From "Subject to Citizen"? History, Identity and Minority Citizenship: The Case of the Mao and Komo of Western Ethiopia

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Thailand was never a colony
And an island is surrounded by a lake or a sea
These are things we can say with some certainty
And you will never escape from your history

The Burning Hell

Glossary

abba	Father, honorary title for a political leader
abba dulla	Or. War leader
abba qoro	Or. Local governor, administrator (cp. *chiqa shum*)
abid	Ar. slave
afaan	Or. mouth, tongue, language
agur	Berta king
akui	Komo village headman
Amam	Outdated blanket term for Komo, Gwama and "Mao"
amole	Salt bars, also traditionally used as currency in Ethiopia
Anfillo Mao	Omotic Mao form the Anfillo area, also "southern Mao"
Anya-Nya	Southern Sudan guerrilla movement
awrajja	Administrative division, corresponding to province
balabbat	Local official, landlord, noble
Bambasi-Mao	Omotic Mao language, mostly around Bambasi, "northern Mao"
barya	Amh. slave
birr	Ethiopian currency
Burun	Outdated blanket term for Nilotic groups from southern Funj

chiqa shum	Village chief and local administrator
däjjazmatch	"Commander of the gate", military title
Därg	From Amharic "committee", short form for the Provisional military administrative council
fadashi	Sub-clan of the Berta
faki	Ar. religious scholar
färänj(i)	Widely used term for white people, Europeans
gäbbar	Tributary; tribute paying peasant
gadaa	Age grade system
gudaficca	Oromo specific form of ritual adoption
gult	Non-hereditary right to tribute; usually bestowed by the Ethiopian emperor or local king on the nobility or clergy
Hozo	Omotic langue, northern Mao
jenub	Ar. "south"; popular term for Southern Sudanese Liberation Fronts (Anya-Nay, SPLA)
kebele	Peasant association, administrative division
Koma	Komo, Gwama or Opuo in Sudan.
mayu	Berta sub-clan; Berta of "mixed Arab descent"
mek	Title for the petty kings, tributary to the Funj sultanate of Sinnar
mooti	Oromo king
neftegna	Soldier-settler, local ruler
kegnazmatch	"Commander of the right", military title
ras	Military title, "head", general

razzia	Slave raid
rist	Land right
sheikh	Ar.: religious or political leader, noble
shui (*shul*)	Local beer
sitt, sitti, asit	Ar. honorary title (female)
Turkiyya	Ottoman-Egyptian rule over the Sudan
wäräda	District
watawit	Sudanese Arab migrant, Arab nobility of Bela Shangul
wäqet	Tribute, measurement, 28 grams
wäyyane	Tgr. "revolt", popular term also for the TPLF
zemech'a	Amh. "campaign", alphabetization campaign of the 1980s

Acronyms & Abbrivations

Amh.	*Amharic*
A/N	*Author's note*
Ar.	*Arabic*
BGPDUF	*Benishangul-Gumuz People Democratic Unity Front*
BPLM	*Benishangul People's Liberation Movement*
EAE	*Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*
E.C.	*Ethiopian Calendar*
EDU	*Ethiopian Democratic Union*
EPRDF	*Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front*
GPDUP	*Gambella People's Democratic Unity Party*
GPLM	*Gambella People's Liberation Movement*
GPLP	*Gambella People's Liberation Party*
IDP	*Internally Displaced Persons*
MKPDP	*Mao Komo Peoples' Democratic Party*
NGO	*Non-Governmental Organization*
OLF	*Oromo Liberation Front*
Or.	*Oromo*
ORA	*Oromo Relief Association*
PA	*Peasant Association*
SIL	*Summer Institute of Linguistics*
SNNPR	*Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region*
SPLA/M	*Sudan Peoples Liberation Army/Movement*
TPLF	*Tigray Peoples Liberation Front*
Tgr.	*Tigrignya*
UNHRC	*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*

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[...] there are many stateless societies where inaccurate definition has simply been the product of ignorance, illusion, or inattention; but very often the 'definition by illusion' has been a definition of larger scale which became permanently adopted for administrative convenience and ultimately accepted by the people themselves. We may thus say that the problems of illusion have frequently been perpetuated by those of transition and transformation.[1]

Social labels in general are best treated as relative terms, which cannot be thought of as having a constant meaning or standard reference, but change in their particular implication and range of reference with the changing social situation. The varying use of these terms through history may be used as an index of changing social and political situations, rather than as an absolute measure of the existence, growth and migration of distinct social bodies.[2]

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[1] Aidan W. Southall, 'The Illusion of Tribe', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 5, no. 1–2 (1970): 45.

[2] Wendy James, 'Social Assimilation and Changing Identity in the Southern Funj', in *Sudan in Africa: Studies Presented to the First International Conference Sponsored by the Sudan Research Unit, 7—12 February 1968*, ed. Yūsuf Fadl Hasan, vol. 2, Sudanese Studies Library (Karthoum: Karthoum University Press, 1985), 197–98.

Introduction

With regard to nation building, national integration and the "making of citizens", Southall's observation is a powerful reminder of the complexities of both the issues of identity and the *administrability* of groups within African states. Similar to post-colonial states elsewhere in Africa, policy-makers in Ethiopia are concerned with local identities, national belonging, and minority statuses, and try to find constitutional arrangements to accommodate these features. Complex and conflicting concepts such as minority rights, indigenous peoples' group-rights and rights to self-determination are at stake.[1] In Ethiopia today, to be politically meaningful and to exercise political agency, an (ethnic) group needs a stable identity which is usually based on a coherent territory and sustained in-group reference based on culture and language. The political framework for the accommodation of diversity in Ethiopia is popularly termed "ethnic federalism".[2] This arrangement led to multiple and overlapping dynamics and conflicts concerning collective identity formation.[3] The Silte are an interesting case in point.[4] Silte political stakeholders achieved the redefining of their status as a group as

[1] David Maybury-Lewis, *Indigenous Peoples, Ethnic Groups, and the State* (Boston-London, et al.: Allyn and Bacon, 2002); Solomon A. Dersso, ed., *Perspectives on the Rights of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples in Africa* (Pretoria: PULP, 2010); Solomon A. Dersso, *Taking Ethno-Cultural Diversity Seriously in Constitutional Design: A Theory of Minority Rights for Addressing Africa's Multi-Ethnic Challenge* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2012).

[2] Concerning Ethiopian federalism I will refer to the provisions made by the post-1991 Ethiopian constitution later and throughout the text. The literature of Ethiopian ethnic federalism is voluminous and can only be reviewed in outline in the later chapters.

[3] For an overview s. Jon Abbink, 'Ethnicity and Constitutionalism in Contemporary Ethiopia', *Journal of African Law* 41, no. 2 (1997): 159–74; Jon Abbink, 'Ethnicity and Conflict Generation in Ethiopia: Some Problems and Prospects of Ethno-Regional Federalism', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 24, no. 3 (2006): 389–413.

[4] The Silte are a predominantly Muslim group; they are speakers of one of the Ethio-semitic Gurage languages. They were historically administered as a sub-group of the Gurage until they successfully claimed autonomy from the Gurage and the "Silte zone" was established as their own administrative entity. See also Gideon P. E. Cohen, 'Language and Ethnic Boundaries: Perceptions of Identity

well as the establishment of the Silte zone within the *Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region* (SNNPR) through a constitutional referendum in 2001. This "critical test for citizenship-expansion" is a good example for the fascinating proximity of group identity and politics in Ethiopia today.[5] Despite this civil achievement, the parameters that make some groups politically successful while other groups are left fragile and fragmented remain to be analysed. Internal power struggles may contribute to these differences as much as the ever-changing patterns of identity formation in a politically *ethnicised* society. One way to approach this is to develop an inclusive understanding for minorities' integration in a multi-ethnic state based on the idea of *historical minority citizenship*: Minorities are not necessarily a cultural given; they are themselves a product of historical as well as socio-political circumstances. An ethnic group can neither be understood without the inherent cultural features and self-understanding, nor without considering the outside forces that enable or influence these groups. Hence the interaction between state and individual frames social memories and an inherent understanding of the position a group holds within a society.

The Mao and Komo, small ethnic minorities, are relatively little studied. Both groups have been subjects of various forms of state formation for centuries. Since 1991 they became subjects of *citizenship formation* in Ethiopia. In the current federal system, the Mao and the Komo have been endowed with formal citizenship rights as minorities. The genesis of their group identities vis-à-vis the historical processes of state encroachment and regional integration, the vertical stratification of the state (institutions) and citizens (locality) as well as the broadcasting of state power between the two are the main concern of this thesis.

Expressed through Attitudes towards the Use of Language Education in Southern Ethiopia', *Northeast African Studies* 7, no. 3 (2000): 199. For insights into the historical identity formation, see e.g. Dirk Bustorf, *Lebendige Überlieferung: Geschichte und Erinnerung der Muslimischen Silt'e Äthiopiens*, vol. 74, Aethiopistische Forschungen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011).
[5] Lahra Smith, *Making Citizens in Africa: Ethnicity, Gender, and National Identity in Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 121.

Minorities and the State in Ethiopia

The conceptual pair *minorities and the state* has inspired much scholarship and the question, *what holds nations together,* moves policy makers, historians and anthropologists worldwide.[6]

 "Minority" is an ambiguous category. Minorities may live in the centre of the state or at its margins; sometimes they are border people, national or religious, gendered or otherwise distinguished from the mainstream society. They are usually numerical minorities, but they may not always be politically marginalized. There are also politically dominant minorities.[7] Usually though, the minority status does also relate to their possibilities regarding the expansion of citizenship. It affects the way in which they can claim rights or have rights; both positively (building on special treatment, consideration and constitutional provision), or negatively framed by marginalization or exclusion. Much scholarship concerning Ethiopian minorities – a category that gained prominence with the *polarization* of ethnicity under the current regime – has looked at the question "how does the state accommodate diversity".[8] Less work has focused on the perspective of the minorities: how do groups deal with the assigned status? Which demands and which benefits do they derive from the political framework? Although both perspectives take "minorities" (read any ethnic group in the Ethiopian context) as a cultural given, the latter viewpoint also includes – in a functional perspective – the presence of state and how it shaped groups and affected

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[6] For an overview on the anthropological arguments, e.g. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, Anthropology, Culture and Society (Pluto Press, 1993). Works on minorities, especially, multicultural approaches have been blossoming. Earlier works include Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Wiley, 1991) or Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London – New York: Verso, 1991). They are both discussed in Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 'Place, Kinship and the Case for Non-Ethnic Nations', *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. 1–2 (2004): 49–62. See also Peter A. Kraus and Peter Kivisto, *The Challenge of Minority Integration: Politics and Policies in the Nordic Nations* (Warsaw - Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015).

[7] Eric P. Kaufmann, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Majority Groups and Dominant Minorities* (London–New York: Psychology Press, 2004).

[8] Cp. Christophe van der Beken, *Unity in Diversity - Federalism as a Mechanism to Accommodate Ethnic Diversity: The Case of Ethiopia*, Recht und Politik in Afrika 10 (Zürich-Berlin: Lit-Verlag, 2012). Outside Ethiopia, much attention has been given to "ethnic" minorities in the framework of majority society in America, the UK or Canada (e.g. compare the works of Kymlicka (e.g. Will Kymlicka, *Human Rights and Ethnocultural Justice* (Swansea: Department of Political Theory and Government, University of Wales, 1998); Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

their internal workings. This is also the main approach taken here: this study is about the broadcasting of state power in the periphery with regard to local patterns of power negotiation as well as of the internal stratification of peripheral people.

Multi-ethnic states, in order to avoid ethnic strife and to achieve national cohesion, are continuously looking for approaches to accommodate "cultural diversity" rather than to assimilate the different ethnic groups into a single national culture. This is a global trend that has significantly influenced the restructuring of Ethiopia after the end of the civil war in 1991.

Ethiopia, a country with approximately 80 ethnic groups, which all experienced different degrees of national and political integration, has gone through a range of state-building conflicts, some of which were fought over perceptions of ethnicity and regional autonomy. As a result of civil conflict, to accommodate the ethnic diversity of the country, the Ethiopian government in 1991, claimed *abyotawi demokrasi*, "revolutionary democracy",[9] as the way to a peaceful future. Its effect was formal power sharing between regions and nominal decentralization popularly known as "ethnic federalism". The establishment of supposedly decentralized, or deconcentrated, regions framed by ethno-linguistic borders is postulated as a "safeguard to stability" for the multi-ethnic country.[10] While ethnic federalism has been hailed an expression of the global approaches to minority empowerment,[11] other authors have described it as a trigger and motif for regional and national conflicts.[12]

The results of the political restructuring, especially in peripheral regions of Ethiopia, are rather mixed.[13] The rapid changes brought about by federalism challenge

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[9] Jean-Nicolas Bach, 'Abyotawi Democracy: Neither Revolutionary nor Democratic, a Critical Review of EPRDF's Conception of Revolutionary Democracy in Post-1991 Ethiopia', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5, no. 4 (2011): 641–63.

