly to the malevolence of Jwok (*nyidungu*). The only positive aspect of Jwok is creation; but, even so, Jwok regretted having created a conscious being which was similar neither to the animals nor to the spirits. In fact, in their creation myth, the Anywaa owe their survival to the caring Dog (*Medho*), the apical ancestor of dogs, not to the creator Jwok. The Anywaa believe in a phased creation within which they occupy a senior position; for the first creatures are believed to have been Anywaa twins.

According to Anywaa cosmological scheme, peoples such as the 'white' (Europeans) and 'red' (Arabs and Highlanders) represent 'kinds' of human beings, who are inferior, though they are rewarded by Jwok for being submissive to his will, expressed in the form of their political power and technological advancement. Although the Anywaa recognize the affinity of other 'black' peoples, they nevertheless claim superiority over them as the most 'pure' and politically more sophis-

3 For a full account of Anywaa creation myth, see Perner (1994: 57–68).

ticated. As such they refer to the Nuer and other pastoralists at large as ‘uncivilized’ or ‘people without culture.’

The persistent themes in Anywaa-Jwok relations are those of confrontation, abandonment and hostility. When the destructive side of Jwok is manifested, as it does for example in droughts, epidemics, infertility, and floods, people openly revolt and chase Jwok out of their villages. Such acts of resistance against Jwok are expressed in collective rituals. The Anywaa worldview emphasizes dominant symbols such as the sexual features marking the boundary between humanity – *luo* or the Anywaa – and Jwok. If Jwok is primarily defined as spiritual, *luo* is physical, a quality which consists principally in having ‘proper’ sexual organs. ‘Proper’ sexual organs must not exhibit any anomalies, such as peculiarities in the number and shape of the testicles, an incompletely formed vagina, or a penis that is disfigured naturally or through circumcision. In Anywaa identity discourse, not all of those who seem to be human satisfy these criteria. There are those who ‘look like’ humans but who in reality work for Jwok and its various manifestations and participate in the destruction of humanity. Such anomalous beings are called *padhano*, ‘non-human.’ The *padhano* are not simply destructive but dangerous for hiding in plain sight: for, although their features are known, it is difficult to detect them, except in their childhood. Since adult *padhano* are not easily recognizable, children are carefully watched. One of the dominant events after child birth is checking the testicles or the vagina of the infant. If any of the aforementioned signs are observable, the child has to be disposed of, lest it grows up to be a *padhano* (Perner 1994: 182). From the perspective of the Anywaa, the witchcraft of the *padhano* is not motivated by personal envy or by any of the factors known from standard sociological explanations for witchcraft. For the Anywaa, witches simply work for Jwok in furthering the ultimate destruction of humanity.

If the boundary between humanity and Jwok is drawn along natural lines (as expressed by sexual organs), the boundary between humans and animals is marked by artificial means (Perner 1994: 247). The second important symbol of humanity (‘being’ Anywaa) is *naak*, extraction of the lower incisors of humans, in order to distinguish them from animals. The canines are destroyed early in infancy, and the four lower permanent incisors are removed at about the age of ten. Many Nilotic societies, including the Nuer, practice dental evulsions, but none of them attribute such a fundamental meaning to it as do the Anywaa.⁴

4 Removal of teeth is common throughout East Africa. Schlee has analyzed extraction of the teeth among the Rendille as an emblem serving to enhance visibility in inter-group interaction: “The Rendille refer to Gabra or Boran as ‘the enemies with teeth’ because these northern neighbours do not remove the two central lower incisors” (Schlee 1994: 133).

Anywaa also extend the notion of purity to their non-Anywaa neighbors. Their sense of uniqueness finds expression in an ideology of ethnic purity, which is linked to distinctive practices of ethnic distancing. Membership in any given clan is determined by patrilineal descent, but the patrilineal affiliation of the mother is also relevant for her children's social identity, and in order to be considered fully Anywaa, one should be born of Anywaa on both the father's and the mother's side. Ideally, then, a person needs to be Anywaa on both paternal and maternal sides of his or her family in order to claim full Anywaa ethnic identity. Children of mixed ethnic background are subjected to social discrimination. They are referred to by the derogatory term *jur*, which literally means 'foreigner.'

Ethnic purity is also maintained through a unique medium of social exchange. In traditional Anywaa society, fundamental social relationships between leader and commoner, elder and junior, or husband and wife were created through the medium of beads. Unlike most Nilotic societies, the traditional Anywaa bride wealth is not cattle but the blue glass beads called *dimui*. The social significance of the beads is so fundamental that Evans-Pritchard called the Anywaa the 'beads people' (1940b: 20). The origins of *dimui* are obscure. In their oral traditions, the Anywaa say that the ancestors brought the beads with them in ancient times, and today *dimui* are for the Anywaa the scarce good par excellence. There is a finite supply of *dimui*, which cannot be replenished and which are transferred from one kin group to another in the form of bride-wealth, blood-wealth, ransom, or other kinds of payment. Traditionally, the number of *dimui* one possessed influenced one's status. The beads possessed by a family formed a kind of heritage which was controlled by the elders and which, therefore, gave them tremendous power over their juniors. Men's prospect of marriage also depended on having a sister, in as much as they could usually only gain access to *dimui* through the bride-wealth that they received when their sisters married. Besides serving as a medium exchange among the Anywaa, the *dimui* are a marker of Anywaa identity in the eyes of the Anywaa themselves and in the eyes of their neighbors. Because the *dimui* are valuable and scarce, the Anywaa make some efforts to prevent their loss to the community through safe depositing as a form of family heritage. In this way, the *dimui* and the practices related to them encourage ethnic endogamy, place a limit on inter-ethnic marriages, and, more generally, reproduce the ethnic boundary between the Anywaa and others.

Anywaa's self-understanding is also greatly shaped by the special attachment they have with the land, the specific territories (villages) which are the constitutive parts of local identity. As they are exclusively agriculturalists, territoriality strongly features in Anywaa's social imagination. Anywaa territoriality is amply evidenced

in the two mutually constituted concepts of *jobur* (people of the settlement) and *welo* (guests). In traditional Anywaa society, the dominant sub-clan of a village (*tung*) comprises the *jobur* and the *welo*. Guests of a temporary or permanent nature are highly respected, but not really fully integrated as *jobur*. Within the *jobur* there are earth priests called *wat-ngumi*. In addition to ensuring fertility (human and agricultural) and maintaining the dignity of the earth, the *wat-ngomi* also ensures the separation between the human and animal (wild) territories through various rituals.

Anywaa sense of uniqueness is also derived from a local discourse on civilization. Among their Nilotic neighbors, the Anywaa stand out with their strong form of political centralization. Although they had never developed a unified kingdom, among the Anywaa there were village-based kings and nobles (*nyiye*, sing. *nyiya*) as well as headmen (*kwaari*, sing. *kwaro*). The insignia of the offices of headmanship and kingship consisted especially in a four-legged stool (*walo*) and additional forms of precious beads, in particular, a string of beads called the *abudho* for the *kwaaro*, and a necklace called *uchuok* for the *nyiya*. The object of the struggle between the various noblemen and headmen was not territory but these emblems of royal authority. The noble who controls the *uchuok* and the *walo* is known as *nyinya*. The royal emblems, however, are not monopolized entirely by the *nyinya*, as he is required occasionally to allow other nobles to wear the *uchuok* and to sit on the *walo* to demonstrate their nobility. Nevertheless, the competition for the position of *nyinya* was a constant source of warfare. Collins noted that “the possession of the emblems conferred upon the holder a prestige amounting to veneration” (1983: 368). Neither the *nyiye* nor the *kwaari* wielded absolute power. What is unique about Anywaa political organization is also the higher degree of accountability of leaders to their followers. As Lienhardt (1957: 348) succinctly put it, a leader among the Anywaa needs to follow his followers in order to be able to lead. Abuse of power and neglect of public duty often resulted in an *agem*, a village rebellion against a *kwaro* or *nyiya*.

The Anywaa traditional political system was abolished by the Derg as part of its so-called cultural revolution which redefined local forms of hierarchy as ‘backward’ and ‘anti-revolutionary.’ There was an attempt by the Anywaa political party that took power in the regional government of Gambella in the 1990s to revive the traditional political system. The *kwaari* were restored in some villages but they are overshadowed by the new educated political elites that run the regional government. Nevertheless, the Anywaa refer to it as a symbolic capital in inter-ethnic relations. They take pride in their political organization as an index of ‘civilization’ and often contrast it with ‘stateless’ pastoralist neighbors such as the

Nuer and the Murle, or the authoritarian political culture of the Highlanders, particularly at a time when ‘good governance,’ understood as social accountability of leaders and greater citizens participation, has become a global buzzword.

The *ran mi ran* (real): the self-image of the Nuer

The Nuer are predominantly pastoralist, though some groups of Nuer have been shifting towards agro-pastoralism. Like their neighbor the Anywaa, the Nuer, too, have a strong sense of uniqueness. At face value, the Nuer also appear exclusivist. They call themselves *neitinaath* (distinct people) or *ran mi ran* (the real person), terms which they employ to bolster their self-esteem. Other Nilotic societies also use various terms to denote ‘people’ or ‘person,’ but it is mainly among the Nuer that it does confer prestige, while denying it to members of other ethnic groups, who are not ‘real people.’ But the Nuer understanding of ethnic worthiness is inclusive, evident in their elaborate assimilation practices. The Nuer have the conviction that ethnic identity is not ascriptive but performative – that being a Nuer is based on cultural competence rather than biological descent.

This presentation of the Nuer self-image differs from their representation in the anthropological literature as an ideal typical case of a lineage society. Ever since the publication of Evans-Pritchard’s classic study, *The Nuer* (1940), the larger community known by this name has become synonymous in the ethnographic literature with the so-called segmentary system based on patrilineal, or agnatic, descent. The Nuer, in Evans-Pritchard’s presentation, are Nilotic ‘people,’ who are divided into a number of ‘tribes,’ or groups of related tribes. These tribes or tribal groups are, in turn, divided into clans, just as the clans are divided into lineages. Finally, Evans-Pritchard distinguishes among ‘maximal lineages,’ which are most inclusive, ‘major lineages,’ which are less inclusive, ‘minor lineages,’ which are relatively exclusive, and ‘minimal lineages,’ which are most exclusive. He refers to all of these units, which represent different levels of inclusiveness and exclusiveness in the organization of descent groups, as genealogical ‘segments’ or sometimes as ‘sections;’ hence the term “segmentary system” (Evans-Pritchard 1940a: 148). What impressed Evans-Pritchard most, and what he sought to convey to his readers in his famous monograph, was that this segmentary system provided the basis for coordinated political action in a community of circa 200,000 souls that was totally lacking in hierarchical structures and centralized political institutions.

It is important to emphasize that the segmentary system is based on the principle of patrilineal descent. When descent is patrilineal, as it is among the Nuer, all

individuals, whether male or female, belong to the segments – the minimal lineage, minor lineage, major lineage, maximal lineage, clan, and tribe – to which their father belongs; and, ideally, all Nuer should be able to trace their ancestry through a chain of males back to a common male ancestor. Clearly, patrilineal descent is important in Nuer society, as Evans-Pritchard insisted, but it is equally clear that the Nuer do not live by patrilineal descent alone. Identification among the Nuer is much more complex than the segmentary system of ‘balanced opposition’ between structurally equivalent lineages and residential units, as in Evans-Pritchard’s structural-functionalist interpretation. In fact, it is well-known that the Nuer regularly incorporate people into their communities who began their lives as outsiders, transforming these former outsiders into Nuer in the process. What is more, the Nuer are fully conscious of their practices of incorporating outsiders, and they provide extensive commentary on them. Indeed, it is largely because of their aggressively assimilationist policy that I elsewhere characterized the Nuer mode of ethnic identity formation as ‘constructivist’ (Dereje 2003, 2005). Contemporary Nuer, regardless of the diversity of their origins, all claim and have access to group worthiness, principally expressed in their self-esteem as *neitinaath* (distinct people) with a unique language (*thok Nueri*) and culture (*ciang*) and with unique rights to claim the status of being *ran mi ran*, i.e., a ‘real person’ (Hutchinson 1996: 76). In addition, by acknowledging the diversity of their origins, the Nuer facilitate the absorption of outsiders. Their extensive conquests throughout the nineteenth century resulted not only in the four-fold expansion of their territories (Kelly 1985), but also in the absorption of diverse groups of people (Evans-Pritchard 1940a: 239; Hutchinson 1996).

Descent is important for the Nuer, but it works in a way that allows the integration of those who were previously outsiders. Group formation and identification operates through three interrelated Nuer concepts: *dil* (pl. *diel*), *rul*, and *jang* (pl. *jaang*). *Dil* is ‘an aristocratic clan,’ though the term also applies to individual men within the clan or descent group in question. The *diel*, though a minority, provide a lineage structure on which the territorial organization (*cieng*) is built. A Nuer is a *dil* only in a *cieng* where his clan is the dominant lineage. As soon as he is outside of the tribe in which his clan has the superior status, he becomes *rul*. A *rul* is a Nuer immigrant who attaches himself to a *dil* through affinal ties, marrying either the sister or the daughter of a *dil*. *Jaang* are non-Nuer captives or immigrants. The *jaang* are assimilated into the *diel* either through adoption or marriage. The assimilation of the *jaang* is often more complete than that of the *rul*, since the *jaang*, in contrast to the *rul*, are completely cut off from their homeland ties. *Jaang* are actively supported in ‘becoming’ Nuer *naath* insofar as they receive contribu-

tions towards their marriage payments, the size of which are often substantially reduced, and insofar as they are rewarded with leadership positions, should they be heroic enough to contribute to the strength of the local community. In Nuer language, this process of ethnic conversion is known as *caa* Nuer (becoming Nuer). A fully assimilated *jaang* may assume a high social standing, and it is not polite among the Nuer to remind somebody who is fully assimilated and upholds local standards of his foreign origin. In fact, whoever is discriminated on the basis of his origin can easily elicit sympathy. In this sense, the Nuer identity system encourages assimilation by rewarding excellence in fulfilling Nuer standards. The more complete assimilation of *jaang* into the aristocratic clans (*diel*) explains in part why Nuer seeking to augment their own local groups are more interested in outsiders than in their fellow Nuer. In other words, an 'ethnic other' for the Nuer is a potential 'self.' Nuer society is assimilationist par excellence. There are no internal others. Unlike the 'salad bowl' of other assimilationist systems, this assimilationist pot is still melting.⁵

Among other mechanisms of transforming an 'ethnic other' into the 'Nuer self,' one aspect of male initiation called *gar* stands out. *Gar* refers, more specifically, to the scars that a male Nuer adult bears on his forehead as a symbol of his initiation into manhood between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. Evans-Pritchard has described *gar* as follows: "All male Nuer are initiated from boyhood to manhood by a severe operation (*gar*). Their brows are cut to the bone with a small knife, in six long cuts from ear to ear. The scars remain for life, and it is said that marks can be detected on the skulls of dead men" (Evans-Pritchard 1940a: 249). Nuer age sets, known as *ric*, differ from comparable institutions in other East African societies, insofar as they do not constitute successive age grades (cf. Kurimoto/Simonse 1998). *Gar* is, rather, a one-time initiation that marks the difference between men (*wut*) and boys (*dhol*). *Ric* are formed during the initiation ceremony, affectionately called 'shedding blood together.' After initiation, a man's domestic duties and privileges alter radically: "At initiation, a youth receives from his father or uncle a spear and becomes a warrior. He is also given an ox, from which he takes an ox-name and becomes a herdsman" (Evans-Pritchard 1940a: 254). As Evans-Pritchard further noted, "initiation rites, more than anything save language, dis-

5 According to the 'melting pot' theory of the American nation, anyone who enters the United States is automatically thrown into this 'pot' where, for the following years, a process of assimilation into the American belief systems is taken place (Dinnerstein/Reimers 1975). The 'salad bowl' theory demonstrates a complete separate perspective that the newcomers bring different cultures, where each of these cultures is kept as an essential part to make up the whole. Every distinctive culture or belief is considered to be one of the tastes or ingredients that contribute in forming the whole; therefore its original shape and characteristics are maintained (Singer 1986).

tinguish Nuer culture and give Nuer that sense of superiority which is so conspicuous a trait of their character” (Evans-Pritchard 1940a: 260).

Within Nuer society, *gar* creates male identity and status through the dramatization of the experience of pain; but it also serves an important ideological role in the process of assimilating non-Nuer through the articulation of a particular conception of masculinity. In this radical formulation of male identity, non-Nuer men are loosely referred to as *dhol*, or boys, for they have not gone through the litmus test of bearing pain in the initiation rite. Conversely, however, non-Nuer men may become Nuer by going through *gar*. *Gar*, viewed as a practice with ideological implications, operates at different levels in the process of assimilation. For one thing, non-Nuer men are provoked or teased to partake of this Nuer version of masculinity. Typically, when a Nuer girl declines a marriage offer by a non-Nuer, she would say that she does so because the would-be groom has not been initiated. Many Dinka and Anywaa men who were integrated into Nuer society have been initiated in Nuer ways. Those who go through the initiation confirm not only their masculinity, but also their lifelong commitment to the Nuer mode of identification. *Gar* is thus a vivid example of the constructivist variety of ethnic identity formation that is characteristic of the Nuer. It defines an area of cultural competence in which people are required to perform in a certain way in order to claim Nuer identity. The complete integration of the conquered Dinka and Anywaa into Nuer society is possible partly because these men undergo this initiation rite in which becoming a man is synonymous with becoming Nuer.

Nuer sense of uniqueness is also derived from military exploits against their neighbors. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Nuer were confined to the area west of the Bahr el Jebel River (Jal 1987: 36) in present-day South Sudan. By the end of the century, they advanced as far east as the escarpment of the Ethiopian highlands. Based on the magnitude of the territorial losses described by Evans-Pritchard, Kelly (1985: 1) estimates Nuer territorial gains as fourfold of what they had before the expansion: “Nuer displacement of the Dinka (and Anywaa) represents one of the most prominent instances of tribal imperialism contained in the ethnographic record.” This dramatic expansion has significantly informed a warrior identity with an invincible power among the Nuer. Perhaps it is for this reason that the only ‘real’ enemies the Nuer recognize are the British in reference to the overwhelming firepower of the latter during the colonial pacification campaigns in southern Sudan in the early twentieth century. Neither the Dinka nor the Anywaa ‘qualify’ as (real) enemy in the eyes of the Nuer. Thus, the Nuer self-esteem is also reinforced by their long standing military superiority vis-à-vis their neighbors.

‘The chosen nation’: the Highlanders’ self-image

In Gambella, for all practical intents and purposes, the term translated as ‘Highlander’ signifies ‘mainstream Ethiopia’ with a sense of uniqueness rooted in Ethiopia’s imperial ‘great traditions,’ particularly the national identity that centered on the Solomonic myth. The Highlanders’ preferred term for self-designation, *Habesha*, bears this out, a term which connects them to the medieval Christian kingdom of Abyssinia. The northern Ethiopian highlands were the center of state formation, which dates back to the first millennium B.C. (Bahru 2001). That earlier period also saw population movements from southern Arabia to northern Ethiopia, and the ensuing intermixture of immigrants with the local population is said to have injected new dynamics in the process of state formation. Situated strategically on the Red Sea, northern Ethiopia was under the orbit and cultural influence of the Greco-Roman world and Medieval Europe. An important legacy from participation in the cultural and political economy of such early forms of ‘globalization’ was the production and consolidation of a resilient ideology of power and an identity discourse that draws on the popular mythology of Queen Sheba and her visits to King Solomon of Israel (see Pankhurst and Weinerth, both this volume). From this meta-narrative emerges the legendary King Menelik I, the issue between Queen Sheba and King Solomon as the founder of the Ethiopian monarchy (Bahru 2001).

Highlanders’ sense of uniqueness is also derived from a discourse on skin color. The memory of early immigrants and the resultant differentiation in physical complexion (the emergence of the *qey* people, meaning ‘red’ in Amharic) has ever been the hallmark of highland Ethiopian society, in which the ‘fairer’ one in skin color is, the ‘better’ Ethiopian he becomes. The introduction of (Orthodox) Christianity to northern Ethiopia in the fourth century C.E. has further reinforced a sense of uniqueness with a new narrative of self, a narrative of Ethiopia succeeding Israel, including the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant, as the chosen nation (Teshale 1995). The modern Ethiopian state has grown out of these northern Christian kingdoms, and its Semitic ideology has kept these parameters of national identity largely unchanged. *Qeynet* (redness) is socially valued and is contrasted with *tikurnet* (blackness). Mainstream Ethiopian identity discourse is very much color-conscious, with a hierarchy of shades ranging from *qey*, *yeqeydama* (‘reddish’), *teyem* (low red), to *tikur* (black). With a higher degree of inter-marriages and shared political history among the various highland societies, a similar dominant discourse on color has been adopted by many ethnic groups. Nowhere is this more socially relevant than in the border regions such as Gambella, where the ‘fair-skinned’ meets its ‘radical other’ – the black Nilotic people.

The identity discourse in Gambella exhibits a certain twist from what is currently going on at the national level. The Oromo and the Tigrean elites have fiercely contested the parameters of Ethiopian national identity and are engaged in deconstructing it in different terms. In Gambella, however, the Amhara, the Oromo, the Tigreans, and the diverse groups of people from southern Ethiopia still identify as Habesha. Whether one is a Habesha or Anywaa/Nuer is a major statement, signifying the prime identity location of someone in Gambella.

The Highlanders' sense of uniqueness is also derived from a claim they put on the historical 'ownership' of the Ethiopian nation. In the peripheral parts of Ethiopia the term 'Highlanders' is not only a topographic statement but also signifies the Ethiopian state itself. Ever since its first representatives arrived in the Gambella region at the end of the nineteenth century, the Ethiopian state has been introduced through, represented by, and identified with the Highlanders. This seems to be affirmed by the representation of the Ethiopian state by the peoples of the periphery. In fact, it is for this reason that the Anywaa and the Nuer use the same word – *gala* or *buny*, respectively – to refer both to the Highlanders as people and to the Ethiopian state. Once politically dominant and numerically the third largest group, the Highlanders have been stripped of formal political rights under the terms of the constitution of 1995, because, as migrants, they now 'belong' to various other ethnoregional states in Ethiopia, depending on their respective ethnic identities. Despite the EPRDF's new ideological spin, however, there has been marked continuity in center-periphery relations in Ethiopia from one regime to the next. In the current government, as in the past, all authorities who wield substantial clout in the politics of the region are Highlanders. This enduring special political status of the Highlanders makes them the 'significant other' in Anywaa-Nuer relations.

In the encounter between the Anywaa, the Nuer, and the Highlanders over the last one hundred years or so, what we observe is a clash between different senses of uniqueness, where the 'pure,' the 'real,' and the 'chosen' peoples have met and negotiated their status in various socio-political contexts.

The encounter

The mutual irritation

The first encounter between the Anywaa and the Nuer on the one hand and the Highlanders on the other can be characterized as mutual irritation. This was expressed in various domains of social life. The Highlanders as agents of the Ethi-

opian state participated in the slave raids and the slave trade that followed in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Although Gambella was spared violent conquest and the settler colonialism that followed in many parts of the new conquered territories in Ethiopia, the people of Gambella were nevertheless subjected to the so-called pacification campaigns. Attendant to these campaigns was slave raiding, and peoples in Ethiopia's borderlands were particularly targeted for these raids. This was justified not only in reference to cultural differences (the raided being 'non-Christians'), but also to skin color, for 'real' slaves are supposed to be black people. The image of the Nilotes as 'real' slaves did not sit well with their self-image. Black is not an inauspicious color among the Nilotes. For the Anywaa, for instance, it is associated with humanity and is contrasted with white, which is spiritual, hence belonging to the realm of Jwok (Perner 1994: 173).

The Anywaa and the Nuer, on the other hand, were disgusted to see the Highlanders, who otherwise claimed to be superior, practice a 'pre-fire' technology of food processing and eating *tire siga* (raw meat). Along with *injera* and *wot* (the stew), raw meat is one of the iconic dietary symbols of being Ethiopian, so that what the Highlanders considered as an aspect of displaying their superior culture was perceived as an evidence of an inferior culture by the people of Gambella. In fact, the Anywaa and the Nuer used to hide their children from the Highlanders policemen, the first agents of the Ethiopian state in the region, after having seen them eating raw meat. Retrospectively, contemporary Anywaa and Nuer informants recount that they were really scared of the Highlanders as they imagined them to be cannibals. On their part, the Highlanders were disgusted by the food habits of the Anywaa and the Nuer. From the perspective of the Highlanders, the Anywaa, and the Nuer ate revolting food such as ritually unclean parts of rats and other animals. The reference point for this view is the scriptural definition of what is 'proper food' in the Old Testament. What is called 'rats' by the Highlanders are cane rats (*Thryonomys*), called *adula* (pl. *adule*) in Anywaa.⁶ The Anywaa also eat smaller mice.

Another domain of mutual irritation was circumcision or its absence. The Highlanders, both followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the few Muslims among them, practice male circumcision in reference to the Old Testament. Circumcision in the OT was practiced as a sign of baptism. It was given to Abraham as a token of the Covenant. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is a form of

6 Cane rats are widely distributed and valued as a source of 'bush meat' in West and Central Africa. The meat is of a higher protein but lower fat content than domesticated farm meat and it is also appreciated for its tenderness and taste. Cane rats spread from Senegal to South Africa (Van der Merwe 1999).

Christianity strongly Hebraic in character, and has retained many cultural practices of the OT. Circumcision among the Nilotes, however, has a completely different meaning. As indicated above, circumcision among the Anywaa, for instance, is not only devoid of any sacred nature, but is in fact a sign of ‘abnormality’ in the sexual organ, evidence of being non-human (*padhano*). Hence, it is no wonder that the Anywaa initially perceived the Highlanders as *padhano*, non-humans. Here again what is an index of a ‘great tradition’ or ‘kinship with God’ for one is a sign of lower status for the other. Thus the mutual irritations are not only induced by different ‘forms of life’ as it were, but also by the perils of symbolism and its possible inversions. Where circumcision is ‘sacred’ for the Highlanders, for instance, it is a sign of ‘abnormality’ for the Nilotes, illustrating collision of self-images in the world of symbolism.