[10] Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, The Secretariat of the House of Federation, Nations, Nationalities and Regional Study Team, "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia" (Addis Ababa: Image Advertisement, 2007).

[11] Quite recently e.g. van der Beken, *Unity in Diversity*.

[12] Cp. Abbink, 'Ethnicity and Conflict Generation in Ethiopia'; Asnake Kefale, 'Federalism: Some Trends of Ethnic Conflict and Their Management in Ethiopia', in *The Quest for Peace in Africa: Transformation, Democracy and Public Policy*, ed. Alfred G. Nhema (Utrecht: International Books, 2004), 51–77; Assefa Mehretu, 'Ethnic Federalism and Its Potential to Dismember the Ethiopian State', *Progress in Development Studies* 12, no. 2–3 (2012): 113–3; Merera Gudina, *Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalisms and the Quest for Democracy, 1960-2000* (Maastricht: Shaker Publishing, 2003).

[13] Abbink, 'Ethnicity and Conflict Generation in Ethiopia'; John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*, Eastern Africa Series (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2011).

established power-relations between groups. Accompanied by these changes were high hopes and expectations for political self-determination of historically marginalized groups that have in some places evolved in violent confrontations in the struggle for ownership and control of the regional administrative units.

Statement of the Problem

This study takes the example of the recent experiences of the Mao and Komo as a point of entry to analyze how federalism accommodates minorities in western Ethiopia. It aims at looking at the state of national integration of some of the least studied groups in Ethiopia. The Mao and Komo have experienced unprecedented empowerment and gained political visibility in the current political framework of Ethiopia's ethnic federalism. Their status as recognized minority groups has been manifested in the establishment of the Mao-Komo *special wäräda* (district), their "ethnic territory", as well as in their constitutional endowment with political rights and responsibilities.

The Mao and Komo live in three regions: from south to north in Gambella, Western Wallaga (Oromia) and Benishangul-Gumuz (for an overview on the administratitive division s. map p. 243). They are the smallest ethnic groups in the region. In the federal state of Benishangul-Gumuz both Mao and Komo are officially recognized and share political responsibilities with the Berta, Gumuz and Shinasha. In the state of Gambella, only the Komo appear constitutionally recognized. Here, on the other hand, they are the junior partners of the Anywaa, Nuer, Majangir and Opo. In Oromia, on the other hand, the Mao and Komo hold a rather precarious minority status, unacknowledged by the regional constitution (for a rough sketch of the distribution of ethnic groups, s. p...)

This thesis is concerned with the often conflictual, highly complex and rarely acknowledged situation of *fragile societies* living separated across federal territories. All over Ethiopia federalism has had a huge impact on the peripheries. Political and economic liberalization challenged existing power equilibriums.[14] At the same time the

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[14] James Ellison, '"Everyone Can Do as He Wants": Economic Liberalization and Emergent Forms of Antipathy in Southern Ethiopia', *American Ethnologist* 33, no. 4 (2006): 665–86; Elizabeth E. Watson,

state has never had as tight a grip on the peripheries as under the current regime.[15] Overall the local communities may only play a limited role in the process of reconfiguration of politics.[16] *Meaningful citizenship*[17] is today articulated within the boundaries of the regional federal states. Ethiopia nowadays is divided into nine such states (*killil*). These administrative units are further subdivided in zones, *wärädas* and *qäbäle*. It is not uncommon that each level is assigned to an ethnic group (cp. the Amhara Regional State or Oromia Regional State, etc.), and in some cases the regional constitutions are amended in such a way that ethnic groups can claim zones or *special wärädas* (like in the given case of the Mao-Komo *special wäräda*). These districts are usually on the administrative level of the zone, but due to the small numbers of the ethnic groups are only designated as *wärädas*.[18] Hence on all administrative levels the rights of ethnic groups are potentially territorialized.

But the compartmentalization of political agency falls short in cases where ethnic groups such as the Mao and Komo, hampered by a splintered agency, live as scattered minorities under the constitutions of several regional states. Rarely have studies focused on the politics of fragile minorities with neither the numerical nor the ideological preconditions to struggle for self-determination. Even in the peripheral areas the weak are subjects of the history as told by the strong. Accordingly, highly complex social processes of integration, assimilation and social stratification are simplified in the eyes of current historical and political analysis of the western borderlands,[19] not to mention the relevance for the understanding of such processes

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'Making a Living in the Postsocialist Periphery: Struggles between Farmers and Traders in Konso, Ethiopia', *Africa* 76 (2006): 70–87.

[15] Jon Abbink, 'Ethnic-Based Federalism and Ethnicity in Ethiopia: Reassessing the Experiment after 20 Years', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5, no. 4 (2011): 596.

[16] Lovise Aalen, 'Ethnic Federalism and Self-Determination for Nationalities in a Semi-Authoritarian State: The Case of Ethiopia', *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 13, no. 2 (2006): 243–61; Teferi Abate Adem, '"Decentralised There, Centralised Here": Local Governance and Paradoxes of Household Autonomy and Control in North-East Ethiopia, 1991–2001', *Africa* 74, no. 4 (2004): 611–632.

[17] Cp. Smith, *Making Citizens in Africa*, 42–43. Contrary to Smith (*ibid.*) who focuses on the national citizenship promoted through federal policies, I tend to see citizenship as locally confined and see a national unity as less obvious.

[18] Yonatan Tesfaye Fessha and Christophe van der Beken, 'Ethnic Federalism and Internal Minorities: The Legal Protection of Internal Minorities in Ethiopia', *African Journal of International and Comparative Law* 21, no. 1 (2013): 38.

[19] Cp. also Alessandro Triulzi, 'Battling with the Past. New Frameworks for Ethiopian Historiography', in *Remapping Ethiopia. Socialism and After*, ed. Wendy James, Donald Donham, Eisei Kurimoto, Alessandro Triulzi, Eastern African Studies (Oxford et al.: James Currey et al., 2002), 284.

for the study of regional or national claims for citizenship. I argue that a continuing epistemological problem in the narration of state formation in Ethiopian history, a lack of immersion in historical and political study, as well as the domestic discourse about ethnicity limited to primordial facts, have led to a rather technocratic understanding of current ethnic politics in Ethiopia.[20]

Research Question

Political choice in a plural society is a delicate issue. As much as politics are influenced by diverse local structures, local preconditions also affect political practice. Accordingly, conflicts and contradictions within and between groups, enforced by ethnic federalism, are the result of the up-rooting of pre-existing social relations. Thus, different groups in the same area may both experience political choice and structure differently. These variances make the experience of citizenship expansion essentially difficult to understand, since citizenship promises political equality on a national level.[21] A key to understanding these variances may lie in the socio-historical process of inter-ethnic relations in plural societies. From this hypothesis, the following questions emerge:

- What are the antecedents of group formation in the Ethiopian-Sudanese border area and which historical factors affect group distinction?

- How did the inter-ethnic, as well as, the intra-ethnic relations between majority and minority groups evolve (e.g. Berta-Mao-Komo or Oromo-Mao-Komo relations)? How did the historical emergence and encroachment of the Ethiopian state since ca. the 1880s influence these relations?

- In which way do historical experiences of marginalization among the Mao and Komo, conflate with current approaches of power sharing and political integration?

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[20] I take "technocratic" here to mean the understanding promoted by the political discourse in Ethiopia today, that takes ethnicity as a stable, cultural fact.
[21] Julia Eckert, 'Introduction: Subjects of Citizenship', *Citizenship Studies* 15, no. 3–4 (2011): 309.

Significance of the Study

As a project in regional policy analysis, this study will fit into the field of comparative regional and ethnic studies. As it takes the perspective of the regional minorities and not of the majorities, it brings the periphery closer to the centre and connects national politics with its local effects. The significance of the study may also be measured by its contribution to the analysis of historical interaction of ethnic groups, and describing the models of coexistence between neighbouring groups on a regional level. Thus, it will contribute to the understanding of the driving forces behind inter-ethnic alliance and conflict generation vis-à-vis political choice.

Little attention has been awarded to the study of the region after all, not to mention the protagonists of this study, the Mao and Komo communities. Accordingly, the importance of the study is also based on the acquisition and presentation of ethnographic data on long neglected groups in western Ethiopia.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The Mao and Komo, footnotes in any work on western Ethiopia, are the main focus of this thesis: specifically, their patterns of adaptation to political changes, alliance making and conflict vis-à-vis their neighbours and the state. The study will neither give a full account of all "Mao" groups in Ethiopia nor be able to shed substantial light on the variously pending linguistic questions on the different "Mao" languages. This study addresses such questions in passing, but focuses chiefly on the socio-political developments around the Mao-Komo *special wäräda*. Looking into Gambella and Oromia will benefit the comparison, without presenting results from "deep" stationary field work in all locations of the Mao and Komo. The study is based on multi-sited research but it does not deal with the Koma (Gwama and Komo) across the Sudanese border and limits itself to the Ethiopian Mao (mostly Gwama) and Komo, and will only briefly treat the cross-border issues. With regard to the recent arrival (since 2012) of Sudanese Koma in the refugee camps in the Mao-Komo *special wäräda* the study can neither give substantial information.

"Western Ethiopia" – The Geographical and Demographic Setting

Along the north-western border with Sudan extends the regional state of Benishangul-Gumuz of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Together with the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) and Gambella it is one of the constitutionally recognised multi-national states of Ethiopia. In 1991 the region was amalgamated from the two former administrative regions Beni (formerly known as Bela) Shangul, or the Asosa *awrajja*, later forming parts of Wallaga, as well as the former Mätäkkäl district. Benishangul-Gumuz today comprises three zones (districts) and one *special wäräda* (sub-district). These are Mätäkkäl, Kamashi, Asosa and the Mao-Komo *special wäräda* (for the detailed admintrative division of the regional state, map on p. 243). The constitutionally recognized population comprises Gumuz, Berta, Shinasha, Mao and Komo. Additionally, many Oromo and Amhara live in the region. My research largely focused on the Asosa zone with the Bambasi *wäräda* as well as on the Mao-Komo *special wäräda* (especially the *kebeles* [sub-districts] of Ya'a, Banga, Yangu, Mimi Akobo, and Lakki) and also Bambasi (with Mutsa).[22]

Neighbours of the Mao and Komo, and deeply interwoven with the history of Benishangul itself, are the Berta. The Berta are speakers of a Nilo-Saharan language. They live across the border in Sudan also (where they are often referred to as *Funji*.)[23] There is a marked Sudan-Arabic influence recognizable in food habit, dress code, etc. and a strong lexical influence of Arabic on the Berta language (the self-designation of the language is *rutan'a*, the Arabic word for a (non-Arabic) local language). The Berta originated from the multi-ethnic Funj sultanate (1504–1821). They migrated into the Ethiopian highlands approximately during the late 17th century. According to their oral traditions there they first encountered the Gwama (around the river Tumat) which they pushed further south.[24] Their country of origin lies between Fazughli and Roseires in present day Sudan.

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[22] While I think in parts this thesis would have benefited from more stationary and long-term observation in designated areas of the Tongo *wäräda*, I console myself with the fact that my research has profited from the coverage of largely separated settlements of the Mao and Komo in different areas.

[23] A UNHCR *Monthly Statistical Report for Tongo Refugee Camp* counted approximately 10,000 Funji/Funj in September 2012.

[24] Etymologically reference is made to the Gwama word *tubatob* ("to drink"), which became Tumat. For this oral tradition of the Berta see Alessandro Triulzi, 'Myths and Rituals of the Ethiopian Bertha', in *Peoples and Cultures of the Ethio-Sudan Borderlands*, ed. M.L. Bender (East Lansing, MI: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1981), 179–205. See also Alfredo González-Ruibal,

Once in the region the Bertha did not settle together. Rather each kindred group or clan, led by his own *agur*, settled in a scattered way mostly on tops of hills and low mountain areas. Traditions refer casually to the scattering of the new migrants and to their settling on different hilltops. This was probably due to several reasons, among which the coming at different stages and the need to settle in hideaway places with natural shelter form external threat.[25]

Sudanese Arab traders followed the Berta, which led to the spread of Islam in the region. The influx of these traders, who knew the Berta as *jäbällawin* (Arab. "mountaineers"), led to mixed marriages from which emerged a feudal ruling class that came to be known as the *watawit*. When the Ethiopian Empire expanded and incorporated the *sheikhdoms* of Bela Shangul in 1898, *sheikh* Khojali al-Hasan became the most influential regional ruler. Khojali was a vassal of Addis Ababa until the 1930s and managed to maintain a semi-autonomous rule over Benishangul.

As the second biggest group in Benishangul, the Berta today occupy many political posts in the capital Asosa. The rural population depends on subsistence agriculture based mainly on sorghum and maize. Christianity generally plays a subordinate role in the region and the Berta are predominantly Muslim.

The main contestant for political power and the numerically most important group in Benishangul-Gumuz are the Gumuz. Their settlements extent north of the Berta, in the area of Mätäkkäl as well as in the Dabus valley.[26] Like the Berta, the Gumuz are also speakers of a Nilo-Saharan language. The Gumuz of Gubba also formed an aristocratic class with historical links to the Funj sultanate. The last leader of Gubba, *sheikh* Hamdan, also known as *däjjazmatch* Banja, was, like Khojali, a vassal of the central government in Addis Ababa.[27] His palace was used as a fort during the Italian occupation and was later bombed by British air raids during the War of Liberation

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An Archaeology of Resistance: Materiality and Time in an African Borderland (Lanham, ML, et al.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 219.

[25] Alessandro Triulzi, *Salt, Gold, and Legitimacy: Prelude to the History of a No-Man's Land, Belā Shangul, Wallaggā, Ethiopia (Ca. 1800-1898)* (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1981), 30.

[26] Meron Zeleke, *The Mother and the Bread Winner*, Spektrum: Berliner Reihe Zu Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft Und Politik in Entwicklungsländern 103 (Münster-Berlin: Lit-Verlag, 2010).

[27] Peter Garretson, 'Manjil Hamdan Abu Shok (1898-1938) and the Administration of Gubba', in *Modern Ethiopia: From the Accession of Menelik II to the Present* (Rotterdam: Balkema, 1982), 197–210.

(1941).[28] Contrary to the other Nilo-Saharan groups of the region, the Gumuz have, to a certain degree, retained the tradition of sister-exchange marriage. With the penetration of Christianity and government policies the Gumuz have increasingly given up this tradition. Contrary to the Berta, many Gumuz still follow traditional religions. Islam is most prominent among the Gumuz of Gubba. On the day to day political and socio-economic scene the Mao and Komo have little contact with the Gumuz. Culturally the traditional Gumuz may be the closest to the traditional Gwama and Komo in the area.

Another and more important neighbouring group in the history of the Mao and Komo are the Oromo. Many Oromo have for a long time settled in areas now designated as Benishangul-Gumuz. Similarly, there are major settlements of Mao and Komo in the areas now under administration of Oromia and furthermore there are several border disputes between the two administrative regions, of Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia that have a repercussion on the life of the different groups in the area. Prominently in this research the border dispute between Begi and Tongo will be discussed. This dispute looms large in the regional politics and is informative not only to understand the old territorial claims between the Oromo leader Jote Tullu and *sheikh* Khojali, but it also elucidates the distribution of the Mao and Komo as regional minorities across several regional borders. One can say that the migration of the Oromo who reached the area in the 18th century had a tremendous impact on the demographic situation in the area. The Oromo of western Wallaga remember the Komo, Gwama and "Mao" as the original inhabitants of the area. In Oromia I specifically made research in the Begi *wäräda* (in the *kebeles* of Qama and Shonge), of Qellem zone, and I was able to make further small investigations in Gidami, in Dambi Dollo, and Muggi, as well as in Qama Shandi, Guma Gara Arba (cp. map. 247).

From Dambi Dollo one can reach Gambella through Muggi after several hours on the bus. The serpentine road winds down towards the lowlands of Gambella. Behind the federal border between Oromia and Gambella the small town of Bonga[29] is situated. In and around Bonga one may find a scattered community of Gwama speakers, who are referred to as Komo officially; some of the towns-people though

[28] Alfredo González-Ruibal, 'Fascist Colonialism: The Archaeology of Italian Outposts in Western Ethiopia (1936–41)', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 14, no. 4 (2010): 561.

[29] Bonga appears as an area of gold panning and was a significant refugee centre during the Southern Sudanese Civil war. Bonga was abandoned as a refugee site in 2005 almost immediately with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan.

have a strong link with the Oromo population from Illubabor and refer to themselves as Oromo (or "black Oromo"). From Bonga it is another hour ride to reach Gambella. Gambella town has a significant Komo population. In Gambella the Komo count as one of the five indigenous groups, together with the Anywaa, the Nuer, the Majangir and the Opuo. Historically the Anywaa and the Komo lived together in close proximity. The Nuer on the other hand were historic enemies, who were also involved in the slave trade as middlemen.[30] In Gambella town, towards its eastern edge, there is a place called *burr komo*, "the hole of the Komo", which is slowly being reclaimed as a Komo settlement. From Gambella the road leads to Itang and southeast of Itang one will find the settlement of Pokung. Pokung is primarily a Komo inhabited *kebele*.

Entering the Field: Methodology and Research Design

The Mao are not one group but many. The term is ascribed to and used by the Gwama, the Hozo, Sezo, the Bambasi Mao, and beyond the area of investigation, also the Mao of Anfillo.[31] Mao is both an ethnic term, as well as a social ascription. As a social label the term is accepted by the political elite, it symbolizes a certain degree of coherence with political territory, and a group idea in the political arena of ethnicity and group definition. The term Mao is also one of the foremost complicating factors for ethnographic work in the region. It is sustained by the governmental discourse, but also by the encounter between different groups. Approaching oral data through such labels obstructs to a certain degree the knowledge we may gain. One may hear, 'the Mao did this and that, lived there and there', instead of referring to Gwama, Komo or else. It made it difficult also, especially in the beginning of the research, to understand exactly who one was talking to. Information such as "we speak *Afaan Mao*" ("the mouth/tongue of Mao" in Oromo) was difficult to comprehend. Sometimes people would say that they spoke *Afaan Mao-Komo*, an amalgamation and clear signal that they were referring to the identity discourse of the current administration in the Mao-Komo *special wäräda*.

[30] Douglas Johnson, 'On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan, 1898-1936', in *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*, ed. Donald Donham and Wendy James (Cambidge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 219–45.

[31] I will attempt to provide a more detailed differentiation of the groups in the second chapter.

When I first started to ask for 'the Komo' in Gambella I was conducting research mostly among the Anywaa and the migrant communities from the highlands.[32] The Anywaa put a relatively strong claim to ownership over the region while the migrant settlers, workers and shop keepers, who settled in Gambella since the 1980s, had a strong sense of ownership of Ethiopia as such. Clearly there collided very different interpretations of citizenship, ownership and belonging. In retrospect, it is not so surprising that neither group seemed to know or care much about the Komo, a small group with few people in the government and the administration, and a rather weak political agency. The Komo lived dispersed among the Anywaa, and for the highlanders they just did not seem to exist. I was able to make a lengthy interview with a Komo elder, on which, together with the review of the available sources and literature, I based my article in the *EAe*.[33] I was less lucky to obtain any information from, and very little about, the "Kwama" (the Gwama of this thesis). In fact, I was convinced I would be able to interview Gwama who I thought were living in the Bonga refugee camp, not too far from Gambella, when I conducted a series of interviews and group discussions in Bonga with people who referred to themselves as "Burun", who spoke in fact the same language as the "Opuo" in Gambella. In 2006, I had the opportunity to follow a group of Anywaa pastors of the local *Mekane Yesus Church* for several days to Wanke *kebele*, where a major settlement of the Opuo was to be found.

Only in 2009 I began to do research in the area south of Asosa, starting from Bambasi where I met Bambasi Mao who referred to their language as *mawes aats' tose*,[34] to Tongo, the capital of the Mao-Komo *special wäräda*, where my first encounter was with people who looked nothing like the *Mao* I had met before and who refer to themselves as *Begi Mao*, or *Arab Mao* or *Mana Dawd* (Oro. "House of Dawd/David"). The people I spoke to referred to a Sudanese Arab origin. In Begi itself the Mao I met referred to themselves as *sit shwala* (Gwama "black people"). I consecutively visited the outlying areas below Tongo where the Gwama refer to

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[32] This was research done for my Master's thesis at the University of Hamburg carried out for six months in 2005 and 2006.

[33] I contributed three articles on the Gambella minorities basically derived from interviews with locals in Gambella and Bonga as well as on the dispersed literature at my disposal then (*EAe* III, 'Komo: Komo, ethnography' (S. Hummel and A. Meckelburg), *EAe* III, 'Kwama: Kwama, ethnography' (A. Meckelburg) and *EAe* IV, 'Opuo: Opuo, ethnography' (A. Meckelburg).

[34] Cp. Michael Ahland, 'Aspects of Northern Mao Phonology', *Linguistic Discovery* 7, no. 1 (2009).

themselves as Komo or Gwama and rejected the name *sit shwala*. Back to Gambella I realized that the Komo of Bonga spoke Gwama and understood themselves as *black Oromo* and felt no connection to the Komo, who they were lumped with. All these encounters, and many more snippets of inquiry into the history and the self-perception of the Mao and Komo, will feed the theme and topics I will present in the second chapter.

In Ethiopia today, much of the local and domestic socio-political discourse is about culture, identity and history. All over the country people are involved in defining their culture; on cultural festivals (Nations and Nationalities Day, etc.) they perform what defines their culture. *Bahəl* (ባህል), the Amharic word used in the political discourse on culture, largely comprises primary features, such as dances, dresses, food habits, drinks, material culture, etc. Often it has an historical connotation to it, and speaks of cultural traditions that need to be preserved or revived.

Ethnicized culture has a great revival in Ethiopia. Mao and Komo politicians are involved in standardizing the culture of their groups. Musical instruments, cultural artefacts, dance, and foremost the languages, are developed, created and re-created to identify ethnic groups as such and it is not different with the Mao and Komo. There are attempts to revive the language and make it available for primary education also. It was an interesting time, I suppose, for entering the field because of this interest in identity and history. This was particularly motivating in an environment where ethnicity is traditionally of little importance; all Mao I met were usually multi-lingual with a mixed ancestry while they paid little attention to the politics of identity in present day Ethiopia.[35] The Mao are used to retaining their culture against the neglect of their majority neighbours and live amongst them as historical minorities, a fact that Alfredo Gonzaléz-Ruibal recently referred to as cultural "mimicry".[36]

I was working closely with one person who was so important for the undertaking that I want to give his introduction some space here: Andinet Arega Woga is the son of an Oromo teacher and a Komo woman. He lived with his mother in Gambella, and grew up, socially a Komo, while he was also connected to the Oromo. Through the language and as a young modern urban man, he also integrated into the Amharic-

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[35] This is of course a generalization and does not account for people who worked for, or were close to the government; people who, to a certain degree, were able to gain resources from fostering the discourse on a political identity.

[36] I am referring to the chapter-title "Of Mimicry and Mao" in González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 241.

speaking urban milieu of Gambella. And by outsiders he was mostly defined as an Anywaa, who he also identifies with to some degree. A painful episode of identification, he once confirmed to me, was the 2003 massacre in Gambella, when he was lumped with Anywaa men and fled together with other youngsters to Pochalla.

Andinet was very eager to discover the history of the Komo with me and fascinated to meet many culturally related groups in Benishangul as well. Andinet, who worked as a teacher in the Komo *kebele*, took much interest in the cultural forms and features, instruments and materials we discovered during our travels. Sometimes, I have to say, Andinet was much more eager to learn from people, than I was, especially when my exhaustion from walks between villages was just overwhelming, while Andinet's energy levels seemed not to have suffered at all.

Between 2011 and 2014 Andinet and I travelled between Asosa, Tongo, Begi, Gidami, Gambella and Pokung and many adjacent areas, and often to outlying villages. In all the years the actual time spent in the field has not exceeded 12 months. In this time, I did over 100 interviews with male elders, youngsters and elderly women. We conducted small censuses in Pokung and Gambella, and we visited 15 villages and *kebeles* for durations between one day and several weeks.