Contesting the other’s image of their self

As agents of the Ethiopian state, the Highlanders had sought to establish a cultural hegemony over the Anywaa and the Nuer. The latter, however, contested that in different terms. Against the backdrop of the competing ethnocentric cultural worlds as well as the implausibility of their claim to be on a civilizing mission, the Highlanders had initially failed to establish a cultural hegemony that often follows political and military power. The Highlanders status claim as people of a kingly tradition, for instance, was contested by the Anywaa who invoked their own model of political order which also produced nobles and headmen.

If the Highlanders had a distaste for the Nuer ‘chaos,’ the latter were bewildered by the Highlander’s authoritarian style of governance. In fact, the very term the Nuer use to refer to the Highlanders, *buny*, bears this out. The term *buny* was coined by the Nuer prophet Ngundeng in 1898 during the first encounter between the Nuer and the Highlanders. *Buny* in Nuer language means ‘those who bow down,’ in reference to the Highlanders reverence towards authority figures. The Nuer contest of the Highlanders self-image as people of a ‘great tradition’ is also evident in ethnic stereotypes. The Nuer say ‘*Buny cie turuk*.’ Literally this means in Nuer language ‘the Highlanders are not modern.’ Metaphorically, it is a negation of the Highlanders’ self-image as more ‘modern’ than the Anywaa and the Nuer. *Turuk* is a generic term for state power and modernity, originally used to refer to the Ottoman Turks, the first ‘modern’ people the Nilotes encountered in southern Sudan early in the nineteenth century. In the eyes of the Nuer, the Ethio-

pian state, identified with the Highlanders, failed to deliver as much as it ought to have.

The Nuer also used to describe the Highlanders as *turuk mi thilkade* ('civilization without salt'), in reference to the introduction of salt to the Nilotes by the Turks and Egyptians, whereas the Highlanders could not deliver it to the Nuer in Gambella before the 1990s. Unlike the Ottoman Turks and the Anglo-Egyptians in southern Sudan, imperial Ethiopia was short on salt supplies, particularly in the western parts of the country. Nor did the Highlanders introduce a materialist culture which might have impressed the Nuer. Salt is also here synecdochically used for the expected deliveries of the state in terms of goods and social services. This is an interesting local criticism of *maqinat* (lit. in Amharic 'to domesticate'), Ethiopia's version of the 'burden of a civilizing mission.' *Maqinat* was used to ideologically justify the conquest of territories in the southern, eastern, and western parts of the country in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The Anywaa, on the other hand, primarily project their sense of uniqueness onto a Supernatural Being, Jwok. This is an overarching theme in Anywaa's world view. They, for instance, turn to their own cosmology to make sense of the inequality in the living standards and power position between them and the Highlanders, yet another 'plot' in the long confrontational drama between the Anywaa and God. The following myth suggests that:

While God in the beginning had had no liking for the humans, he finally started to become interested in the Anywaa, found them beautiful and intelligent. As time went on, God began to like them, and one day he asked them to lick his ass! The Anywaa were filled with indignation and they refused categorically: "You may be a great God but we are pure human beings, and we never agree to such insanity, not even on your demand!" God got angry. He poured water and sand in the eyes of the people to make them blind, to be sure that they would never see, never discover anything [...] Then he left, he went to the north, to the red (Highlanders and Arabs) and the white people (Europeans). Those people fulfilled all his wishes, and he gave them everything in return.' (Perner 1994: 113f)

In this myth, the lack of modernity or political power is conceptualized as deprivation by the 'evil' God, but at least the Anywaa accrue to themselves a sense of agency, expressed in their dignified defiance, for their deprivation.

Establishing a cultural hegemony

The turning point in the evolution of a cultural hierarchy in the Gambella region among the various aforementioned groups of people is the consolidation and the expansion of the Ethiopian state. Although the Ethiopian state had occupied the region in the late nineteenth century, it was only in the post liberation period (since 1941) that it has made substantial impact on socio-political processes at the regional level. This was a time when political centralization was pursued in earnest, though deeply resented at the peripheral areas of the country (Bahru 2001). In the context of Gambella, expansion of the Ethiopian state in institutional terms has meant the political empowerment of the Highlanders, as all government representatives have been Highlanders.

The Gambella region assumed a greater national publicity after the commencement of the Sudanese civil war and the appointment of General Lemma Gebrekidan as its governor in 1961. The appointment of General Lemma as the governor of Gambella was characteristic of the way the Ethiopian state related to its periphery. Most imperial governors of the peripheral regions were sent there as a form of 'exile.' General Lemma came to Gambella because of his participation in the failed 1960 coup against Emperor Haile Selassie. The choice of Gambella for his governorate served as a dual vendetta against him. On a personal level, the general had problems with the governor of Illubabor province, Enquesselassie, and his assignment as governor of Gambella thus placed him under the authority of a rival. On a symbolic level, the general was subjected to a different form of slight. Though he was an ethnic Amhara, he fell on the black side of the color spectrum. In the Ethiopia of the day, when the discourse about 'purity of race' played a prominent role in national identification, associating him with the 'black' Anywaa and Nuer was intended as symbolic violence against him. As he had been the first high-ranking imperial official based in Gambella, the Anywaa and the Nuer came to be referred to as 'People of Lemma,' as if they did not exist before the arrival of the general.

The expansion of the Ethiopian state in the Gambella region had also expressed in the so-called campaign against 'backward' cultural practices (or "harmful traditional practices"?) of the peripheral peoples such as the Anywaa and the Nuer. *Dimui*, *nak*, *gar*, and other cultural practices were condemned in the strongest possible term in one of the letters written by general Lemma instancing, an aspect of the imperial cultural engineering:

The only way of improving this embarrassing culture [in Amharic *asafaribabil*] is through education. But until the new generation is educated with the new culture, they would still revert to the old culture as long as their parents continue to practice it. I repeatedly told the Anywaa and the Nuer in market places how embarrassing their culture is for us Ethiopians and foreigners. If it is difficult to force them directly to abandon their culture, it should still be part of the law the violation of which should entail punishment, primarily of their leaders who failed to change their respective people. (General Lemma Gebrekidan, Governor of Gambella, letter written to Dejazmach Girmachew Teklehawariyat, Illubabor Province Enderase, dated 1587/47, 1964. Author's translation from Amharic)

The means to abolish the 'backward' culture was indicated in the same letter to be through modern education as well as adoption of the Orthodox (Highlander) culture: "In order to bring the people of Gambella into civilization [*silitane*] we need to establish modern schools and bring religious teachers from the Orthodox Church."

The Derg regime that rose to power and overthrew imperial Ethiopia in 1974 took more dramatic measures as part of its so-called cultural revolution. Anywaa and Nuer cultural practices were not only condemned but violently uprooted. The Anywaa were forcefully monetized and their special beads (*dimui*) were thrown into the River; the nobles and the headmen were deposed and replaced by government appointed leaders; *naak* and *gar* were outlawed. In the context of Gambella, however, for all practical purposes and intents, the cultural revolution had meant not only debasing local cultures but also promoting the Highlanders' culture which was deemed more 'civilized.' The Derg reinforced the cultural hegemony of the Highlanders in Gambella, for the state was still perceived as *gaala* and *buny* by the Anywaa and the Nuer. Despite its initial restructuring of the foundations of Ethiopian society, the Derg gradually slipped into the national fabric of the Ethiopian state. As Donham (2002: 20) described it, "here was little iconoclastic destruction of old political symbols at the centre of Ethiopian politics. The revolutionary state drew on the cultural infrastructure of the ancient regime and the monarch served as a model for power."

Becoming 'not backward,' therefore, entailed for the Anywaa and the Nuer to participate in a particular culture, which in effect was traditional Highland culture, thinly disguised as 'progressive.' As a consequence of state-backed campaigns against local cultural practices, the first generation of educated Anywaa and Nuer lost confidence in their respective culture. Some educated Anywaa continued the campaign against cultural practices, particularly those which appear to have produced conspicuous evidence for being 'backward.' They enthusiastically adopted Highlander culture such as eating raw meat, and actively discouraged the eating of

‘unclean’ and ‘inappropriate’ food such as the cane rat. Likewise, educated Nuer re-evaluated what was hitherto considered as a source of pride as an evidence of backwardness, and attacked the practice of cutting the *gar* scars on men’s foreheads. The Nuer leadership in Jikaw district even passed a resolution that no freshly initiated Nuer could enter the district’s capital.

This new consciousness of ‘being backward’ in need of catching up with the ‘modern’ Highlanders has also trickled to the villagers, instancing the establishment of the cultural hegemony of the Highlanders. While I was doing research on the origin and significance of *gar* among the Nuer one elder had this to say:

Gar is to be *wut* [man]. But what is *wut* if it does not make you stronger than other people? If a Nuer fights with a *buny* [Highlander], the *buny* would defeat the Nuer although he does not have *gar*. Who is *wut* then? I believe *gar* is useless. It is possible to be *wut* without *gar*. Why could not we make *turbil* [car] or *nhialbany* [airplane]? People who make all these things do not have *gar*. Our forefathers did not know anything. That is why they took other people [a reference to Nuer assimilation]. Rather they should have looked for a *kume* [government]. We do not have our own *kume* because we are not educated. The *buny* and *naathmibor* [white people] are stronger because they have their own *kume*. During the time of *gar*, we did not know about cloth. Now our children are wearing clothes because they know. We are just following them. (David Tuach, a Christian Nuer elder from Nipnip, interview, Addis Ababa, November 23, 2000)

The sense of relative deprivation in David’s narrative was defined in the form of differential access to education. He, and in fact the Nuer in general, use the term *kume*, as a code word for entitlement and the desire to ‘catch up.’ In what appears as a ‘if you cannot beat them, join them’ situation, the Anywaa and the Nuer succumbed to the cultural hegemony of the Highlanders. This is evident not only in cultural assimilation but also in the emergence of the Highlanders as a ‘significant other,’ a figure of the third, in Anywaa-Nuer relations. Anywaa and Nuer political actors of the 1980s and 1990s referred to their respective cultural competence in Highlanders-cum-national culture to legitimize local resource and power claims. In fact, the terms of the political debate in Gambella have been defined along citizenship lines since then, competing in displays of “who is more ‘Ethiopian’” today. In this authenticity debate, the Highlanders validate the claims. The Anywaa often refer to their competence in the Amharic language and assimilation into national culture to prove that they are more Ethiopian than the Nuer. In fact, they scorn the Nuer for not yet having started eating raw meat, or for lacking the knowledge of coffee-making, another symbol of Ethiopian national identity. In one of the interviews I had with an Anywaa political actor on the terms of the political debate in Gambella, he answered me emphatically “have you ever seen in at least one Nuer

village where women make coffee?,” as if this summed up all what is at stake. This statement nevertheless signifies the imbalance in national cultural competence. The Anywaa are more successful in playing the Highlanders game in cultural terms, which at times seek to convert into legitimation for political power in Anywaa-Nuer relations.

Towards regaining self-esteem

Upon seizure of state power in the year 1991, the EPRDF has restructured the Ethiopian state in the form of ethnic federalism. The 1995 constitution explicitly recognized ethnicity as the official state ideology and legitimate unit of political action. Sovereignty rested on “Nations, Nationalities and Peoples” (Art. 8) who accorded not only with the right for self rule but also a right for secession (Art. 39). Furthermore, according to Article 39, “Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history.” (The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1995) On this constitutional basis a number of ethno-regional states were created. Some of these ethno-regional states are allocated to ethnic majorities, even bearing their names, whereas others are organized as multi-ethnic regional states with various levels of political entitlement for the ‘nations and nationalities’ living there. The Gambella Peoples National Regional State (GPNRS) is one of these multi-ethnic regional states that constitute the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

The GPNRS is designated for the ‘indigenous’ people or ‘Minority Nationalities.’⁷ These are what the EPRDF classified as the five national minorities which live in Gambella; the Anywaa, the Nuer, the Majangir, the Opo, and the Komo. Much in line with the Federal Constitution, in the Constitution of the State political sovereignty resides with these five ethnic groups, hitherto national minorities but now turned into majority ethnic groups at the regional level. In Gambella, then, the Highlanders are neither politically recognized as a group nor are they differentiated along ethnic lines as Oromo, Amhara, or Tigreans because, by definition, they ‘belong’ to other regional states on the basis of their respective ethnic identity. In fact, in this new political dispensation, the Highlanders appear leftovers or

7 According to the 1995 Election Law of Ethiopia, a “‘Minority Nationality’ means a community determined, by the House of People’s Representatives or its successor, to be of a comparatively smaller size of population than that of other nations/nationalities.” (National Election Board of Ethiopia. ‘Election Law of Ethiopia 1995.’ Proclamation No.111/1995)

‘guest workers.’ By promoting Gambella into a regional state, ethnic federalism has suddenly turned a peripheral region into a new political center. Overnight, the Anywaa and the Nuer replaced the Highlanders as political leaders and administrators. In an unprecedented manner they have also for the first time occupied ministerial portfolios at the national level.⁸

The Highlanders contest the new political order. The ruling EPRDF is in an ambiguous position on the status of the Highlanders. On the one hand, it considers the Highlanders as ‘vestiges’ of the defunct regime who could potentially undermine the new political order. On the other hand, the federal government is still represented by people who are readily categorized as Highlanders by the Anywaa and the Nuer, despite the fact that the federal officials are not residents of Gambella and come from the centre. Despite the new relations of dominance that put the Highlanders at a disadvantageous position in regional politics, the federal government, represented by the EPRDF, is still regarded as ‘Highlanderish’ and as such it, too, falls within the ‘red’ side of the color spectrum in Gambella. This categorical identification of EPRDF, and governments preceding it, with the Highlanders has had political consequences. Whenever there is conflict between the EPRDF and the political organizations that claim to represent the Anywaa or the Nuer, the Highlanders would be targeted by the latter; for killing the Highlanders in Gambella is synonymous with attacking the Ethiopian state and the government that represents it.

Simultaneously, though, the new political order and the affirmative actions connected to it have had the effect of strengthening (or re-awakening) confidence in local, ‘traditional’ (i.e. non-Highlander) culture. One of the first political measures taken by the ruling regional party, the Gambella People’s Liberation Movement (GPLM), was to revalidate local cultural practices. Some officials of the GPLM themselves went through *nak* (dental evulsion) and the nobles and the headmen were restored in some Anywaa villages. Anywaa ‘re-traditionalization’ is also constructed discursively, linking their nobles to Biblical kings as well as to the Highlanders’ ‘King of Kings,’ the long-deposed line of emperors:

The Anywaa *nyiya* brings social order. You find kings in the Bible as well. There were kings in Israel. Jesus came from the House of King David. Haile Selassie was called *niguse negest*, King of Kings of Ethiopia, just like our *nyinya*, which means *nyiya* of the

8 Anywaa and Nuer have served as State Ministers and Ethiopian ambassadors to Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, and Japan, the first installation of its kind since the incorporation of Gambella into the Ethiopian polity at the end of the nineteenth century.

nyiyē. (Interview with Reverend James, Anywaa Pastor in the Presbyterian Church, Gambella town, August 12, 2001)

Pastor James' reference to the Jewish kings of the Old Testament and to Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, who legitimized his power through a mythological connection to King Solomon, is a discursive link with what Redfield (1950) called 'great traditions.'

The regained confidence in local culture is also at the basis of people's criticism of what had suppressed it. The new social order which above all had brought a change from traditional systems of exchange to a monetary system is now perceived not as an aspect of 'modernity,' but as a cause of social disruption. The following narrative by an educated Anywaa woman illustrates this:

I know that society has to change but we need to keep some of our good culture. We should have kept *dimui* as a medium of social exchange. Now the bride wealth is only 1,500 birr. That makes it easy for people to marry more than one wife. Of course, the traditional marriage also allows polygamy. There are people who even married up to thirteen wives. As long as you live up to a polygamous family it is not a problem. There is also another reason for polygamy. It is about labor. The first wife gets tired having born many children and taking care of the extended family. According to Anywaa culture, your wife is for all the relatives. If you have enough to eat or relatively better, all your relatives come to you for subsistence. It is your wife's burden to cater for all. Then she gets tired. When her husband realizes that she is getting tired, he looks for another wife. It is often the first wife who encourages her husband to marry. The relationship between the elderly wife and the young wife is like a mother-daughter relation. They do not get jealous; as the elderly thinks she already lived her life, and it is now time for the second wife to get her husband's attention. She even gives her jewellery. They are also like friends. But the 1,500 birr generation, they marry age-mates. That is why they compete. The husband does not care for both. These days there is always intra-household conflict. At the end of the day, the husband leaves them all and looks for another wife. That is why I do not like the modern marriage. The best would be mixing the traditional system with the modern system. (Interview with Ariat Ujulu, Gambella town, October 18, 2001)

The elders who were disgraced in the 1970s now feel vindicated in the context of the disillusionment of the younger generation, who had extensively campaigned for the new social order and now have become alienated themselves. Kurimoto (1997) has documented a narrative by an Anywaa elder which aptly captures the point I am making here:

[After the abolishment of *dimui*] people started to marry by money... Now those young people, why do they not multiply at all? It is because of beer. Those young boys who did not drink, they have now started drinking. Now those young boys, they do not bear around ten children as their fathers did... Now people believe in *gaba* [market]. People go to the market and buy things and forget the work at home. Because of the maize which is brought for *welo* [guests in reference to the Highlanders and the refugees] people left their work and think about the market. (Kurimoto 1997: 5)

This changing perception of the self had one main symbolic expression. Ujulu Tekon, one of the major players in regional politics in the early 1990s, is said to have replied to those Highlanders who went to the regional council to ask to be retained in their job with the Amharic phrase *sile injera guday* (for the sake of survival), a statement that reflects the inversion of the power relation: in Gambella, it is all about *ye genfo guday*, not *injera* (it is about porridge, not *injera*), a reference to the cultural precedence of local culture over the Highlanders/national culture.

Renewed self-esteem is also fed by a different source, namely the new sets of social experience gained in the diaspora. As a strategy of coping with economic marginality and violent conflicts raging in the Gambella region since the 1980s, many Anywaa and Nuer had flocked to refugee camps in Gambella and Kenya, trying to pass and often passing as southern Sudanese. In doing so, they effectively instrumentalized their cross-border settlement patterns. The attraction to the refugee camps lay in their access to social services, particularly education. In the Gambella of the 1980s and early 1990s, being a refugee was more rewarding than being an Ethiopian citizen. As a corollary to their new experience in the refugee camps, especially in Kenya, the Anywaa and the Nuer have also gone through a new form of reflection on their self-understanding. Kenya has not only larger Nilotic communities, but these are also socially well-advanced and wield substantial power in Kenyan political landscape. Above all, they met in Kenya their ‘cousins,’ particularly the Luo, who are confident in their culture. Many Anywaa and Nuer were surprised to see the Nilotes continuing to eat their traditional food without being labelled ‘backward.’ The following narrative by an Anywaa man from Kakuma refugee camp illustrates the process of re-valuation of one’s culture triggered by the new social context:

My dream is one day to open a restaurant in Gambella where Anywaa could freely eat their traditional food, including *adule*. This is not a problem in Kenya. The Luo are like us and eat the same food we eat. But they do not feel ashamed as we are in Gambella. I also heard that the Chinese eat everything and yet they are modern and powerful people. I used to think that *enjera* is the only proper food and many Anywaa stopped cooking traditional Anywaa food. Habesha are very strange people. They do not like black

people. They do not like white people either. One has to be red to be real people. They also look down upon those people who do not eat *enjera* and *wot*. (UchanKayure, Ruiru, September 19, 2002)

The Anywaa and Nuer refugees who managed to resettle in North America and Australia through the UNHCR resettlement program are even keener in renegotiating social status. Currently more than 10,000 Nuer and around 3,000 Anywaa live in the USA, Canada, and Australia, where they acquired the respective citizenships of the host countries. Most of them were originally from Gambella region and at some point claimed southern Sudanese nationality. These Anywaa and the Nuer maintain strong links with homeland affairs, expressed in various domains, from economic remittances to families, to international advocacy to protect the political rights of their respective people. The social remittance of the Anywaa and the Nuer diaspora is also expressed in their conspicuous consumption and display of the new social status as Americans, Canadians, or Australians during homecoming holiday visits. They wine and dine in the only expensive hotel in Gambella (Ethiopia Hotel) and wear expensive clothes with the latest fashion that exhibits the African-American hip hop-culture which they comfortably relate to. Their families and relatives in Gambella adapt even more enthusiastically to the American hip hop culture. A glance at the Anywaa and Nuer youth in Gambella – with iPods and African American hairdo and sagging pants – clearly suggest that they have become more ‘modern’ than their Highlander counterparts.

In lieu of a conclusion: the power differential in the changing perception of the self and the other

From the aforementioned discussion it is clear that the Anywaa, the Nuer, and the Highlanders, with their respective self-images as ‘pure,’ ‘real,’ and ‘chosen’ people, subscribe to a stronger version of a sense of uniqueness. It is no wonder then that the first phase of the encounter was characterized by mutual irritation. When the Highlanders sought to establish a cultural hegemony by imposing their world view, the Anywaa and the Nuer contested the claim at various levels. The contest was possible despite the identification of the Highlanders with the Ethiopian state. The Highlanders’ cultural hegemony was established only since the 1960s when imperial Ethiopia had consolidated its grip on the Gambella region. Unlike other newly conquered regions, Gambella was spared of large scale military conquest and the settler colonialism that followed. This was so because of two reasons. For one, the lowland regions such as Gambella were perceived as inhospitable for permanent

settlement for the Highlanders. The political competition between colonial Britain and imperial Ethiopia had also the effect of containing a stronger presence of the Ethiopian state in the region. Situated between two competing political powers, the Anywaa and the Nuer came to effectively instrumentalize the international border to extract local autonomy.

The 1960s brought new geopolitics to the region. Sudan became independent and Emperor Haile Selassie embarked on a vigorous policy of nation-building that included political and economic centralization as well as cultural homogenization. It was during that time that the so-called campaign against 'backward' cultural practices was initiated, a policy which was consummated by the Derg regime. This introduced a new power relation between the Anywaa and the Nuer on the one hand and the Highlanders on the other, as the cultural hegemony of the Highlanders began to gain ground: Anywaa and Nuer elites abandoned their contestation and in fact started competing in 'being' Ethiopian.

Since the 1990s, the Gambella region has seen a reconfiguration of the power relations, with two major factors defining the new socio-political context. The first is the new political order in post-1991 Ethiopia, i.e., the redefinition of the parameters of the Ethiopian national identity along multicultural lines. In this new political dispensations thus, the Highlanders have lost an important political tool, their identification with the Ethiopian state, which had hitherto been the tipping point in the allocation of status and prestige to each group of people. This is despite the fact that the federal government is still largely perceived by the Anywaa and the Nuer as 'Highlanderish.' Equally important in the changing perception of self is the new set of experiences in the situation of the diaspora. With thousands of Anywaa and Nuer emigrating to the west through the refugee resettlement program they were both exposed to and become more competent with new forms of 'modernity' than the Highlanders in Gambella. With the differential access to the new modernity, coupled with the new purchasing power thanks to the remittances, the Anywaa and the Nuer not only regained self-esteem but also feel that they are surpassing their former 'senior' in the ladder of modernity. The following table summarizes the link between the changing perception of self and the other in Gambella in reference to the fluctuating power relations:

Table 1:
Changing perception of self and the other in Gambella in the *longue durée*

<i>Period</i>	<i>The power relation</i>	<i>The nature of the interaction</i>
1902–36	Parceled sovereignty between the British and the Ethiopian governments	Mutual irritation
1941–60	Emerging power of imperial Ethiopia	Contestation
1960–91	Ethiopian state power peaked	Cultural hegemony of the Highlanders
Since 1991	Decentralization, differential access to globalization	Anywaa and Nuer regaining self-esteem

By now it would sound too conventional to emphasize that identity is relational. The self is always realized and made relevant in reference to ‘others,’ however the latter are constructed. The challenge is rather to explain how self-understanding is signified and changes over time. A better explanation is sought when self-image and the other are embedded in specific socio-political contexts in which power differential emerges as the intervening variable. How the self is presented and the other is represented has a lot to do with who wields what type of power to impose its vision of the world on others.

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Christianity and the King, matrimony and marijuana: icons of the unresolved Ethiopian relationship with Rastafari¹

ERIN C. MACLEOD

I had heard from a friend in Addis Ababa that there would be a Rastafari parade down the main road of Shashemene, the Ethiopian town where the majority of Rastafari repatriates have settled after moving to Ethiopia, viewing it as the Promised Land. The occasion for the parade was His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie's birthday, celebrated on July 23, according to the western Gregorian calendar, but the sixteenth of *Hamle* according to Ethiopia's dating system. Haile Selassie is viewed as divine by Rastafari. I sat at a café waiting for the parade, and I seemed to be the only audience. A few trucks went past, spangled with red, green, and gold, and full of flag-waving participants. Their flags were those of the Emperor's regime, featuring the 'Conquering Lion' symbol, and they were waved to the rhythm of reggae music. Locals seemed nonplussed, continuing to go about their business, almost actively ignoring the event. I asked the waiter if he knew the reason for the parade, and he shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. His response is similar to that of the Ethiopian government, who has not recognized repatriates as citizens, mostly turning a blind eye to those who wish to stay months, years, lifetimes.

In addition to the parade, I also was interested in attending the Rastafari celebration commemorating Haile Selassie's birthday later that evening. An English teacher and local business owner named Tsegaye² offered to accompany me to the party. Given the local response (or lack thereof) to the parade, I was not surprised at his own low enthusiasm where attending the birthday party was concerned, but

1 This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Excerpts from *Visions of Zion: Ethiopians and Rastafari in the Search for the Promised Land* by Erin C. MacLeod © 2014 by New York University were reprinted with permission from NYU Press.