The study is set in a context of multi-method-approaches, and outlined as a project in "political ethnography".[37] I correlate methods of history and political science with those of anthropology. I contend, that a political science study should indeed "derive inspiration from anthropology's self-interrogation".[38] The study is based on the interpretation of sources and the collection of empirical, qualitative data from the field. The sources are scant, but some materials I gathered on the way are presented for the first time. Sources used in this thesis are historical letters from the regional administration to the government (some kept in the Asosa museum, others in the private archives of families). I was also able to obtain a relatively large body of correspondence between the regional administrations of Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia. Furthermore, I did archival research in the British Foreign Record Office (in

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[37] Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

[38] Lisa Wedeen, 'Reflections on Ethnographic Work in Political Science', *Annual Review of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (2010): 259.

Kew in London) focusing mostly on materials related to slavery in the region. Likewise, I made use of the Arkell papers stored in the SOAS library.[39]

I also consulted the existing travel reports, of which Juan Maria Schuver's work was the most helpful.[40] But also Pellegrino Matteucci[41], Romolo Gessi[42] and to a certain degree also Enrico Cerulli's works[43] were of importance here. I will compare my own thoughts with the existing literature and briefly review other writings as I go along. A fascinating source of data are the field notes of Professor Alessandro Triulzi, who generously allowed me to make use of his detailed interview transcripts of the 1960s and 1970s.[44]

Apart from the review of sources the study draws chiefly upon the methodology of oral history[45] and ethnographic observation. The bulk of the data comes from qualitative interviews, genealogical reconstruction and biographical analysis of the lives and personal history of elders, but also from 'stakeholders' like politicians and administrators. On the settlement level, network analysis was employed to study the economic and social interaction between groups. Additionally, basic linguistic analysis was used to unravel the blanket term 'Mao' and differentiate it into linguistic/ethnic sub-divisions.

The use of oral data is inevitable in an area where most history is preserved in the memory of the people. The Mao and Komo have been and are to a large extent an oral society. History is handed down orally through the generations.[46] Owing to the limited time spent in the field and the obvious language barrier, I was not able to record many oral traditions per se. The majority of data in this thesis is based on the

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[39] I am taking a slightly different look at these British materials but they have previously been used both by Bahru Zewde and Alessandro Triulzi (Bahru Zewde, 'Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935' (University of London, 1976).; Triulzi, *Salt, Gold, and Legitimacy*.

[40] Wendy James, Douglas Johnson, and Gerd Baumann, eds., *Juan Maria Schuver's Travels in North-East Africa, 1880 - 1883* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1996).

[41] Pellegrino Matteucci, *Sudan e Gallas* (Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1879).

[42] Romolo Gessi, *Seven Years in the Soudan: Being a Record of Explorations, Adventures, and Campaigns Against the Arab Slave Hunters* (London: S. Low, Marston & Company, 1892).

[43] Enrico Cerulli, *Etiopia occidentale: (dallo Scioa alla frontiera del Sudan) note del viaggio, 1927-1928* (Roma: Sindacato Italiano Arti Grafiche, 1930).

[44] Of course I indicate his field notes whenever I use them.

[45] Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, Penguin University Books (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973); Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

[46] 3/2009; 16 November 2009, Bambasi, Mao elder.

oral history of individuals. I make a distinction between oral history and oral tradition based on Jan Vansina, who stated that traditions are based knowledge that is handed down from generation to generation and oral history is based on what a person has seen or heard in his or her lifetime.[47] Despite its subjectivity and bias, oral data is crucial to understand the perceptions they carry for the narrator.[48] My approach was to use semi-structured interviews, in which I would regularly come back to historical questions pending from other preceding interviews, in order to build a web of information which helped me cross check several aspects. A recurring theme was to ask for lifelines: the biography, the place of birth, the parents, personal and group migrations, major events in the clan and the lineage, marriage, children etc. The interview partners were mostly approached because they were recommended by people for their specific historical knowledge, or random discussions developing out of group meetings.

My approach was multi-sited.[49] Hence while this approach was crucial in getting a regional overview both on the settlement patterns as well as on the distribution of memories, it also came at the expense of depth and historical accuracy. An interview once done in a village I visited only for a couple of days could not necessarily be followed up the next time. Interesting to note was the respondents' relative disinterest in history. History of the *longue durée* is something that I found hard to dig out during my several short visits. While the majority groups (such as the Berta) seem to be more influential in their historical imagination, the Mao and Komo have a significantly ahistorical approach. This in itself is a sign of their constant denigration and marginalization. Despite this, I found people to be interested in talking about and sharing with me more general historical occurrences – especially migrations, or even the traumas of slavery – as well as clan distributions and cultural traits (hunting, agriculture, etc.). The accessibility of data raises important problems for the research. The Mao and Komos' approach to history also reflects the groups' discontent with the state today. Hirsch and Steward indicated,

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[47] Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, 13.
[48] C. A. Hamilton, 'Ideology and Oral Traditions: Listening to the Voices "From Below"', *History in Africa* 14 (1987): 67.
[49] Mark-Anthony Falzon, *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research* (New Haven-London: Ashgate Publishing, 2012).

> [I]n short, history is a culturally constructed practice. Ethnohistorians have, however, spent more time collecting or piecing together substantive historical narratives and presenting them according to a Western conception of history than they have analyzing local historicity.[50]

The conception of history itself poses significant questions to the position the Mao and Komo give themselves in society.

Using Lewellen's conception of the "field" and the "arena", my field is, "the area of political activity" that deals with constitutional politics, memory and identity.[51] The arena consists of pin-points in a wide regional system that ranges from Gambella through western Wallaga to Benishangul. Conflicts related to ethnic identity, ownership, citizenship rights, the re-modelling of established forms of power and the forging of a "Mao-Komoness", emerge in a highly dynamic and complex poly-ethnic environment. The thesis is inspired by Victor Turner's social drama idea, although I am taking a rather historical stand on it.[52] I am interested in the histories and personal accounts of individuals as well as in their current involvement in politics and decision-making. Some personalities that shaped today's social memory comprise figures like Jote Tullu of Leeqa Qellem and *sheikh* Khojali al-Hasan. Their legacies are foundational for the identity of the respective groups and their memories have to be *renegotiated* in regard to *current* claims or ownership, belonging and citizenship. The negative image of *sheikh* Khojali as a slave dealer on the one hand and his seminal importance for the regional history and his position in the identity discourse of the *watawit* descendants (today partly Berta political elites) concern the memories of all groups, the Berta as well as the descendants of slaves. Such border chiefs and rulers can be analysed in terms of Bailey's "middlemen" in a centre-periphery perspective.[53] Another such middleman was *mek* Kutu Gulja,[54] a lower landlord of the region and

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[50] Eric Hirsch and Charles Stewart, 'Introduction: Ethnographies of Historicity', *History and Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (2005): 267.

[51] Ted C. Lewellen, *Political Anthropology: An Introduction*, 2. ed (Westport, Connecticut London: Bergin & Garvey, 1992), 102.

[52] Victor W. Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of [a] Ndembu Village Life*, Classic Reprints on Anthropology (London: Bloomsbury, 1996).

[53] Frederick G. Bailey, *Stratagems and Spoils: A Social Anthropology of Politics*, Classic Reissue (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 167.

[54] Kutu was first mentioned by Grottanelli (Vinigi Grottanelli, *I Mao. Missione etnografica nel Uollega occidentale*, Pubblicazioni del Centro studi per l'Africa orientale italiana della Reale Accademia d' Italia 5 (Roma: Reale accademia d'Italia, 1940); s. also Abdussamad H. Ahmad, 'Trading in Slaves in

"king of the Mao",[55] who is very important for the invention of a founding figure of some segments of the Mao and Komo today.[56] His grandson *Abba* Harun is today known as the "father of the Mao-Komo *special wäräda*": Harun was the lower landlord of the area and administrator of the Mao and Komo, before he had to flee when the socialist government started to imprison the feudal landlords in the 1970s. As an ally of the monarchist Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), seeking refuge in Sudan, he raided Begi with a small army of Mao and Komo. By the fame gained through this assault, and with the fall of the *Därg* government, he could place himself and the "cause" of the Mao and Komo in the political bargaining process of the emerging multi-ethnic region of Benishangul-Gumuz and advocate for an ethnic territory and autonomy of the Mao and Komo. I am interested in the middle-men between centre and periphery who became regional elites and whose history often relates to trajectories of power, and social stratification within groups. Descendants of such elites are often still found in political posts in the regional arena.

What others have said

In the secondary ethnographic literature the Mao and Komo exist largely in footnotes. The Koma (Gwama and Komo) have been subject of some comparative work of Wendy James on Uduk.[57] She also treated the Mao and Komo in a seminal paper, which unfortunately was never officially published.[58] In this paper she has already outlined the general idea of this thesis. She eloquently dealt with the making of

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Bela-Shangul and Gumuz, Ethiopia: Border Enclaves in History, 1897-1938', *The Journal of African History* 40, no. 3 (1999): 433–46).

[55] Abdussamad H. Ahmad, 'Trading in Slaves in Bela-Shangul and Gumuz, Ethiopia'.

[56] "Capo dei Mao, il Mekh Kutu Golscia", s. Grottanelli, *I Mao. Missione etnografica nel Uollega occidentale*, 78.

[57] Wendy James, *'Kwanim Pa: The Making of the Uduk People. An Ethnographic Study of Survival in the Sudan-Ethiopian Borderlands* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); Wendy James, *The Listening Ebony: Moral Knowledge, Religion, and Power Among the Uduk of Sudan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[58] Wendy James, 'From Aboriginal to Frontier Society in Western Ethiopia', in *Working Papers on Society and History in Imperial Ethiopia. The Southern Periphery from 1880 to 1974*, ed. Donald Donham, Wendy James (Cambridge: African Studies Center – Cambridge University Press, 1980), 37–67.

frontier societies and looked at the Mao and Komo as proponents of two similar but parallel frontier processes.

The first longer treatment of the Koma in Sudan was published by the colonial administrator Frank D. Corfield.[59] But the Koma of Sudan (mostly Gwama and Komo) have been the subject of a more detailed and fascinating study of Joachim Theis.[60] Theis' seminal treatment of the Koma is based on prolonged fieldwork and starts with the idea of the self-reconfiguration of the Koma as an ethnic group. Theis opens his book with a long narrative of the Koma's recent past, their society torn to pieces by slave raids and later the civil war in Sudan. He portrays the life world of the Sudanese Koma, their systems of kinship and marriage, their cultural ecology, etc. Of paramount importance for my own work is not only his historical approach, resembling in many ways the findings of my own research and hence supporting the general aspects of the history of slavery; more important in that regard is the portrayal of the systems of marriage, based on sister-exchange practiced in the Sudan, but lost in the areas of own research. Theis's description of the systems of kinship builds a major source of comparison for my work.

At the beginning of my research I largely felt overburdened by the perceived need to accumulate data portraying two (and more) groups, their past and anthropological present. I had already relied heavily on the works of Alfredo González-Ruibal, but his book came to my rescue.[61] As a state-of-the-art approach, the book has become the main source of comparison for my work, and a point of departure for the thesis presented here. His book and my thesis share similar entry points but most importantly I have found it a reliable source of reference, and a medium to refer the reader to when it comes to the ethnographic past and the material culture. I would not have been able to show these so sensibly as the archaeological anthropology of Alfredo González-Ruibal has done.

Noteworthy is the overlapping of the socio-linguistic research carried out by Klaus-Christian Küspert in the area around Tongo and Begi.[62] Collaboration with Küspert in 2012 and 2014 and our joint field trips have broadened my understanding of the

[59] Frank Corfield, 'The Koma', *Sudan Notes and Records* 21 (1938): 123–165.

[60] Joachim Theis, *Nach Der Razzia: Ethnographie und Geschichte der Koma*, Sudanesische Marginalien 3 (München: Trickster, 1995).

[61] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*.

[62] Klaus-Christian Küspert, 'The Mao and Komo Languages in the Begi-Tongo Area in Western Ethiopia: Classification, Designations, and Distribution', *Linguistic Discovery* 13, no. 1 (2015).

linguistic history and landscape of the region and provided me with a lot of comparative data for my own research.[63]

Other linguists, too had an important impact on the study of the different groups in the region.[64] Historians such as the aforementioned Bahru Zewde and Alessandro Triulzi were of seminal importance for the regional history, although they did not specifically treat the Mao and Komo communities.[65] The Italian ethnographer Vinigi Grottanelli has presented the only full ethnographic study on the Mao, whom he subdivided into the *northern Mao* and the *southern Mao*.[66] This broad distinction he made was mostly geographical, but the northern Mao of Grottanelli are the Omotic-speaking Mao in the area of Begi and the southern Mao are the Anfillo Mao. In doing so Grottanelli overlooked, integrated and confused the Nilo-Saharan groups and the Omotic groups. But together with the aforementioned travel reports, his work builds a bridge between the 19th century and the 20th century and has allowed research to be led into the 21st century. Indispensable also for my understanding of the region and ruling elites were some unpublished materials like the B.A. theses by Atieb Dafallah and Rasheed Mohammed.[67] Furthermore, the short B.A. thesis on the "Komo of Gidami" by Yasin Mohammed poses some serious questions on the pace in which memories and social structures change.[68] Another crucial B.A. thesis was prepared by Yirga Tesemma on the political developments in the Asosa *awrajja*. This work offers a huge

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[63] Obviously I will identify the joint field trips and the impact to Küspert's fieldwork as I go along.