2 Name has been changed.

he said he would be able to do so nonetheless. I met with some of Tsegaye's students during the afternoon leading up to the party. They spoke about alleged Rastafari drug use, and there was also praise for the Rastafari love of Ethiopia. Tsegaye, for his part, was nervous about the fact that the Rastafari worshipped a "false idol" in the form of Haile Selassie. He also said that "Jamaicans" tended to marry "*habesha* women"; the word *habesha* is used to mean "Ethiopian" in this context.³ This left him, a *habesha* man, wondering what these cross-cultural marriages might be like and concerned about his own marriage prospects. Tsegaye told me that he was willing to come with me to the Rastafari celebration of the former emperor's birthday, if for nothing other than, as he put it, "protection." He was worried about my safety; though not providing specifics, he told me that Rastafari presented some sort of danger. But after we went and spent some time at the birthday celebrations, his worry seemed to fade and he was quite impressed. Over the course of the evening, there was a great deal of musical and cultural entertainment, ranging from Rastafari attempts at Amharic pop songs, to reggae (Bob Marley's work was performed), to modern, hip-hop dance numbers. Tsegaye appreciated the Rastafari promotion of Ethiopia as a holy place, something he agreed with, and enjoyed the fact that each performer and speaker made reference to Jesus Christ before praising Haile Selassie as the personification of God. "I never knew that the Jamaicans believe in Jesus Christ," he said.

Over the course of this day I gained insight into major themes of the Ethiopian view of the Rastafari. Analyzing the interactions I had on the Emperor's birthday, it is evident that this view is focused on Christianity and the King, as well as on matrimony and on marijuana.

Christianity and the King

The Rastafari movement may present a great variety of particular traits, but one thing is certain: the former emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, is viewed as divine. But the Ethiopian population in Shashemene is predominantly Orthodox Christian, the state religion of Ethiopia under Haile Selassie; and while Rastafari will worship in Orthodox churches and some are baptized into the faith, it is clear that

3 *Habesha*, or, in English, "Abyssinian," is used most often in this way. When I quote my informants saying "Ethiopians," they likely used the term *habesha*. It is helpful to mention, however, that the term can also be used to differentiate between different categories of Ethiopians. In these instances, it mostly refers to Amhara and Tigrayan people as opposed to Oromo or more peripheral lowland groups. Also see Pankhurst and Dereje in this volume for further remarks on this complex field.

Orthodox Christians do not accept the former emperor as God. As anthropologist Ababu Minda writes, “it is also known by some of the people who attend the same church with them that immigrant Rastas believe in the divinity of Haile Selassie which to [Ethiopians] is outright paganism” (1997: 87). Regardless, many Rastafari do attend the Orthodox church, and at the same time, these Rastafari still worship Haile Selassie. Can this seeming contradiction be reconciled in the Ethiopian view?

The Emperor as symbol

During my research, I spent a lot of time seeking out at least one Ethiopian who shared the Rastafari belief in Haile Selassie as divine. I was told on a number of occasions, “yes, I know someone who is Ethiopian and Rastafari,” but when I would meet these individuals, even if they referred to themselves as ‘Rasta’ and would agree with the pan-Africanist views of Rastafari, when asked whether Haile Selassie was God or divine, the answer was always “no.” This does not necessarily mean that Ethiopian Rastafari do not exist, but it demonstrates that if there are indeed Ethiopian Rastafari, their numbers are perhaps rather small. Over the course of nearly a decade, I located and interviewed but one Ethiopian who believed in the divinity of the emperor. This one young man, Naod Seifu, explained that he was unique amongst his friends. In a subsequent email, he elaborated: “Being an Ethiopian and believing that the king is a divine king is taken as a mad man. It is believed that being a Rasta is for Jamaicans only.”⁴ From Naod’s comments, it is clear that the perception of Rastafari within Ethiopia links the movement exclusively with foreigners – specifically Jamaicans. The religion is for “Jamaicans only”; it is not viewed as an Ethiopian phenomenon, and, in fact is seen as an odd or even “mad” choice for an Ethiopian.

Solomon Soroto, who has completed research on the integration of the Rastafari in Shashemene, calls Ethiopian Rastafari “sympathizers.” Certainly, he told me, he had heard of individuals like Naod, as well as a handful of other Ethiopians who have close relationships with Rastafari, but he was unsure if these people were actually firm believers in the movement. As he said to me, “I couldn’t exactly call these people Rasta believers. It’s hardly possible to say that they are Rasta followers. Whenever you inquire deeply, you will get that they don’t believe Haile Selassie

4 I have not edited such emails and other quotes so as to preserve my informants’ voices.

as God in the first place.”⁵ The reality of Haile Selassie’s positioning within Ethiopian culture and history is that of a king – divinely ordained as leader, perhaps, but a human being, imperfect and mortal.

Ethiopian professor of sociology, Alemseghed Kebede, who has analyzed various Rastafarian thinkers (1999), was led to his research topic due to his immense curiosity about the Rastafari and their view of Haile Selassie. According to Alemseghed, the Ethiopians view of Rastafari is based on a different way of looking at the figure of Haile Selassie: “They are not talking about what you and I or the rest of people know. They don’t have this kind of historical view of this person. They have this symbolic understanding about the living God.”⁶ Alemseghed’s explanation demonstrates a gap between what he refers to as an Ethiopian “historic” notion of Haile Selassie, and the Rastafari “symbolic” view.⁷ There is a divide expressed between the Rastafari and everyone else – the Rastafari have one view and “the rest of people” have another. Alemseghed asks, “Why Haile Selassie? Why Ethiopia?” Answering these questions presents the reality that the overall framework of understanding, for Ethiopians, is very different from the Rastafari.

Divinity deferred

When Haile Selassie arrived in Jamaica to the adulation of crowds of devout Rastafari in 1966, how did he feel about their view of himself as divine? In a 1967 interview, the CBC’s Bill McNeil asked this question: “I have heard of that idea,” responded the Emperor, “I also met certain Rastafarians. I told them clearly that I am a man, that I am mortal, and that I will be replaced by the oncoming generation, and that they should never make a mistake in assuming or pretending that a human being is emanated from a deity.”⁸ In addition to this lone record of Haile Selassie’s response to Rastafari belief in him as messiah, members of his family can provide

5 Solomon Soroto, interview, Addis Ababa, June 24, 2012.

6 Alemseghed Kebede, interview, Addis Ababa, August 25, 2007.

7 Alemseghed’s commentary privileges a more recent history of Ethiopia and Haile Selassie. The Rastafari claim to Ethiopian identity could perhaps be viewed as “historic” in that it takes into account an ancient, Biblical connection to Ethiopia, further in the past than West African histories of transatlantic slavery. For an example of a connection between ancient Ethiopia and pan-African experience, see Monges (2002). Monges utilizes the Bible and the *Kebra Nagast* (an Ethiopian scripture) to provide a connection between the thinking of Ethiopian-born Queen of Sheba (wife to Solomon, mother of Menelik, beginning the Solomonic line that connects to Haile Selassie) and African consciousness against a backdrop of Euro-centrism. For Alemseghed, however, his view is of Haile Selassie the man; for him, Haile Selassie was simply the Ethiopian leader for the bulk of the twentieth century.

8 From a 1967 interview broadcast on the CBC’s program entitled “Project 67.”

further insight. Prince Ermias Sahle Selassie is the only son of Prince Sahle Selassie of Ethiopia and Princess Mahisente Habte Mariam. This grandson of Haile Selassie is the head of the Ethiopian Imperial Crown Council, the body that represents the Ethiopian royal family. He says that there is “no doubt that Haile Selassie did not encourage the Rastafari movement.” However, while he sees positive elements in the Rastafari movement, he insists that the Rastafari view of Haile Selassie as divine is “always a controversial issue.”⁹

Prince Bedemariam Mekonnen Haile Selassie, son of Prince Mekonnen Haile Selassie and Princess Sara Gizaw, presents a similar perspective. Since his father passed away before Prince Bede was christened,¹⁰ the prince had a close relationship with his grandfather. As he puts it: “My grandfather took us over to him and I grew up... he was like a father to me.”¹¹ When Prince Bede was a child, he recalls hearing about the Rastafari and understanding Haile Selassie’s interest in Jamaica, but also the fact that his grandfather did not wish to be considered as divine: “After [the visit to Jamaica], he was really fascinated... His heart was very close to Jamaica as well... And he wanted to be absolutely clear that he was not a saint or a messiah or whatever. He was just the emperor of Ethiopia.” There is no doubt in Prince Bede’s mind that the emperor pushed aside any sense of himself as divine: “He never took that seriously, not for a second. He was not ambivalent about it.”

Prince Bede was imprisoned during the Dergue regime from 1974 until 1989, when he, along with other members of the Royal Family, was released (Perlez 1989).¹² Though firm regarding the position of his grandfather as a king, and not a divine figure, when asked about his feelings regarding the Rastafari relationship to Ethiopia, he expresses a need to credit the Rastafari:

I feel very much indebted in the sense that when my grandfather was really condemned by that awful military regime, Rastafarians, and Bob Marley, and family especially, kept the flag, kept Ethiopia on the map... Because of Rastafarians the world could see beyond – meaning the history, that there is a country that is proud and never colonized – occupied but never colonized. And all this is due to Rastafarians. All of us Ethiopians should recognize that and feel happy to have brothers like that.

9 Prince Ermias Sahle Selassie, interview, April 28, 2012.

10 Christening and a naming ceremony happen forty days after a male child’s birth in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

11 This and the following quotes are from an interview with Prince Beide Mekonnen Haile Selassie, November 7, 2012.

12 Along with Bedemariam, Princes Wossen-Seged Mekonnen and Mekele Mekonnen were also released.

Prince Ermias also describes the ways in which Rastafari acted as what one might call public relations representatives for Ethiopia, promoting the Crown, but also promoting the country and ensuring that the rest of world remained aware of Ethiopia during the time of Haile Selassie and through the time of the Dergue regime: “I have seen and talked to a number of Rastafarians. The way I have long felt about it, is that even during the worst times of the communist rule, it was the Rastafarians who kept pride of the Ethiopian flag and the monarch alive.” Though not an academic, Prince Ermias has spent a lot of time researching and thinking about the Rastafari. He has traveled throughout the Caribbean and learned a great deal about the movement. His positive view of the movement is understandable – the Rastafari hold his family’s history and the history of the Imperial regime in high esteem. But Prince Ermias also understands how a belief in the actual divinity of Haile Selassie, a man that was his grandfather, could have arisen:

The fact of colonialism, segregation, the oppression, slavery – what that had done to these people’s psyche and spirituality and people’s identity. It is only natural that you have to develop your own survival mechanisms and spiritual foundations that you could relate to because the spirituality being taught to you runs contrary to what spirituality stood for from your perspective. It is absolutely understandable how a movement like that could develop. There’s a logic: because of the history, the connection, what in principle it stood for against an evil, or perceived evil, and a sense of justice.

From Prince Ermias’s perspective, Rastafari makes sense as a response to historical pressures. There is a “logic” to the movement and a cause and effect relationship between elements like the rise of Marcus Garvey and pan-Africanist movement, and what Alemseghed Kebede might call a development of the “symbol” of freedom in the form of the Emperor.

Indeed, the Biblical mentions of Ethiopia and the Solomonic myth connecting Haile Selassie to King David and the Queen of Sheba do provide a sense of divine connection or ordination, but that does not make Haile Selassie divine himself. While the support for the divinely ordained emperor and the monarchy is valued, the divinity offer from Rastafari was denied. Instead of encouraging the Rastafari belief, says Prince Ermias, the emperor offered the Rastafari his own faith in return – that of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. “I think the biggest legacy for His Majesty was to establish the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the Western hemisphere in Jamaica, Trinidad, and elsewhere,” describes Prince Ermias, “this was the first time in its history that the EOC was able to, outside its borders, recruit followers.” Prince Bede’s description of his grandfather’s reaction to the Rastafari faithful is similar. After Haile Selassie’s visit to Jamaica, Prince Bede explains, “[the Emperor]

felt that he never compromised about his religion, so he felt he had to make it clear, so he sent priests and so on from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church so they do the teaching.” The Ethiopian Orthodox Church still exists in the Caribbean and the Western hemisphere today, and not just for diaspora Ethiopians. The emperor attempted to transform the devotion of Rastafari into devotion to the Orthodox faith, spreading the faith outside of Ethiopia. As Prince Ermias puts it: “They have come to the way of the Orthodox Church through Rastafarianism. In fact, it’s an intriguing cycle.”

It is possible to view the establishment of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church overseas as an extension of the land grant in Shashemene: Haile Selassie offered land to the black people of the world in Ethiopia in 1948, as well as a church for the black people of the world in the Caribbean, in New York, where the Harlem Renaissance had driven an interest in black Christianity, and, potentially, beyond. In the interest of expanding the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, a congregation was established in Jamaica in 1970, under an assigned Ethiopian Archbishop Yesehaq. This church still exists, with branches across the Caribbean. Archbishop Yesehaq, who spent his life working in the church in Jamaica and the West, never returning to his native Ethiopia, is buried in a tomb on the grounds of the original Ethiopian Orthodox church on Maxfield Avenue in Kingston, Jamaica. Archbishop Yesehaq wrote of the Rastafari asking to be baptized in the name of Haile Selassie: “On being informed by the visiting head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the United States Archimandrate Laike M. Mandefro that he could baptize them under no other name than Jesus’s the cultists became angry and shouted that they would be baptized in no other name than Ras Tafari” (1997: 205f). But this was unacceptable to Bishop Yesehaq and to the church. Liq Kahnat Misale, who came to Jamaica from Ethiopia in the late 1970s and spent significant time with Bob Marley, has considered the challenges presented by Rastafari belief in Haile Selassie’s divinity. In a 2012 interview,¹³ he spoke of his mission to Jamaica as a mission to bring the Rastafari to the “right religion”: Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity.

We went there to bring the believers in Haile Selassie to the Orthodox faith. When we got there, they had many errors, and it took a lot of effort to correct these errors... Haile Selassie made many efforts to tell them that he couldn’t be God, but it took a long time before Orthodox teachers arrived there. I visited after Haile Selassie’s death, and when I told them that Haile Selassie had died, many people were angry.

13 Lik Kahnet Misale’s interview was with Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT) and uploaded to Youtube.com on February 12, 2012. The video can be found under <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLLH543HOy0>. Matthew Cain provided translation of this interview.

Archbishop Yesehaq held a similar position to Liq Kahnat Misale, suggesting that teaching was necessary. “Rastafarians should not be ridiculed or condemned,” according to the Archbishop, but “be brought gradually to Jesus Christ” (1997: 208). The Ethiopian Orthodox Church should proselytize and, as Christian missionaries, reach out to Rastafari. To understand more about the religious perspective on the Rastafari, I met with a group of scholars from the Theological College of the Holy Trinity in Addis Ababa. We met at the Patriarchate. They all had had contact with Rastafari at one point or another and had a level of familiarity with the movement. The conversation was wide-ranging, and all scholars seemed to agree with each other, many nodding when others spoke, and one person’s comments were often interrupted by support and additional examples from another speaker.

The first, and perhaps fundamental problem these scholars had regarding Rastafari matched that of Haile Selassie’s family and both Archbishop Yesehaq and Liq Kahnat Misale: “They believe Haile Selassie is God. I have had some conversations. We argued about their belief system... I told them that [His Majesty] also believed in God... It’s unacceptable. We believe he was simply a man,” said one scholar. Another suggested that it was possible that Rastafari be converted, as long as they understood the position of Haile Selassie within the church: “Gradually we are on the way to change or convert them... Some think we hate Haile Selassie. No. Haile Selassie is simply a person... The church honored him.” Yet another summed up the issue: “The main problem is respecting Haile Selassie instead of what Haile Selassie respects.” For the scholars, this focus on Haile Selassie instead of Orthodox Christianity did not make sense. If Haile Selassie himself was an Orthodox Christian, and you respected Haile Selassie, why would you insist on his divinity?

Also, the Rastafari tendency for literal interpretation of words, as discussed by Velma Pollard in her book *Dread talk: The language of the Rastafari* (2000), means that more meaning is read into Haile Selassie’s name than there should be. This was made plain by one of the scholars:

They start by interpreting the name itself. In Ethiopian Orthodox Church tradition, we have a family name, a baptismal name and an enthronement name. So Haile Selassie is the baptismal name of the Emperor, Haile Selassie, which means the son of trinity, the power of trinity... But they never understand this. They explain or interpret just simply the “power of the trinity.” “Haile,” which means power, and “Selassie” means trinity. So the Emperor’s name itself creates an obligation to accept the “power of the trinity,” but this is a simple name. Like Haile Gabriel, “power of Gabriel.”

The Rastafari are seen as having inherited mistaken assumptions, so that with education, they would eventually understand that, for instance, “Haile Selassie” is but a name. Yes, there is a literal meaning, but that meaning exists within the context of Ethiopian cultural history and a traditional naming practice. This assumption might be difficult to change, especially if those serving as priests at the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Jamaica believe in the divinity of the emperor themselves. This syncretic mixing of bits of the Orthodox Church and the Rastafari belief system was worrying: “They intermingled the concepts of our church. They are confused. They know about our church teachings ... they confuse with the spirit of Haile Selassie. Few of them are on the way to understand.”

The scholars did acknowledge that the Rastafari had, over time, made a contribution to the church, providing the example of a church built in Harar, at the birthplace of Haile Selassie. They also mentioned contributions to the Orthodox churches in Shashemene. There was also a sense of understanding why the Rastafari might insist on their belief in Haile Selassie as divine. As a group, the scholars discussed a lecture given by Desta Meghoo, a Rastafari repatriate whom I had also interviewed. Meghoo presented at the theological college. According to the scholars, she explained the “problems” in Jamaica. She explained the history of slavery and colonialism, asking, said one scholar, “What can we do if there is a person who helps us?” That person, of course, being Haile Selassie. “As a result of this,” claimed the scholar, “they exaggerate Haile Selassie. [Meghoo] cried, you know. ‘What can we do?’ she said ... Her feeling, her thoughts depend on the spirit of Haile Selassie.” Here, the scholar points to Meghoo’s sense that it is only natural that the Rastafari would apotheosize Haile Selassie.

From these statements, it is clear that the representatives of the theological college, even though they disagree with Rastafari belief, appreciate the contribution that the Rastafari community has made to the church and the context for the view of Haile Selassie as divine. It would be imperative, however, for Rastafari to dispense with this belief in order to be a part of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The church offers integration and inclusion, but, as the clergy asserts, it requires an acceptance that the Emperor was not divine, an acceptance antithetical to the Rastafari movement.

Local Orthodox priests in Shashemene echoed the belief that the Rastafari, if taught, would no longer believe in Haile Selassie as divine, but instead solely believe in Jesus. One priest explained how the Rastafari supported the church, giving money and gifts. “They err in seeing Haile Selassie as God,” he said, but “some

of them know that there is one God and they come to church and get baptized.”¹⁴ As I spoke to this priest, he began to insist that the majority of them were Orthodox. “Seventy-five percent of them have rejected Haile Selassie as God. The others are just ignorant and need to be taught.” Another priest was also convinced that baptism indicated a rejection of the divinity of Haile Selassie. The priest was certain that baptism required a conversion: “If they are baptized, they believe in God. Haile Selassie is just a leader. The problem is the unbaptized.” For these local priests, the Orthodox Church provides a way of educating the Rastafari about Haile Selassie and leading them towards the truth of their Ethiopian faith. He was a man, a king – some say a great king – and he died at the hands of the Dergue regime. Beyond the religious differences, one priest also discussed a further divide between the Rastafari and the people of Shashemene.



Fig. 1:
Near the Nyabinghi Tabernacle in the Jamaica *sefer* (photograph by the author)

14 Firesibat Muchee (Orthodox priest, Awassa), interview, August 4, 2007.

This priest, whose perspective was framed by his work over fifteen years at the Orthodox church located closest to the Jamaica *sefer* (meaning “village” in Amharic, a term used within the Ethiopian as well as Rastafari communities in Shashemene), realized his own lack of understanding of the Rastafari belief system. This led him to write an essay on the Rastafari as part of his theological education. But his research did not engender a greater appreciation or sense of closeness with the Rastafari. He still very firmly feels that there is a divide: “They live here but we don’t know them... they don’t exchange ideas. They live on an island... The Jamaicans don’t like the people around them. The [Ethiopian] people see them as *ganja* [marijuana] smokers. Even the children of Jamaicans insult their Ethiopian counterparts. That is the problem.”¹⁵

This depiction presents the Jamaicans as self-isolating – disconnecting themselves from the wider Ethiopian population. The priest also suggested there were “only about ten” Rastafari who came to the church and that they only went to the church closest to them – they did not reach out: “Rastafarians are living near and around this town, but many people do not know much about them... very few [Rastafari] are followers of this church. They have their own religion... There is a big gap... No close interpersonal relationships.” This being said, the priest still did mention that the Rastafari were in fact involved in some local charity work and he did feel that there should be more discussion between Rastafari and Ethiopians, going so far as to suggest a “forum” to “reduce the gap.”

For Princes Ermias and Bede, and also the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the goal is to have Rastafari embrace Ethiopia and Ethiopians, but leave their belief in the divinity of Haile Selassie behind. In analogy to such an ‘acceptable’ belief system, one can also trace that there is a model for ‘acceptable’ community involvement and acceptable intermarriage – all of which move the Rastafari closer to assimilation into Ethiopian society, but, again, require leaving Rastafari beliefs behind.

Marriage and family

What of the marriages between Rastafari men and Ethiopian women? If the church provides some inclusive potential, how do these unions contribute to integration between Rastafari and Ethiopians? It would seem that these marriages could be examples of cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin’s observations in “The traffic in

15 Marijeta (Orthodox Priest, only gave first name, Shashemene), interview, June 20, 2012.

women” (1975), such that women represent the first level of exchange between different cultural groups. However, there would not be an equal exchange between groups,¹⁶ given that in all reported instances of Ethiopian and Rastafari marriages it was the woman who is Ethiopian. Ababu’s (1997) and Bonacci’s work (2007, 2008) both demonstrate this fact, as does my research. Solomon Soroto also indicates that the Rastafari men choose women from neighboring towns whereas Rastafari women are undesirable to local men: “[...] most of the time, the women immigrants come to the area after either being married, divorced or getting too old to marry” (2008: 76). Also, I was told a number of times during my research that women would marry Rastafari for money. Since foreigners in Ethiopia are viewed as wealthy, a woman (and her family) could view Rastafari as a means of marrying into wealth. As Solomon writes, “for old Rasta man, his age does not matter to marry even a young Ethiopian woman as far as he has got money to induce her” (ibid.).

But even if driven by economic forces, how do these interethnic marriages indicate integration within the town or within Ethiopian society? Both Ababu and Giulia Bonacci (2007, 2008) describe some cases, but there are no specific statistics available. When I asked Gebre Gebru, Jamaican Consul General to Ethiopia, about statistics on intermarriage, his response was that although anecdotally he was aware of these marriages, there were no statistics. My experience in Shashemene was that many people mentioned these marriages as an example of how the communities were connected. One of my students there talked about how her cousin had married a Rastafari, and how her family liked him very much. I also spoke to Rastafari who described being happily married.

However, Solomon questions the very legitimacy of the marriages between Rastafari and Ethiopians. He writes that he could not find any marriage of this type that was conducted according to Ethiopian tradition: “This implies that the marriage ties between these two groups of people seem infirmly cultivated from the very beginning of its agreement” (2008: 77). As support for this statement, Solomon quotes an anonymous informant: “I know many Rasta men who have only sexual relations with lots of Ethiopian women. To be honest, I did not see any Rasta got married Ethiopian woman in a normal process of engagement. I didn’t see any wedding or things like that either.” (2008: 78) This commentary underscores the lack of faith in the value of intermarriage. There is clearly an attitude

16 This is Solomon Soroto’s claim (2008), which is similar to my experience. In addition, it is difficult to discern the legality of relationships. Shelene Gomes describes this fact: “Due to the broad application of the terms ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ I was usually unable to distinguish between legal and social marriages unless individuals directly told me about their status” (2011: 182).

that these marriages do not make the grade: they are not as good as “normal” marriages. Solomon’s argument – which seems quite prejudicial – against the validity of marriages between Rastafari and Ethiopians is, however, based on an Ethiopian understanding of marriage. In his opinion, only marriages that are in keeping with his view of Ethiopian culture are legitimate. Through his statements, Solomon presents a perception of Rastafari as not living in accordance with Ethiopian cultural norms. There is no acknowledgement in his work that perhaps the marriages could be valid according to Rastafari tradition. Because the unions were not “conducted according to Ethiopian tradition” it means, for him, that they can be nothing but “infirmly cultivated.”

Almost two decades previous to Solomon’s work, William Lewis details a conversation with an Ethiopian woman, formerly married to a Rastafari, who “fled” because she “found the Rastafari way of life too oppressive” (1993: 112). The narrative of Lewis’s interview with the individual he describes as “an Amharic [*sic*] woman” (1993: 111) demonstrates a similar perception – Rastafari do not respect Ethiopian customs. The woman presented quite a negative portrait: from her perspective, the Rastafari were oppressive, violent and threatening, not allowing their Ethiopian wives to practice any Ethiopian customs.¹⁷ She expressed concerns about her Rastafari husband – “she did not understand [his] hatred for the Babylonian oppressor” – and also sensed a threat to Ethiopian values: “... they will not allow their Ethiopian wives to follow any Ethiopian customs in their kitchens” (1993: 112). Bonacci also provides reports from three Ethiopian wives of Rastafarians, detailing the difficulty of Rastafari in accepting outsiders: “They don’t like outsiders... They think that only Jamaicans can be Rastas, but this can’t work! [...] They don’t like when others approach them and they don’t want others to believe in their God.” (2008: 426)¹⁸ Each of these comments presents a perception that the Rastafari do not connect with other cultures – Ethiopian culture being but one.

In my interview with Vincent Wisdom, a Rastafari repatriate who moved to Ethiopia in 1976, we talked about how he first met his Ethiopian wife of now over two decades at a party. He then said that Ethiopian women are “glad to be with us.”¹⁹ However, he also stated that his wife did not and does not share his faith: “She don’t fight me about my faith. I don’t fight her. She’s a Protestant.” The

17 Lewis’s interview with the individual he describes as “an Amharic woman” (1993: 111) was arranged by Catholic missionaries. The woman, reports Lewis, “had lived with her husband for four years and then broke the marriage. Exasperated after he locked her and her daughter in the back room, she fled the commune” (1993: 111f).