[64] Noteworthy are also the works of Bender (especially Lionel Marvin Bender, 'The Beginning of Ethnohistory in Western Wellegga: The Mao Problem', in *Patterns in Language, Culture, and Society: Sub-Saharan Africa. Proceedings of the Symposium on African Language, Culture and Society, Ohio State University, April 11, 1975*, ed. Robert K. Herbert, Working Papers in Linguistics 19 (Columbus, Ohio, 1975), 125–41) as well as Harold Fleming, 'The Importance of Mao in Ethiopian History', in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies: University of Lund, 26-29 April 1982*, ed. Sven Rubenson (Uppsala et al.: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies et al., 1984), 31–38.

[65] Bahru Zewde, 'Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935'; Triulzi, *Salt, Gold, and Legitimacy*.

[66] Grottanelli, *I Mao. Missione etnografica nel Uollega occidentale*; Vinigi Grottanelli, 'Materiali di Lingua Coma', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* 5 (1946): 122–155.

[67] Atieb Ahmad Dafalla, 'Sheikh Khojale Al-Hasan and Bélā Shängul' (BA thesis, Haile Selassie I University, 1973); Rashed Mohammad, 'A Biography of Däjjazmač Abdulrahim Khojele' (B.A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1995).

[68] Yasin Mohammed, 'The Komo of Gidami' (B.A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1982).

appendix of original documents attesting for the relations between Asosa and Addis Ababa in the early 20th century.[69]

How this thesis is structured

After the introduction, Chapter 1 will give a short overview on the theoretical perspectives of this study. Based on the idea of the *African frontier* I will introduce the history of the Mao and Komo as a continued frontier process influenced by overlapping and conflicting patterns of state-making, territorialization and ethnization of politics and identity. To capture this, Chapter 1 will also provide the definitions of ethnicity and citizenship, etc. applied. The main theoretical approach is Kopytoff's African frontier thesis: looking at the production of frontiersmen, the movement of groups seems to lend a focal point of entry for the complex social processes that the Mao and Komo underwent. Examples will be provided by the encroachment of the Oromo frontiersmen, the Berta frontiersmen as well as the state frontier, extending into the heartland of the Mao and Komo, which will be analysed in more detail in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 provides a brief overview on the ethnography of the Mao and Komo. Chapter 3 opens the chronological presentation of the history of the Mao and Komo and inter-ethnic encounters in the region. It offers a short overview of the region before the incorporation of the territory into the Ethiopian state. Here Chapter 4 connects to and presents the *making of a periphery* in a state-making perspective, focusing on the subject status of the Mao and Komo in the regional integration under the pretext of tributes and taxations.

Chapter 5 gives a more detailed background on the history of slavery as a motive in the centre-periphery relations. Chapter 6 and *7* return to the processes of state formation, modernization and the political changes in the periphery between 1941 and 1974. Chapter 7 also discusses the Civil War and the cross-border insurgencies in the Sudan as a formative as well as traumatic chapter in the history of the Mao and Komo. Chapter 8 connects the presentation of the historical events to the present political system. First it discusses the practices of memory as a formative act of the inter-ethnic

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[69] Yirga Tesemma, 'The Process of Political Integration in Asosa-Beni Šangul/Gumuz: A Case Study' (B.A. thesis, Haile Selassie I University, 1973).

relations in the post-1991 regional setting. This presentation eventually leads to the appraisal about the political present of the Mao and Komo. Notwithstanding the frontier-history, the post-1991 government has opted for border demarcations to tame the western borderlands. Thus, towards the end of the study I will discuss some structural dilemmas that emerge from these modern federal arrangements in a former frontier zone: territorial arrangements in the federal structure as well as the emphasis on ethnicity create questions for citizenship and identity in terms of regional ownership and belonging; mobility has always been a main feature of the political economy of the region and at the same time elites have always fought for territorialisation and border control.

Notwithstanding the creativity by which the Mao and Komo react to the contestation of belonging and identity, the current trend to formalize territorial control in *killil* and *wäräda* and *kebeles* is the main obstacle in their quest for identity.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Assumptions – The Western Ethiopian Frontier, Identities and Citizenship

Studying citizenship in rural Africa requires understanding the historical relation between the people and the state. The patterns of state formation will ultimately define the perceptions of belonging of a people.[1] Citizenship, as I will outline further below, for the purpose of this thesis is more than the definition of national belonging in citizenship laws. While such laws are important as "boundary mechanisms",[2] I am more concerned with the emotive aspects of citizenship. Defining the historical formation of local, regional or national *society* as a term of reference is a precondition for inquiry. Of interest are the broadcasting of state-power, the local middlemen, the composite of the society and its internal stratification, majority-minority relations and the like. The Mao and Komo have been at the margins of several state formation processes, both Ethiopian and Sudanese. The area of Western Ethiopia has thus been described as a "double periphery".[3] The Mao and Komo lived at the fringes of the *Funj sultanate* and

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[1] Lauren MacLean, *Informal Institutions and Citizenship in Rural Africa: Risk and Reciprocity in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[2] Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 231.

[3] Triulzi, *Salt, Gold, and Legitimacy*, 181.

the Ethiopian empire. They also lived on the fringes of the *watawit sheikdoms* as well as of Oromo kingdoms (i.e., the Leeqa kingdom under Jote Tullu). Their historical experience informs the position the Mao and Komo are currently holding in the multi-ethnic Ethiopian society. These complex social processes will be described in more detail in a later chapter (cp. Chapter 3). First, the theoretical approach to state formation and the inter-ethnic encounter will be briefly outlined in this section.

Seen from the Ethiopian side, the peripheral position of western Ethiopia is rooted in the logic of Ethiopian state formation and the incorporation of the western fringes as a periphery.[4] In the wake of this forceful process of state expansion, the centre co-opted local elites or destroyed and substituted local rule. Both processes led to the establishment of regional political rule, the penetration of the Ethiopian state apparatus as well as the diffusion of state culture. But the Ethiopian state did not permeate into uninhabited areas. On the contrary, these areas had a long history of local political formation and inter-ethnic relations.[5] Before the Ethiopian state expansion, local rulers had for long been in competition over the *stateless* (acephalous, or less hierarchically organized) people surrounding them, as well as over the resources of the region. The encroachment of the *predatory state systems* aggravated the inter-ethnic relations and power equilibrium between the people. In brief, this meant: regional polities like the *Oromo mootidoms* or the *watawit sheikhdoms* had for long competed with each other over control, before they were drawn into a tributary system with the central state. These tributes were in fact handed down to the lower groups of the regional social stratum.[6] These *fragile groups* were in part reduced to slaves, serfs, tenants, porters, and hunters. Hence the regional society came to be divided into local elites and subordinate people. These situations lead to the lumping of the lower stratum of the society under blanket terms and set in motion a process of "overwriting identities":

> In 'the old days' various terms were used by central elites of the old states which blanketed fringe communities together under more or less exclusionary names. The most glaring was the Ethiopian *shangalla* meaning something like the American term 'nigger' (banned in the reform of 1974), and in the case of

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[4] Donald Donham and Wendy James, eds., *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[5] Of course the pre-conquest history of the areas was markedly different in different areas.

[6] Abdussamad H. Ahmad, 'Trading in Slaves in Bela-Shangul and Gumuz, Ethiopia'.

the Sudan it was (and still is) common to hear the use of 'abid (slave peoples) or *zurga* (blacks) or regionally inclusive blanket terms such as 'Nuba'. In the case of the Blue Nile, there is an old term, 'Hameg' or Hamaj, applied to people living on the southern fringes of the former kingdom of Sinnar, and another, 'Burun', used of a range of peoples in the foothills and valleys west of the Ethiopian escarpment. Within these blanketed socio-political categories were dozens, if not hundreds, of local indigenous language communities with a strong sense of self as against a variety of neighbours, and increasingly so in concert against the state and its elites.[7]

A remnant of this process is the usage of the term Mao for the subaltern people. Today it is not surprising to meet a Mao explain his or her identity/ethnicity as *Mao-Komo* and the language he or she speaks as *Afaan Mao-Komo* (*afaan* being the Oromo word for mouth/tongue/language). The Mao and Komo have adopted the governmental discourse and accept being blanketed together. This concurs with observations made by González-Ruibal:

> The Mao adopt a humble, silent position in front of the Oromo. In places like Arabi or Egogirmos, the Mao do not even preserve their ethnic self-denomination: they have fully adopted the term of their dominators and call themselves simply 'Mao'. Even when they maintain their own names, these have often been transformed by the Oromo.[8]

The Mao and Komo pose substantial questions to the mainstream ideas of ethnicity, identity, group or social formation and structure.[9] To take an evolutionist stand to their marginality cannot do justice to their experiences. They are dispersed mainly because of the course of history. But, to be sure, they have not been helpless victims of the past. Currently they re-configure using the gateways that the new political system provides. This is not an easy process and their fractured identity, or agency, does not help them to gain all constitutional benefits, although otherwise stated by the

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[7] Wendy James, *War and Survival in Sudan's Frontierlands: Voices from the Blue Nile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

[8] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 262.

[9] Hermann Amborn, 'Die zerfranste Ethnie. Zum analytischen Umgang mit komplexen Gesellschaften', *Anthropos* 93, no. 4/6 (1998): 349–61.

government and the local elites. Any representation of the Mao and Komo would be painfully incomplete if it was to ignore the workings of the frontier, the intertwined and overlapping process of the *reproduction* of the early peripheral societies till the coming of the tidal federal frontier of today.

The African Frontier Thesis

The study of the formation of African societies has greatly benefited from Igor Kopytoff's rethinking of Turner's American frontier, which built the base of his seminal theoretical approach on the African frontier.[10] Both ethnic and social formations in Ethiopia in general and western Ethiopia in particular, have often been, implicitly and explicitly, described as a frontier: a zone of constant social and cultural transformation.[11] The migrations of people both from the Sudan and from within Ethiopia have led to significant amalgamation of cultures, customs and eventually identities on this Ethiopian–Sudanese frontier. The immigration of Sudanese Arabs, also described in great detail by Alessandro Triulzi,[12] the migration of the Oromo,[13] the immigration of the Busase from Anfillo[14] are all interlocking frontier processes,

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[10] Igor Kopytoff, ed., *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

[11] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*; Benedikt Korf, Tobias Hagmann, and Martin Doevenspeck, 'Geographies of Violence and Sovereignty: The African Frontier Revisited', in *Violence on the Margins. States, Conflict, and Borderlands*, ed. Benedikt Korf, Timothy Raeymaekers (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 29–53; James, 'From Aboriginal to Frontier Society in Western Ethiopia'; Luca Puddu, 'State Building, Rural Development, and the Making of a Frontier Regime in Northeastern Ethiopia, C. 1944–75', *The Journal of African History* 57, no. 1 (2016): 93–113; Triulzi, *Salt, Gold, and Legitimacy*; Alessandro Triulzi, 'Frontier History in Ethiopia Western Wallaga: The Making of a Frontier Society', in *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies Addis Ababa, April 1-6 1991*, ed. Bahru Zewde, Richard Pankhurst, and Taddese Beyene (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, 1994), 339–50; Alessandro Triulzi, 'Ethiopia: The Making of a Frontier Society', in *Inventions and Boundaries: Historical and Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, ed. Preben Kaarlsholm and Jan Hultin, International Development Studies 11 (Roskilde: Roskilde University, 1994), 235–45.

[12] Triulzi, *Salt, Gold, and Legitimacy*.

[13] Lambert Bartels, *Oromo Religion: Myths and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia; an Attempt to Understand*, Collectanea Instituti Anthropos: Anthropos-Institut (Berlin: Reimer, 1983); Tesema Ta'a, *The Political Economy of an African Society in Transformation: The Case of Macca Oromo (Ethiopia)*, Asien-Und Afrika-Studien der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006).