18 This and the subsequent translations from the French original are mine (ECM).

19 Vincent Wisdom (Rastafari settler, restaurant owner), interview, June 26, 2007.

church his wife attends does not approve: “Sometimes they talk to her about it,” Wisdom reported, “how can she do a thing like that? Because the Rasta faith is different. [We] praise a person for God. What they cannot understand is how we get his majesty into it.” Even though Wisdom and his wife have been married for a long time and have five children, there is a disconnect as regards belief. And this disconnect is also with his children: “They don’t share my faith. Two of them are Orthodox and one of them is Protestant, the others are too small.”

The Rastafari belief system is not passed down in Vincent Wisdom’s family, and Ababu (1997) underlines that this is typical. The children of Rastafari who are born in Ethiopia, some to Rastafari/Ethiopian parents, like Wisdom and his wife, feel a distance from the Rastafari faith. Mikkael, Wisdom’s son, says he never saw himself as Rastafari. He explains that he was born in an area where there were no Jamaicans: “From when I was born, I lived and played with Ethiopians so I am more Ethiopian.”²⁰ He was told about his father’s faith, but does not share it: “When I was 13 he explained his culture and religion... As I learn and as I see and as I heard, a lot of people say [Haile Selassie] is a good person... he is a Christian and a king... I am Orthodox.” From Mikkael’s perspective, he is not unique. Being born and growing up in Ethiopia tends to influence these youths. “Most of [the children of Rastafari], born here, they see a lot of things, so they choose differently [from Rastafari]... When you are born here you see the Ethiopian.” Certainly, Mikkael feels a connection to both of his cultural roots, but this is not connected to the beliefs of Rastafari, and specifically the belief in Haile Selassie as divine. “If I see my father, I have a Jamaican vibe. But most of the time I feel Ethiopian,” says Mikkael: “When Tirunesh wins, I feel Ethiopian, when Usain wins, I feel Jamaican.”²¹

Another child of a Rastafari states the following: “My father used to tell me Haile Selassie is God and I used to do all this and say Haile Selassie is God, not understanding ... I used to say it [be]cause I was a little boy then[;] I didn’t have my own understanding to read the Bible and see the truth. But after some time I read the Bible myself and I know Haile Selassie is not God” (Bonacci 2007: 487). Another expresses a similar feeling: “I don’t really defend him [Haile Selassie] on that kind of way [divine], but I would say yeah some things about him, some mystical about him, some kingly character and he does a lot of work he teaches, inspires our fore parents” (Bonacci 2008: 488).

20 Mikkael Wisdom (son of Vincent Wisdom), interview, October 24, 2012.

21 Tirunesh Dibaba, the multiple gold-medal winning Ethiopian long-distance runner, and Usain Bolt, the multiple gold-medal winning Jamaican sprinter.

In each of these cases we see the distancing of the children from the beliefs of their parents – a disconnect centrally based on the acknowledgment that Haile Selassie is not divine. Instead of being inspired by paternal faith and accepting the Rastafari belief system, these children tend to stray from the Rastafari faith. In looking at the second statement, while we see a denial of the divinity of Haile Selassie, we also see a recognition that the Rastafari belief system, including the power of the figure of Haile Selassie, is valuable and relevant as an “inspiration” to people who have come before – people who firmly believed in the former Emperor as the messiah. The repatriate experience is part of a narrative that places Haile Selassie in the position of the “divine teacher” that will free the African diaspora. The repatriate is inspired and believes; his children, born in Ethiopia, do not share the repatriate experience, and are therefore less likely to believe in the divinity of Haile Selassie.

Rastafari repatriate Sister Isheba Tafari, originally from Austria but living in Ethiopia since 1997, details the difference between the first and second generations of Rastafari in Ethiopia. To Sister Isheba, the second generation cannot be defined as Rastafari at all: “The spirit of loving to be in Ethiopia, all the expectations or visions or dreams that we connect to this, mostly in the second generation I don’t see it so much. They are more complaining, ‘why are we not in the West, why don’t we have a PlayStation 2, why don’t we have a fancy television’ and so on.”²²

What Sister Isheba calls “expectations,” “visions,” and “dreams” are connected to a narrative of liberation from the Babylonian West and into the Zion of Ethiopia. The children of Rastafari settlers reverse this narrative and place the West in the position of Zion. Their desire is to leave Ethiopia or at least connect with the west through, as Sister Isheba describes, material things like video game systems and television.

The connections between Rastafari and Ethiopians are challenged by different narratives. Rastafari and Ethiopians view Haile Selassie differently, and they differ in expressed beliefs and lived practices. Some level of integration is occurring at the level of the church and family, but the Rastafari movement’s belief system – stems from a narrative reinforced by a different history, experience and culture than that of Ethiopians. Intermarriage along with involvement in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, does not, then, lead to integration, but is more likely to lead to assimilation in subsequent generations, in that the Rastafari belief becomes subsumed by Ethiopian belief. The Ethiopian community, according to Solomon, is

22 Isheba Tafari (repatriate, Yawenta Children’s Center), phone interview, November 7, 2012.

the arbiter of what is or is not a legitimate marriage, and, in families, the children of Rastafari are more likely to move away from the Rastafari belief system.

Community contact

In the cases of Alemseghed Kebede and Prince Ermias there is an understanding of and respect for the belief system of Rastafari, even if the beliefs might not be shared. However, on a general level, there seems to be a general lack of understanding of the worldview of the Rastafari, specifically the threat of Babylon, as well as a worry that Rastafari culture is not commensurate with Ethiopian culture. Even when Ababu Minda attempts to present connections between Rastafari and Ethiopians, beyond intermarriage, his examples are limited:

Generally speaking, the Rastas have a good relation with the local people. [...] Locals often greet them when they see them in town. Some Ethiopian youngsters have taken their style of dress and matted hair. Rastas also are known masons and carpenters, and they help the local people when the need arises. The Rasta music band plays during public festivals, annual school days and on weddings. A few young Rastas play football in the stronger teams for the town, most importantly, Ras Kabinda, a self trained physician, gives medical treatment for local patients free of charge. These few points indicate the good relationship Rastas have with the local people. (1997: 21)²³

“Some” Ethiopian youths now dress like Rastafari, there is a music band, “a few” Rastafari play in local sports leagues, and one self-trained physician treats Ethiopians for free. That locals greet the Rastafari when the Rastafari are in town is not surprising. Greetings are a very important part of Ethiopian communication and one of the first things that *ferenjoch*, the foreigners, learn. Since one realizes very quickly that the greeting is essential in Ethiopia, it is a small bit of linguistic knowledge that most foreigners are comfortable with. The mention of the Rastafari involvement in local trade (carpentry and masonry) is very vague, as is the mention of the “Rasta music band.” Is there more than one band? Whose weddings? Which public festivals? At which schools? Ababu provides no context for these moments of integration. Do the Rastafari share their culture? Their beliefs? Even in my interviews with Ethiopian townspeople, there was no mention of this band performing for any events other than those planned and executed by the Rastafari community themselves.

23 Ababu Minda also writes quite a great deal in his thesis about the difficulties he himself had in attempting to work with and research the Rastafari (1997: 8f).

In terms of sports, I was told that the Rastafari, at one time, were very involved in football. Zerihun Mohammed, who was raised in Shashemene, remembered that in the 1970s, Rastafari were known for their football playing abilities. “In 1977 more Jamaicans came,” he recalled. “The first area they were active was sports. They had their own team, they also used to play for local teams. Some of them were really very good. There was good interaction between them and the local people.” Allan Cole, a Jamaican footballer and Rastafari – also famous for his close friendship with Bob Marley – played professionally for the Ethiopian Airlines team in Ethiopia during the 1970s. Zerihun then went on to discuss how, in the 1980s, there were a number of teams in Shashemene. There were teams that represented the town, the workers, the telecommunications company – there was also, of course, the All Ethiopian team. “Half of that team’s players were Rastafarian,” he remembers, “They were treated like citizens. They were representing their *woreda*,” their district. Zerihun made it clear, however, that this success at sports was in the past. Ababu’s statement that a few youths – which would indicate not so large a number – play football on local teams is also not demonstrative. Sporting Rastafari do not have the same visibility as they once did in the past when, as Zerihun mentioned, they were treated “like citizens.” There isn’t the same visibility in present Ethiopian sport.

However, even if these points of connection and positive indications were taken at face value as exemplary of acceptance and integration into Ethiopian culture, I cannot avoid the many informants that provided perspectives presenting Rastafari as problematic, through the importation of cultural practices unacceptable to Ethiopian culture and, of course, the practice of smoking marijuana. From Tsegaye’s belief that I needed “protection” when attending the Rastafari celebration for Haile Selassie’s birthday to the perceived danger of drug use, the Rastafari are seen as a threat to Shashemene and Ethiopian society.

The threat of marijuana

While in Shashemene, I observed both Rastafari and Ethiopian youth smoking marijuana, or what Rastafari call *ganja*. It was ubiquitous to the extent that when strangers were among the Rastafari, *ganja* was often offered to them. Ethiopian youth would also offer the plant on the street to tourists, peddling it as “high grade,” a familiar Jamaican term for marijuana. While used as a sacrament for Rastafari, it was a source of great concern among Ethiopians I interviewed. When speaking to my class at the Afrika Beza College, many students would provide a

positive commentary about the Rastafari, but then immediately express worry about the threat of drugs and see youths as being encouraged by the Rastafari to engage in drug use. “Their presence in Ethiopian society is not bad,” said one young man, “but they are influencing our society in our traditions. Youths are changing their style. They are using drugs – heroin.”²⁴ Another student in my class made the statement that “they are dangerous.” Yet another student continued: “Many people say they use some kind of cocaine – which is called *izt* in Amharic. People hate them because of this.”

Student Daniel Wogu consulted the Shashemene police about problems with the Rastafari community and was told that while the use of marijuana (*ganja*) was illegal in Ethiopia, the police understood that “it is part of their culture.”²⁵ Daniel said that according to the police,

[Y]ears back, there were conflict between Jamaican community and police in Shashemene on the ground that police did not allow them to use it, but through the process of time it became clear that they couldn't stop using it and [they] even challenged the police, raising the use of *chat* [a stimulating leaf] in Ethiopia which is illegal in USA and many other countries. Then the police shifts their strategy to [preventing] the distribution of ganja through out the town and else where.

Marijuana, *ganja*, presents the major challenge to law enforcement in the town, but there is a level of understanding of the ‘cultural’ use of the plant. The fact that the Rastafari reportedly brought up the use of *khat* (or *chat* or *t'chat*) to counter the legal argument is also significant: even as they presented marijuana as illegal and incredibly dangerous, Ethiopians would not address their own cultivation and use of *khat*, a stimulant drug used by chewing the leaves of the *khat* plant. In my observation, *khat* is used by a range of people, from cab drivers to bus passengers to locals sitting and chewing while enjoying a cold soda pop or a cigarette. The use of *khat* was not viewed as socially unacceptable, even though I observed it being used by clearly destitute individuals whose erratic behavior and tell-tale bleary eyes denote a habit or possible addiction to the substance – *khat*, over long periods of time, can limit and prevent sleep.

Instead, the focus was solely on the alleged dangers of marijuana. Marijuana was considered by some students to be as strong or harmful as cocaine or heroin. They saw “hashish” as extremely dangerous. The drug would spoil and harm adolescents. Again providing a positive spin before offering a strong critique, another

24 These comments stem from a discussion with my Africa Beza College English Class, Shashemene, July 24, 2007.

25 Daniel Wogu, email communication, November 16, 2012.

student voiced his opinion: “We like them because they love our country,” he said, “but some of the youths are attracted to them and they are losing their cultures. They are adapting their culture and clothes, and some of them are becoming addicted to drugs.” This comment is in keeping with Ababu’s observation of “cultural” differences between Ethiopians and Rastafari, as he writes about the problem some locals have with “eating and dressing habits” as well as the “smoking of marijuana” (1997: 87). The threat of drug use contributes to anxiety about loss of Ethiopian culture, and then expands to create a stereotype of Rastafari as drug-addicted peddlers of narcotics. Fueled by the danger inherent in their drugs, then, the Rastafari are perceived as presenting an unresolved threat to Ethiopian cultural values.

According to the students, the impact the Rastafari had on society at large, be it through drugs or clothing choice, was the “loss of Ethiopian culture.” One student, even as he had some understanding of the Rastafari’s historical and spiritual connection to Haile Selassie, still expressed a sense that Rastafari practices were incommensurate with Ethiopian culture: “They are here because of the Emperor. Since I like the Emperor very much, I respect their activities here. But as the others said, the drugs or music beats are not going along with the Ethiopian culture.”

Conclusion

It would seem that the concerns of Ethiopians are perhaps not abated through a party to celebrate Haile Selassie’s birthday, the performance of a band or by individuals joining local sports teams. The examples of the “good relationship” between Rastafari and Ethiopians, as presented by Ababu, are not enough to eliminate the Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari as threatening. The *ganja* issue was one that came up in conversation with not only local residents of Shashemene, but also scholars and journalists, always with the tenor that *ganja* was as a danger to Ethiopian society.