[14] Girma Mengistu, 'The Busase of Anfillo, Qellam, Wallaga (A Historical Study)' (B.A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1973).

which shaped the regional socio-cultural environment at different points in time. These processes have created memories and narratives, often overlapping and simultaneously challenging the respective perceptions of the past.[15] Considering the moving forces both behind the historical regional formation as well as exploiting this knowledge to predict future processes of identity formation is the merit of Kopytoff's theoretical approach.

The Mao and Komo were affected in two significant ways by this frontier: they were incorporated and became part of the new social formations brought about by the frontier processes, and they were expelled and reduced to refugees and migrants, hiding from the emerging social constructs, and forming new social structures elsewhere. The frontier produces winners and losers.[16] Hence, we might analyse the Mao and Komo as frontiersmen in a double sense: they are in part a remnant society incorporated at the lower end of the new social hierarchy of an emerging regional society. And they are *deep rurals*, refugees and hideaways, moving to new spaces unoccupied by the majority society. A Gwama elder once made this perception of the historical duality of the Mao-Komo society very clear:

> The Mao are the ones who were forced to work on the field, the Komo are the ones who managed to run away. They live scattered in the bush.[17]

This explains that locally the Mao are referred to as the subaltern peasantry, drawn into the emerging hegemonic cultures of the *watawit* or Oromo, while the Komo retreat and open new social spaces.

Originating from the work of Fredrick Turner, the frontier thesis has been quite influential both in the description of social and state formation as well as inter-ethnic relations. Turner believed that American institutions were not imported by Europeans and thus a copy of the European institutions but that the process of migration influenced the political culture and the emergence of the new American frontier state:

> Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs, any more than the

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[15] Triulzi, 'Frontier History in Ethiopia Western Wallaga'; Triulzi, 'Ethiopia: The Making of a Frontier Society'.

[16] Triulzi, 'Ethiopia: The Making of a Frontier Society'.

[17] 14/2010: Interview with Mao elders in Ya'a, 2 October 2010.

first phenomenon was a case of reversion to the Germanic mark. The fact is, that here is a new product that is American. At first, the frontier was the Atlantic coast. It was the frontier of Europe in a very real sense. Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American. As successive terminal moraines result from successive glaciations, so each frontier leaves its traces behind it, and when it becomes a settled area the region still partakes of the frontier characteristics.[18]

While Turner "sees the frontier as a natural force of transformation", Kopytoff understands the frontier as "force for cultural-historical continuity and conservatism". For Kopytoff the African frontier is a "local frontier, lying at the fringes of numerous established African societies".[19] Instead of creating a new society, the frontier "provides […] an institutional vacuum for the unfolding social processes". Accordingly, "a crucial factor in the outcome of the frontier process is the nature of the initial model carried from the metropolitan culture to the frontier". If the communication between metropole and frontier is kept alive, "the frontier may consequently act as a culturally and ideologically conservative force".[20] Donham summarized the "essence of the frontier" accordingly:

> […] once outsiders have defined an area as a frontier and have intruded into it in order to settle in it, there begins a process of social construction that, if successful, brings into being a new society. The central thesis of this analysis is that most African societies arose out of such a conjuncture of events. And, further, that this process of building new societies, paralleled by the demise of established societies, has been a continuous one in African history.[21]

The ideological construction of an *institutional vacuum*, i.e. the imagination and self-perception of the late-comer as first-comers, is the most striking aspect of the thesis. In

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[18] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (North Chelmsford, MA: Courier Corporation, 2012), 4.

[19] Igor Kopytoff, 'The Internal African Frontier: The Making of African Political Culture', in *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*, ed. Igor Kopytoff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.

[20] Ibid., 14.

[21] Donald L. Donham, 'On Being First: Making History by Two's in Southern Ethiopia', *Northeast African Studies* 7, no. 3 (2000): 23.

all my interviews concerning migrations, the respondents initially described the destination of their respective migration as 'uninhabited' by any people, only to admit that there *were* previous inhabitants, but their status was usually belittled as 'wild', 'backward' and 'uncivilized'.[22] For Kopytoff the frontier is an area of uncertain political rule, in which groups migrate and settle to fill a perceived or real institutional vacuum. Western Ethiopia is defined by interlocking frontier-processes: it provides for "interstitial spaces of different kingdoms and princely polities",[23] into which immigrated various actors to define new spaces. But following the forceful proliferation of state culture and political ideas, it also provides for a "tidal frontier",[24] with the emergence of the Ethiopian state, the imperial (ca. 1898-1974), the socialist (1974-1991) and the federal frontier (1991 till today). Today this process is the permeation of the 'developmental state' on the margins, the "centering of the periphery".[25]

Deep Rurals

One way of approaching the Mao and Komo is dominated by the idea of the "deep rurals".[26] The 'hills' (i.e. mountain ranges) play a crucial role in the memory of different groups and form a path to a collective identification: some Mao say they come from (Mount) Kiring, the Komo say they originate from Gemi[27] and the Gwama originate in Banga according to their oral traditions.[28] These hills, though, have not been strongholds but places from which groups have been ejected by expanding neighbouring groups. The idea of the *deep rurals* was introduced to the Sudan-

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[22] Interviews in Benishangul 2010-14.

[23] Korf, Hagmann, and Doevenspeck, 'Geographies of Violence and Sovereignty: The African Frontier Revisited', 34.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Dereje Feyissa, '"Centering the Periphery"? The Federal Experience at the Margins of the Ethiopian State', *Ethiopian Journal of Federal Studies* 1, no. 1 (2013): 155–92.

[26] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*; M. Charles Jȩdrej, *Ingessana: The Religious Institutions of a People of the Sudan-Ethiopia Borderland*, Studies of Religion in Africa 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Theis, *Nach Der Razzia*.

[27] The Komo refer to Tullu/Gara Gemi as *gewa*, cp. also Schuver's Yowé (Yewa) which refers to both the mountain massif and the settlement (James, Johnson, and Baumann, *Travels in North-East Africa*, 102).

[28] Personal interviews: 2006 and 2010-12.

Ethiopian frontier by Charles Jędrej from Western African scholarship.[29] Jędrej's observation about the Ingessana (Gaamk), who share many similarities with the Komo, Gwama, Uduk, (proto–) Berta and others concerns us here:

> Though linguists and ethnologists might point out the great ethnological and linguistic differences between Ingessana culture and that of the JumJum, the Berta, or the Uduk, or the Ragreig and others, Ingessana themselves say of them that 'they are people like us', by which they mean they share the same experience in relation to the 'dingi, habash, demge, and urunk (Dinka, Ethiopians, Sudanese peasants and merchants, and Baggara Arabs respectively). They are all, though in different ways, cultures of resistance, or […] 'deep rurals'.[30]

Deep rurals are those groups that sought to avoid "subordination by, and cultural assimilation into, the neighbouring, more pervasive culture".[31] These are the cultures that the frontiers process has made peripheral to the emerging groups. Thus, one way to perceive and understand ethnic borders in the poly-ethnic setting of the frontier is the focus on "flight" due to the fear of assimilation and enslavement.[32] This is deeply enshrined in the memory of the fragile minorities on the Ethiopian–Sudanese border. A research note from Joachim Theis is interesting in this regard:

> The Koma[33] feel surrounded by three powerful nations: "Sudan," to the north; "Janub" (southern Sudan) to the south - which the Koma consider an independent state (I was once asked "Who is the president of the Janub?") - and "Shoa" (Ethiopia) to the east. The Koma who live in all three "states" do not feel part of any of them. They fear all three powers and try to avoid

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[29] Wendy James has given a substantial overview on Jędrej translation of the deep rurals idea into the Nile Valley and its *scientific migration* from West Africa (Richard Fanthorpe, 'Limba "Deep Rural" Strategies', *The Journal of African History* 39, no. 1 (1998): 15–38;; Wendy James, 'Charles Jędrej and the "Deep Rurals": A West African Model Moves to the Sudan, Ethiopia, and beyond', *Critical African Studies* 8, no. 1 (2015): 1–15. The deep rural idea is also the *leitmotive* behind González-Ruibal's seminal regional overview (González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*).

[30] Jędrej, *Ingessana*, 3.

[31] Ibid.

[32] The *methods of survival* are substantially summarized also by Klein for the West-African case (cp. Martin A. Klein, 'The Slave Trade and Decentralized Societies', *The Journal of African History* 42, no. 1 (2001): 49–65).

[33] Theis uses the word Koma in the Sudanese usage for Gwama and Komo speakers.

contact with them whenever possible. They keep clear of the motortracks and tend to settle their disputes among themselves to avoid the involvement of the "hakuma" (government), because "the talk of the hakuma is bad".[34]

While the deep rural-paradigm is one useful way to investigate, it neglects the Mao and Komo which did *not* live in separation of the state, especially on the Ethiopian side of the border. Large parts of the Mao and Komo were integrated, if in a subaltern position, in one way or another into regional systems or the wider Ethiopian polity. Some were forced to do so, other chose to do so. Thus, this study is about the state in the periphery and less about the "art of not being governed";[35] it deals with the persistence and maintenance of ethnic boundaries of fragile minority groups in a poly-ethnic environment.

Today, the Mao and Komo are generally referred to as indigenous groups (this is constitutionally inscribed at least in Benishangul and Gambella). In the western-liberal approach, ethnic groups, once their status is defined, have to be 'accommodated' in the diversity of the multi-cultural state. Accordingly, their minority rights have to be "respected" and constitutional provisions are usually taken to ensure this. But only if we understand how minorities are created, re-created and also understand their own agency, we can identify in how far citizen-rights are negotiated in the complexities of multi-cultural arenas.[36] Understanding the status of an ethnic minority should start with understanding their ethno-genesis.

Ethnicity on the Frontier

> Social identities are subject to constant redefinition by their bearers and others. Groups can change their composition, or their status, or their name, or their affiliation, or even all these features.[37]

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[34] Joachim Theis, 'Ethnic Identity on the Sudan-Ethiopian Border', *Cultural Survival Quaterly* Nation, Tribe and Ethnic Groups in Africa (1985).

[35] James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed : An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, Yale Agrarian Studies Series (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2009).

[36] cp. André Lecours, 'Theorizing Cultural Identities: Historical Institutionalism as a Challenge to the Culturalists', *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 33, no. 3 (2000): 499–522.

[37] Günther Schlee, *Identities on the Move: Clanship and Pastoralism in Northern Kenya*, Cultural Politics 5 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 1.

Ethnic affiliation has become an important guiding principle in day-to-day domestic politics in Ethiopia. Since the overthrow of the *Därg* the current government has experimented with a federal arrangement, emphasizing ethnic identity as the core element for political decentralization. In effect, this meant the creation of linguistically or ethnically defined federal states. The government of Ethiopia promotes a rather *primordialist* approach to ethnicity and divides the ethnic groups inhabiting Ethiopia into "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples" following largely an essentialist concept:

> A Nation, Nationality or People for the purpose of this constitution, is a group of people who have or share a large measure of common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominately contagious territory.[38]

To study politics in Ethiopia today is to deal with the "accommodation of diversity", hence to look at a multi-cultural society drawn together by history, and exposed to forces triggered by the daily politics of ethnicity (i.e. ethnic federalism). "Accommodation of diversity" has become the main justification of the post-1991's regime's policy of ethnic federalism, the answer offered as a solution to the "national question".[39]

Since Barth's approach of the ethnic boundary, functional concepts to ethnicity have gained prominence.[40] Ethnicity exists vis-à-vis the "ethnic other" and is maintained through patterns of self-identification, language, myths of descent, and other forms of in-group identification. I contend here that it is especially necessary to analyse the rationale behind ethnic self-identification, that is to ask where, when and why it is felt necessary to identify for one group against another. Thus, ethnicity has to be understood in a regional, political and economic setting within existing group-relations.[41] The ratio behind ethnicity should be analyzed in the historical regional setting:

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[38] Ethiopian Constitution; Art. 39, §5.

[39] Abbink, 'Ethnicity and Conflict Generation in Ethiopia'.

[40] Frederik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries : The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969).

[41] Jon Abbink, 'The Deconstruction of "Tribe": Ethnicity and Politics in Southwestern Ethiopia', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 24 (1991): 1–21; Abbink, 'Ethnicity and Constitutionalism in Contemporary Ethiopia'.