Rastafari are of course aware of these perceptions. Bonacci quotes one repatriate as saying “I think they’re still not sure what the hell is we about, dem kinda watching we, they don’t really overs [overstand] the seriousness of InI²⁶ spiritual aspiration and trod. Hard for them as well ... I’m just watching, they have a prob-

26 “InI” is a Rastafari pronoun meaning “me; I; we; mine, myself” (Pollard 2000: 46). It is both singular and plural. It represents the Rastafari philosophy of oneness.

lem, cause as much as they like or dislike we, we love Ethiopia so much they can't help like we!" (2007: 479)

But another stated that "Rasta is the only outside body they [the Ethiopians] accept as their own. That's who they identify as Jamaicans. When the realization will come eventually, it will be the acceptance of Rastafarians" (2007: 478). Both of these statements demonstrate the consciousness that Rastafari have of not being integrated within Ethiopian society. As individuals who have moved to Ethiopia from other countries in the world, they are aware that the Ethiopian population may not understand "what the hell [they] are about," but believe that "eventually" they will be accepted and assume that Rastafari are uniquely able to connect and integrate into Ethiopian society. These statements show that the Rastafari are conscious of not being accepted in Ethiopian society. Members of the royal family focus on the Rastafari as promoters of Ethiopia and see the church as Haile Selassie's gift of thanks. Ethiopian Orthodox priests, for their part, believe that the Rastafari will "eventually" accept Christ over Haile Selassie. Likewise, the Rastafari believe they will "eventually" be embraced and understood.

How will the Rastafari connect and integrate, overcoming perceptions and perspectives that have evolved and developed from very distinct historical, spiritual, and cultural narratives? Some scholars theorize that contact between groups is a solution to threat (Allport 1979; Fetzer 2000). The idea is that if people interact with one another, if they live in the same neighborhoods, and engage in everyday dialogue, prejudice will decrease and the incoming population will no longer be seen as a threat to the host community. Ababu provides some examples of contact, but differing views on religion, history, and culture seem to make acculturation difficult. As Solomon puts it, "strangers in Babylon, Rastafarians are aliens in the Promised Land, too" (2008: 79).

But even though the Rastafari are marginalized, they are attempting to bridge the gap between themselves and the community in which they live. Beyond the points of connection mentioned here, the Rastafari are involved in opening schools, getting involved in development projects, starting businesses, investing in the community. The Ethiopian responses to their efforts have been varied, but are often positive. Through different business and humanitarian initiatives, the Rastafari are gaining cultural citizenship capital even when official citizenship recognition seems elusive. These initiatives offer important means of connection between the Ethiopian and Rastafari narratives, in addition to producing sustainable projects and innovative ideas that fit into Ethiopian culture and the space of Shashemene. Though the Rastafari have yet to find official recognition within Ethiopia, they are still trying.

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Afterword

IVO STRECKER

Initially, this book was to be the first of several compendia offering the results of research conducted within an interdisciplinary project at the Johannes Gutenberg University (Mainz, Germany), but now it has become the last. Maybe this is just as well, because *Ethiopian images of self and other* opens a wider empirical and theoretical perspective than the preceding volumes. *The perils of face. Essays on cultural contact, respect and self-esteem in southern Ethiopia* (2006, edited by Ivo Strecker and Jean Lydall), and *To live with others. Essays on cultural neighborhood in southern Ethiopia* (2010, edited by Echi Gabbert and Sophia Thubauville) both focus geographically on southern Ethiopia while *Ethiopian images of self and other* assumes a pan-Ethiopian, and at times global perspective. Furthermore, the topic of discourse explicitly addresses theoretically and methodologically difficult notions such as *image*, *self*, and *other*.

Already in *The perils of face*, I mentioned that our research was inspired by William Buchanan and Hadley Cantril's study *How nations see each other* (1953), which in turn was based on *Public opinion* (1922) by Walter Lippmann, who first used the word "stereotype." Lippmann understood stereotypes as "pictures in our heads" and argued that these pictures exert a considerable influence over us. They may even cause social conflict. This is why *The perils of face* "aimed at discovering the similarities and differences in people's understanding of themselves and of others, trying to find out whether persons, social groups, societies, nations and even cultures, collide with each other perhaps because people have different 'maps in their minds'" (Strecker 2006: 1). At this stage of our research I stressed the advantages rather than the difficulties associated with concepts such as *image*, *stereotype*, *mental maps*, and the like.

Felix Girke has provided an expert summary of current anthropological theory concerning *stereotypes* in the introduction to his book, yet he "refrained from further defining" *images*, and did not mention the even greater epistemological problems entailed in the concept of the *other*. This was a wise move in order to set a

straight course and cause no conceptual disturbances at the beginning of this study. But my afterword, which I think of as a kind of *wake* of the project, may be a better occasion to waver, and ponder the questions that Felix has not raised.

The dictionary provides two meanings for the noun *wake*. Understood metaphorically, the first relates directly to the conceptual predicaments that I want to discuss below: “*Wake*, a trail of disturbed water or air left by the passage of a ship or aircraft; used to refer to the aftermath or consequences of something” (OED). The second meaning is “a watch or vigil held beside the body of someone who has died, sometimes accompanied by ritual observances including eating and drinking.” One could read this second meaning as an ironic comment on my current mood – on how I mourn the death (or perhaps only a passing paralysis?) of the South Omo Research Center. However, I am not keen on conducting a vigil. Rather, I want to grasp a welcome opportunity to bring to life some of the conceptual enigmas that underlie our research.

Conceiving our project as a ship – and more specifically as a trawler – let us stand on the stern and gaze at the wake. This mighty wave surging up from the rearmost part of the vessel and soon to vanish in a trail of disturbed water is caused by forward movement, and as such may symbolize the success of our project. What bountiful fish we have hauled in: excellent essays collected in three volumes, outstanding dissertations produced at different universities, and further publications presenting a wide range of discoveries. So the journey has been worthwhile. We ventured into unexplored seas guided only by common sense – the naïve realism of ethnography – which meant we used concepts drawn from everyday language, like *peril*, *face*, *esteem*, *respect*, *neighborhood*, *image*, *self* or *other*, and the rich catch we brought home amply proves that this was the right thing to do.

However, the wake may equally well serve as an allegory for other phenomena, particularly its whirls and turbulences. We may say, for instance, that the notion of *image* – used so widely in our project – resembles the whirls and disturbances created by the wake of a ship because it entails unstable, fluid, and turbulent meanings. *Image* may refer to representations of something external or internal, univocal or multi-vocal, and it may be understood as impression, simile, metaphor, semblance, idol, etc., all of which are incomplete, unstable, and, as Stephen Tyler says, “at best symbolic, their fragmented bits but synecdoches of the world’s things” (1978: 92).

The present book abounds with examples of symbolic meanings, but here let me add two further *images of self* (and *other*), which came from my friend Baldambe, when he

likened himself to the whirlwind (*saile*) and the flood (*meri*). The whirlwind sweeps across the hard and sun-parched surface of the land, and the flood thunders along the dry riverbeds of Hamar country. They both move irresistibly and take along with them everything they meet on their way. No one can stop them. And so it was with Baldambe's thought and talk. (Strecker 2013: 1)

Even though the Hamar on the one hand, and readers from other cultural backgrounds on the other, will most likely fill *flood* and *whirlwind* with different contents, it is probable that all of them will be equally impressed and convinced by these images. Following Dan Sperber, Roy Wagner, Paul Grice, and others, one can argue that these images are rhetorically effective because they leave the interpretation open for everyone, that is they invite us to activate our background knowledge and our imagination to conjure the significant parts (synecdoches) of *flood* and *whirlwind* that most effectively represent the whole (Baldambe's image of himself, or our image of Baldambe).

Stephen Tyler has more to say about the complexities that arise when we engage in discourse about *images* (see his book *The said and the unsaid*, 1978), but I now turn to his even more stunning thoughts on the conceptual problems of the *other*. Before I do so I want to point out that we call Stephen the 'dean' of the *Rhetoric culture project* (www.rhetoricculture.org), as well as an intellectual 'mentor' of our research in Ethiopia. In fact, for several semesters both projects were closely aligned: While Felix Girke, Echi Gabbert, Shauna LaTosky, and others worked mainly at the South Omo Research Center in Ethiopia, Christian Meyer, Anna-Maria Brandstetter, and others conducted seminars on rhetoric culture theory at the Institute of Anthropology and African Studies in Mainz. Both projects fed into each other so that eventually not only were the research results from Ethiopia published, but also a number of contributions were made to the Berghahn Books series *Studies in rhetoric and culture*, particularly volume four, *The rhetorical emergence of culture* edited by Christian Meyer and Felix Girke (2011).

Although we were inspired by Stephen Tyler's many thoughts on rhetoric, culture, and ethnography, most of us shied away from some of his more radical writings collected in *The Unspeakable. Discourse, dialogue, and rhetoric in the post-modern world* (1987) and also his essay "Them others – voices without mirrors." The latter was originally presented in 1995 at a conference organized by Karl-Heinz Kohl and Tullio Maranhao, and was published in 1998 in a special issue of *Paideuma* entitled "Anthropology and the question of the other." Tyler's essay opens with two possible relationships between self and other:

1. I have met the other, and it was only me.
2. I have been met by the other, and I was only it. (1998: 31)

Both relationships have been the subject of philosophical reflection, which Tyler recalls as follows:

The active form in sentence one emphasizes the incorporation of the other into *my* subjectivity in the manner of Descartes or Hegel or Schelling. It characterizes, in other words, that general priority of subjectivity and identity in Western philosophy which converts the other's difference into my identity. In contrast, the passive form in sentence two emphasizes the incorporation of my subjectivity into the other's objectivity. It represents the general critique of subjectivity in Western philosophy mounted in variously nuanced, but similar, ways by Heidegger, Blanchot, Lacan, Merleau-Ponty, Baudrillard, and others. (1998: 31)

This paradox is expressed in the theorem "The more we comprehend the other, the less we comprehend the other" and is subsequently "proved" by the following argument:

We cannot comprehend or understand or explain "the other" in its otherness, for inasmuch as we will have succeeded in understanding the other, we will have failed to understand the other, for what we will have understood as the other will no longer have been that other, but will have become the other-as-understood-by-and-for-us. Moreover, since it is the difference of the other that enables our own identity, the decay of the other's difference through our identification of the other as the other-understood-by-and-for-us ultimately undermines our own difference-dependent identity. The more the other is like us, the less we are like ourselves. (1998: 35)

In the light of these predicaments, Tyler has proposed to conceptualize the relationship between self and other neither in the active nor in the passive, but in the middle voice, as in "It will have been a-meeting," where

the neuter *it* evokes the absence of subject and object, or if one prefers, the absence of thematized subject or object. It does not function as a totalizing/neutralization of subject and object, identity and difference or self and other [...] The whole sentence is meant to evoke the idea of the *middle voice* without privileging the idea of the subject [...]. [I]t attempts to avoid the thematizing role of both nouns and verbs by refusing to specify time, *telos*, subject or object, and thus suspend the fundamental opposition of their correlates – subjective/objective, inner/outer, self/other, identity/difference. (1998: 31f)

Here we have arrived at Stephen Tyler's theory of evocation as the appropriate conceptual tool for both writing and reading ethnography (see Strecker/LaTosky 2013). Also, we have reached a point where I may end, for there is nothing more

for me to say, except that the passages quoted above are meant by Stephen Tyler to be therapeutic, that is, to act – like all genuine ethnography – as a “*pharmakon* for our *hubris*” (1998: 50).

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Even if we consider stereotypes superficial, inaccurate, or practically misleading: deploring them will hardly dispel them. The academic task is to gain a clearer understanding of how stereotypy works, through example and analysis. Written by historians and social anthropologists, the chapters in this book provide such examples for the case of Ethiopia.

Images and stereotypes fulfill important cognitive and communicative functions. They are 'good to tell,' they are the basis of joking and of narrative clichés. Also, not all generalizations are pejorative and harmful. Stereotypy works in both ways: generalizations serve to project fears as well as longing; they nurture disdain as much as adoration. What could be our epistemic basis for accepting positive stereotypes and rejecting pejorative ones? This book shelves the questions of the legitimacy or the correctness of images of self and other in favor of empirical assessment of stereotypes. *Ethiopian*

Images of Self and Other is a non-judgmental attempt to trace cultural imagery to its emergence and show its means of persistence. Stereotypes are an inevitable aspect of social life, an aspect that ought to be dealt with as dispassionately (or passionately, as the case may be) as any other aspect of people's lifeworlds.

The aim of this book is to sensitize readers to the variability and the work of imagery in Ethiopia, as it reproduces and sometimes subverts power relations between various 'selves' and 'others.' A book such as this could be written about most places in the world, but the focus on Ethiopia is grounded in its academic genesis as much as in the very real issues faced by this dynamic nation even today. Nation-building cannot be considered complete in Ethiopia, and debates about its future are intense. This book provides some groundwork for better understanding the social dynamics of Ethiopia's cultural diversity.