[I]ts meaning and practical salience varies for different social groupings according to their position in the social order", and it has its "origins in the asymmetrical incorporation of structurally dissimilar groupings into a single political economy.[42]

Ethnicity and the frontier are here seen as two partly overlapping phenomena. The process potentially affects ethnic-affiliation along its courses. This is especially so when states, hierarchical polities or chieftaincies emerge within the frontier. I argue that changing inter-ethnic relations are visible in the boundary mechanisms between groups and thus are better analysed with "constructivist" approaches than on primordial bases.[43] Abbink has argued for an approach to ethnicity that is based on considerations of "political ecology":

> The assumption here is that groups based on, or acting on the basis of, some ethnic or 'tribal' identity must be seen as located in a wider environment of competing groups of different composition, especially in areas where state influence is relatively weak. The environment is to be seen as composite of ecological-economic conditions and of political conditions in a wider sense: power balances between groups determine the degree of success of groups in maintaining solidarity and achieving results. [44]

This approach is useful in the given case because it looks at external forces that forge identity. Ethnicity in itself is not stable and is changing through time; it is prone to socio-environmental conditions both in a synchronic and diachronic perspective. With reference to historical interaction and "ecological-economic and political conditions" (s. above) we are drawn to look at the relations with neighbouring groups like the Oromo and Berta in the given case. Their impact, based on the economic perquisites of any given time, has forged the identity of the Komo and Mao as subordinate groups, either enslaved or administered, or assimilated into emerging structures.

Comaroff's approach sustains this claim because it emphasizes the structural preconditions under which to analyze ethnicity. Ethnicity "has its genesis in specific

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[42] John L. Comaroff, 'Of Totemism and Ethnicity: Consciousness, Practice and the Signs of Inequality', *Ethnos* 52, no. 3–4 (1987): 301–23.

[43] Cp. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*.

[44] Abbink, 'The Deconstruction of "Tribe"', 1–2.

historical forces, forces which are simultaneously structural and cultural",[45] it is not unitary and describes both a set of relations and a mode of consciousness. Its "meaning and practical salience varies for different social groupings according to their position in the social order" and it has its "origins in the asymmetrical incorporation of structurally dissimilar groupings into a single political economy".[46]

To study political conditions as a force that produces group identity enables us to understand how the ongoing re-orientation of identity in Ethiopia relates to the re-invention of the identity of the Mao and Komo. The salience of history will enable us to understand the changing patterns of self-identification of the Mao and Komo which is instrumental for this study.

Citizenship on the Frontier

At the turn of the 21ˢᵗ century, almost all people belong to a state.[47] Citizenship though is by no means uniform. Its subject differs from place to place and so do its manifestations.[48] Is the overemphasis on a *citizenry* merely a western imagination of the world?[49] Citizenship is mostly an analytical tool in western political sociology and political science. It is, however, increasingly used to discuss African cases of national integration also.[50] As states largely shape local communities, anthropologists have had their fair share in analyzing the interaction between states and local communities:

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[45] Comaroff, 'Of Totemism and Ethnicity', 302.

[46] Ibid., 307.

[47] Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*.

[48] Engin F. Isin and Bryan S. Turner, eds., *Handbook of Citizenship Studies* (London-Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002).

[49] Francis B. Nyamnjoh, 'From Bounded to Flexible Citizenship: Lessons from Africa', *Citizenship Studies* 11, no. 1 (2007): 73–82.

[50] Samantha Balaton-Chrimes, *Ethnicity, Democracy and Citizenship in Africa: Political Marginalisation of Kenya's Nubians*, Contemporary African Politics (London–New York: Routledge, 2016); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, 'Reflections on Liberalism, Policulturalism, and ID-Ology: Citizenship and Difference in South Africa', *Social Identities* 9, no. 4 (2003): 445–73; Sara Dorman, Daniel Hammett, and Paul Nugent, *Making Nations, Creating Strangers: States and Citizenship in Africa* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007); Edmond J. Keller, *Identity, Citizenship, and Political Conflict in Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014); Smith, *Making Citizens in Africa* to name but a few.

> [...] the new interest in the state arises from a recognition of the central role that states play in shaping "local communities" that have historically constituted the objects of anthropological inquiry; in part, it reflects a new determination to bring an ethnographic gaze to bear on the cultural practices of states themselves. An important theme running through the new literature has been that states are not simply functional bureaucratic apparatuses, but powerful sites of symbolic and cultural production that are themselves always culturally represented and understood in particular ways.[51]

Through polices the state affects the relation between ethnic groups; it creates and denies opportunities, blocks or provides access to power and hence willingly or unwillingly affects the internal social equilibrium within groups as well.

Citizenship connects the person to the institutional framework. It is a tool to analyse the interaction of state and people. Citizenship is about belonging to a national community, to feel to belong to it and to gain certain rights and responsibilities from it. Citizenship in traditional approaches was thought in a territorial perspective (the national territory), "therefore", stated Herbst "citizenship laws are critical to examine because these regulations explicitly tie populations to unique, territorially defined polities". These rules thus determine "who's in and who's out".[52]

Is citizenship a logical product of post-colonial state-making in Africa?[53] Is it a concept that will enable us to understand the level of integration of peoples into their respective state? Based on a western notion of civil rights and civic education, etc. the concept of citizenship looms large in regards to inclusion, exclusion and belonging. It touches on identity, ethnicity, group- as well as individual rights. What exactly defines the citizen of Ethiopia? According to the constitution of Ethiopia citizenship is defined by birth. Anyone being born in Ethiopia to one Ethiopian parent is an Ethiopian citizen. On the next level it is about belonging to one of the *nations, nationalities and peoples* that constitute the Ethiopian society. Hence one can be Amhara, Oromo, Tigrean etc. or of shared origin and thus be an Ethiopian citizen. One should be registered in a *kebele* and in technical terms it is about having an ID card or even a passport which defines one as a citizen of Ethiopia. It is about paying

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[51] James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, 'Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality', *American Ethnologist* 29, no. 4 (2002): 981.
[52] Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*, 231.
[53] Dorman, Hammett, and Nugent, *Making Nations, Creating Strangers*.

taxes and enjoying voting rights. Inherently tied to the imagination of modern democratic states, such formalities of citizenship are not necessarily the overall realities in Ethiopia. The "rights bearing citizen"[54] has to be qualified on the basis of ethnographic facts of lived experiences. Especially at the margins of the state (as opposed to an urban milieu) citizenship in Ethiopia is largely still in the making. Interestingly though it is exactly this pattern that elevates it to an analytical tool: Precisely by thinking about the shortcomings of citizenship the level of national integration of minorities in the Ethiopian case can be analyzed. To define that gap between citizen and citizenship, is to understand the position of the person as a political being.

One important discrepancy in the often western based quest for analyzing citizens in Africa, is posed by the historical genesis of group identity. Collective group identities are changing, expanding, adapting to various social, and political changes and stimuli. While the western citizen is a collective being vis-à-vis the state, in African contexts the collective being is often bound to many different contexts of which the state might not be the primary pattern of identification.[55] It should hence be interesting to understand how groups are formed, what constitutes them, how do members of these groups align themselves with the state and its institutions. In western Ethiopia, some members of certain groups may be entirely educated in major towns and live in full enactment of their political possibilities, while members of the same group might not entertain the idea that the Ethiopian state is anything they belong to.[56]

Such situation asks for an institutional understanding of the link of ethnicity, identity and citizenship. But how are citizenship and belonging experienced by historically marginalized groups?

> Citizenship has always entailed aspirations to equality; in fact, citizenship was defined by equality of status, and the integration of social groups into this status meant their formal equality before the law and before the state. Of

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[54] Smith, *Making Citizens in Africa*.

[55] Comaroff and Comaroff, 'Reflections on Liberalism, Policulturalism, and ID-Ology'.

[56] Alpa Shah, 'The Tensions over Liberal Citizenship in a Marxist Revolutionary Situation: The Maoists in India', *Critique of Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (2013): 91–109.

course, such formal equality was seldom realised; moreover, most states differentiated citizenship in the allocation of rights and resources.[57]

The question, who is a citizen and its manifestations also raise questions on how people come to imagine themselves as legal persons and what it means to them.[58] How is citizenship negotiated? Are the points of reference the state, the region, the group? Does ethnic federalism actually capture the original identity of a group, or is it modelling identity itself?[59] Comaroff and Comaroff noted for the South African case:

> The generic citizen of postcolonial South Africa may be the rights-bearing individual inscribed in the new Constitution; also, the rights-bearing individual – typically urban, cosmopolitan – presumed in much mass media discourse. By contrast, ethno-polities and traditional leadership [supra note] speak the language of subjects and collective being [supra note]. For most South Africans, it is the coexistence of the two tropes, the citizen and subject that configures the practical terms of national belonging.[60]

Citizenship is a helpful category to understand how rights are being defined and distributed and how the internal workings of national affiliation, belonging and autochthony are structured. But belonging or integration are not necessarily a socio-political ideal. Not of everyone at least. Integration can be "the battle cry of proclaimed majorities against minorities".[61] The term "integration" evokes the idea of a "defined whole"[62] in which minorities have to integrate, or a periphery that should be integrated in the pre-supposed state. In such perspective, citizenship is an analytical tool for understanding the processes and patterns behind political integration.

Searching for the historical foundations of citizenship or its cultural manifestations is a difficult endeavour though. We have to understand citizenship as more than "the rights to have rights" or national belonging. I am interested in a perspective of cultural citizenship as a form of "subjectification," that is according to Aiwah Ong, "being

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[57] Eckert, 'Subjects of Citizenship', 311.

[58] Ibid., 313.

[59] Abbink, 'Ethnicity and Constitutionalism in Contemporary Ethiopia'.

[60] Comaroff and Comaroff, 'Reflections on Liberalism, Policulturalism, and ID-Ology', 446.

[61] Gerd Baumann, *National Integration and Local Integrity: The Miri of the Nuba Mountains in the Sudan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1.

[62] Ibid.

made by power relations that produce consent through schemes of surveillance, discipline, control, and administration."[63] In order to gain a better understanding of the patterns of subjectification during consecutive governments I will briefly outline the history of citizenship in modern Ethiopia.

A Very Brief History of Citizenship in Ethiopia

The question "who is a citizen of Ethiopia" has to be answered differently depending on the time one is interested in. Before Ethiopia emerged in its present borders, i.e. before the national territory was defined by the interplay of internal expansion and extern (colonial) encroachment, the borders between different Ethiopian kingdoms, polities and other political entities were shifting. Wars of expansion and raids for goods and people loosely defined the shifting boundaries of these political entities, however stable they might appear. Land and the control over it defined the status of the people as well as their relation to the higher, or ruling, administrative body. In the traditional Christian Ethiopian highlands the society was hierarchically structured with the nobility ruling over the peasantry, which was owing it labour, giving parts of their agricultural surplus, and provided services in time of warfare and conflict.[64] At this point western Ethiopia was similarly divided into different polities and chieftaincies. Benishangul was distributed among *sheikhs* who had co-opted areas that were formerly ruled by *meks* (of Funj origin), who were themselves tributaries to the kingdom of Sinnar. Like in Christian highland Ethiopia, the labour on the land played a significant role in connecting the people to the wider political structure. In the Oromo region, small kingdoms formed which built on a clear division of nobility that ruled over a peasantry. In between lived people who, building on their own social structures and on less hierarchical systems, got partly co-opted into these emerging political structures or were drawn into subordinate positions. The subjection of Benishangul, and the Leeqa kingdoms, as well as attempts to control the areas of the Baro and Sobat basin, culminated in the colonial project of border demarcation and led

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[63] Aihwa Ong, 'Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States', *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 5 (1996): 737.

[64] Habtamu Mengistie Tegegne, 'Land Tenure and Agrarian Social Structure in Ethiopia, 1636-1900' (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois, 2011); Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974* (Lawrenceville, NJ-Asmara: The Red Sea Press, 1995).

Ethiopia to fix its borders and define a territory and the people she would rule. Sitting at the intersection of millennia of predatory state encroachment the people of western Ethiopia in 1902 could *hardly* be referred to as citizens of Ethiopia. Nonetheless it is exactly here where the "making of citizens" begins. The presence of the state influenced, at times hardened, existing inter-ethnic relations and enabled certain individuals and groups to climb a "hierarchical" ladder. These individuals became affiliated to the "mainstream" society (i.e. the ruling elite of the centre).

From an Ethiopian state perspective, the people beyond these elites were *shankilla* or *barya*, and had no position in the society except for providing resources and labour. The empire consecutively led people into its service. Soldiers were recruited; slaves and servants were sent from one household to the next and lived in different locations. Administrators and service men appeared in areas beyond those of their northern-highland origin. It is, nonetheless, not before the Nationality Act of 1930 and with the introduction of the first constitution of 1931 that a serious attempt to define the citizens of Ethiopia as constitutive people was made. Nonetheless citizens were broadly defined as subjects given the monarchic character of the state. Article 1 of the constitution of 1931 reads:

> The territory of Ethiopia, in its entirety, is, from one end to the other, subject to the government of His Majesty the Emperor. All the natives of Ethiopia, subjects of the empire, form together the Ethiopian Empire.[65]

The Nationality Law of 1930 confirms that the subjects of the empire are "any person born in Ethiopia or abroad, whose father or mother is Ethiopian, is an Ethiopian subject".[66]

The colonial powers sharing borders with Ethiopia were particularly interested in the question who the Ethiopian citizens were, especially in regard to colonial subjects who would cross the borders of the respective territories for grazing and water. The author of a colonial British treatise regarding the nationality or citizenship question of Somali pastoralists between British Somaliland and Ethiopia quotes from a legal collection concerning nationality laws:

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[65] The Ethiopian Constitution of 1931; http://www.abyssinialaw.com/constitutions
[66] http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=3ae6b52ac

Ethiopia has no [written] citizenship law, and all matters relating to citizenship or nationality are governed by precedent or custom and social or family status of the individual. Any case of citizenship or nationality arising at this time would go eventually to the king for decision. [...] There is not yet available any intelligently defined or written procedure. [67]

The *Nationality Act* emphasizes that "Ethiopian subjects having acquired a foreign nationality may always obtain the benefit of Ethiopian nationality when they return to reside in the country and apply to the Imperial Government for re-admission".[68] For a foreigner to become Ethiopian citizen, the Act states among other things, the need to be able to speak and write Amharic fluently.[69] The 1955 constitution did not bring many changes in regard to citizenship rights.[70] The subjects of the empire were rather blanketed in broader terms. A survey of the land tenure in Wallaga province (then combining also the areas of concern here including Benishangul) read that major languages spoken throughout the *Governorate General* were *"Galligna"*, Arabic spoken by the *Shogeles*[71] in Asosa and "a dialect spoken by the Shankilas living in the Didessa".[72] Cultural sensitivity was of no concern during the era, which was especially characterized by an *Amharization* project (fostering Amharic as the national language and Orthodox Christianity as a state religion, Amharization was part of nation-building project that envisaged a unified national citizenry within a national territory). It was exactly this omission of any rights of self-determination and *Amharization* that brought about regional cultural conflicts. Especially the student movement was concerned with the idea of self-determination of people and the discontent of the people was famously phrased by the student Wallelign Mekonnen who, proclaimed *The Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia*:[73]

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[67] "Ethiopian Nationality Law and the Somali Tribes" FRO, 371/118773

[68] http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=3ae6b52ac

[69] http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=3ae6b52ac

[70] Smith, *Making Citizens in Africa*, 65.

[71] Basically, a denomination for the subjects of *sheikh* Khojali al-Hasan.

[72] Imperial Ethiopian Government Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, 'Report on Land Tenure of Wollega Province', Addis Ababa, 1967 (IES, LAN 333)

[73] Merera Gudina, 'Contradictory Interpretations of Ethiopian History: The Need for a New Consensus', in *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, ed. David Turton, Eastern African Studies (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), 119–30.

To be a "genuine Ethiopian" one has to speak Amharic, to listen to Amharic music, to accept the Amhara-Tigre religion, Orthodox Christianity and to wear the Amhara-Tigre Shamma in international conferences. In some cases to be an "Ethiopian", you will even have to change your name. In short to be an Ethiopian, you will have to wear an Amhara mask (to use Fanon's expression). Start asserting your national identity and you are automatically a tribalist, that is if you are not blessed to be born an Amhara. According to the constitution you will need Amharic to go to school, to get a job, to read books (however few) and even to listen to the news on Radio "Ethiopia" unless you are a Somali or an Eritrean in Asmara for obvious reasons.[74]

Article 2 of the 1987 Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, made for the first time far reaching amendments in terms of citizenship and nationality rights: According to paragraph one, "Ethiopia is a unitary state in which all nationalities live in equality". It was determined to "eliminate all disparities in their economic development" (Paragraph 3). And "The People's Democratic Republic shall ensure the equality, development and respectability of the languages of the national ties" (Paragraph 5).[75]

The federal arrangement as of 1995 has built on the idea of nationalities and enforced major steps towards the recognition of the different ethnic groups of Ethiopia, plus the accommodation of diversity.[76] It thus proposes an Ethiopia specific form of cultural citizenship, which is largely territorially defined. Federal regions are theoretically enabled to decide on all sorts of political issues through the regional parliaments and administrative bodies. A salient feature of this is the right to choose the working language of the region and the regional language of instruction. This process has not been without conflicts either which have to be very carefully analysed on a case to case basis.

Looking at this brief overview on citizenship in Ethiopia, we may now make some assumption on the development of citizenship in Ethiopia. Between 1931 and 1994

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[74] http://gadaa.com/oduu/4613/2010/06/27/on-the-question-of-nationalities-in-ethiopia/ (last access 19 July 2016)

[75] http://www.abyssinialaw.com/constitutions (last access, 19 July 2016).

[76] Markakis, *The Last Two Frontiers*; Smith, *Making Citizens in Africa*; David Turton, *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective*, Eastern African Studies (Oxford: James Currey, 2006).

several amendments in the understanding of citizenship can be seen. While the citizens of Ethiopia were once the subjects of the crown, certain cultural rights, like the right to language and the entitlement to ethnic history have been enshrined since 1991.

Beyond the formalization of these rights in the constitution, the question of active performance remains: the real questions evolve around how cultural rights or political rights are actually exercised in reality. Despite the promise of various rights and freedoms multiple conflicts in Ethiopia range around the struggle over the neglect of such rights. Ample examples from the Ethiopian recent past show the dissonance between cultural rights and territorial claims. These are expressed in a series of conflicts over land, settlement, border demarcation and eventually the exploitation of indignity and autochthony.[77] The relation between politics and the subjects of politics evolve in the living space. It revolves around the interpretation of the past, and the historical growth of the inter-ethnic and power relations, as well as political economic structures.

Towards an Historical Approach to Citizenship

Citizenship, as a relationship between the people and a state is a wide, ambitious, and multi-faceted field of inquiry. Citizenship links the subjects of politics to the polity. As such it speaks about collectives bound by territorial arrangements: Citizenship involves collective, not individual mediations with the respective polity.[78] It is often thought of as a set of rights, duties and performance. Rights, duties and the ability to perform citizenship, refer to the legal relationship between citizens and state: civil rights, or political rights, or social rights, all of which have been changing globally in the past decades. Duties entail e.g. taxation or, in some cases, conscription, etc. Performance relates to both states and citizens and whether and how they are exercising or performing their rights.[79] The performance of citizenship speaks to

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[77] Catherine Boone, 'Land Regimes and the Structure of Politics: Patterns of Land-Related Conflict', *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute* 83, no. 1 (2013): 188–203.

[78] Peter Nyers and Engin F. Isin, 'Globalizing Citizenship Studies', in *Routledge Handbook of Global Citizenship Studies*, ed. Engin F. Isin and Peter Nyers (New York-London: Routledge, 2014), 1.

[79] Ibid., 2.

questions of "belonging" which has been immensely conflictual in recent years in African states. [80]

In a region largely defined by historical marginalization, powerlessness and exploitation, the divergent perceptions of history are equally important to understand the impasses of citizenship performance. Taking inspiration from Mahmood Mamdanis's work I propose to look at the re-production of power relations between the state and the subjects of citizenship from a historical viewpoint. Mamdani's core theme is instrumental here:

> By locating both the language of rights and that of culture in their historical and institutional context, I hope to underline that part of our institutional legacy that continues to be reproduced through the dialectic of State reform and popular resistance. The core legacy, I will suggest, was forged through the colonial experience.[81]

In the last 150 years, large parts of the research area were under political structures designed to gain territorial control and exercise power. Though land was abundant and people were able to easily migrate, at the same time "property rights over people" increasingly developed. [82] Thus began overlapping processes of territorial control: several centres lay in competition over land and people and were eventually bound together by the expanding centre.[83] Ethiopia developed in its western fringes a two-tiered system, similar Mamdanis's post-colonial state structures: the peasants were under control of a constellation of locally defined elites in the local states, "supervised" by officials deployed from a pinnacle at the centre.[84]

The Oromo kingdoms or the *watawit sheikhdoms* clearly were bound by frontier-like edges, which for some time made escape and reproduction of the *deep rurals* a viable option. But Ethiopian rulers undoubtedly had a territorial vision, of territorial

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[80] Sara Rich Dorman, 'Citizenship in Africa: The Politics of Belonging', in *Routledge Handbook of Global Citizenship Studies*, ed. Engin F. Isin and Peter Nyers (London-New York: Routledge, 2014), 161.

[81] Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3.

[82] Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*, 38.

[83] Donald Donham, 'Old Abyssinia and the New Ethiopian Empire: Themes in Social History', in *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology*, ed. Donald Donham and Wendy James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–48.

[84] Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 287.

control of its subjects. Hence it is the legacy of territorial formation and the quest for territorial control from which Ethiopia has formed. These legacies inform the impasses of the centre-periphery divide until today.

There are a couple of important patterns to keep in mind when trying to define the citizen-state relation in Ethiopia from the perspective of minorities or subaltern peoples:

a. The periphery is a frontier: The interpretation of the area, from the perspective of the immigrant groups, or the emerging state, as void and uninhabited, opened it for overlapping processes of territorial control.

b. Local elites connected centre and periphery: the semi-autonomous status of large parts of the area is a powerful reminder of the fact that power relations were negotiated not through central agents alone but through middlemen; local rulers on behalf of the central authorities ruled the subaltern people.

c. The subaltern people dealt in various ways with the state expansion: While some fled, migrated or fell prey to the exploitive state, others themselves would rise in the ranks of the semi-colonial state. The memories of the state encroachment, its legacies of inter-ethnic relations are the immanent features of the state-citizen relations in the Ethiopian case.

Designed as a historic approach to citizenship I deem necessary the following outline in order to understand the impasse of citizenship: I will give a brief background to the ethnographic past and present in relation to social change in the next chapter. I will reflect on the historical emergence of the frontier and the fundamentals ambiguities created thereby, which built venue of the historical encroachment of the Ethiopian state (see Chapters 3 and 4). I will give the occurrence of slavery special importance in trying to portray the marginal and powerless position of the Mao and Komo in the regional power architecture. Slavery here is not only seen as a core element in the relations between centre and periphery, but also as a defining pattern of the social memory of the Mao and Komo as well as a problem of Ethiopian political culture. I furthermore portray the provincial administration as a continuation of exploitation of the regional minorities by the regional elites. These patterns are fundamentally shaken during a short period of regional turmoil during the revolution and the Civil War (Chapter 7). The post-1991 political developments (Chapter 8) will show re-production of marginality and powerlessness under the new federal architecture.

The current government had tremendous effects on the peripheries. More than under any other preceding government the peripheries are on the wane; people previously out of reach are consecutively drawn into the realm of national politics. "The paradox" as remarked by Jon Abbink for the Suri, "is that this is happening under a regime which proclaimed local ethnic identity and 'self-determination' as core defining elements of political participation and group identification".[85]

These paradigms of cultural citizenship and political participation will be questioned both by approaching the memories of the Mao and Komo in relation to the state as well as the actually political practices exemplary shown the federal boundary regime, the land politics, and the politics of language (Chapter 8 and Conclusion).

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[85] Jon Abbink, 'Paradoxes of Power and Culture in an Old Periphery: Surma 1974 - 98', in *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & after*, ed. Wendy James et al. (Oxford-Addis Ababa: James Currey, 2002), 165.

Chapter 2

The Frontier: Peoples and Identities

The Mao and Komo are not two groups but many. They are often understood to be culturally related peoples. This cultural inter-relation is concerned with their common cultural traditions of e.g. sister exchange marriage, material culture, an egalitarian social organisation, their livelihood strategies of slash and burn agriculture, fishing, hunting and honey production. These cultural traditions and livelihood strategies speak of a common cultural heritage. At the same time this common cultural background, coupled with their rather dark skin complexion — as compared to neighbouring groups — has led to their lumping under various blanket terms, like Amam, Burun, Koma, *shankilla*. Even the term Mao is rather a social label than an ethnic term. The culture and institutions of these people have been exposed to multiple layers of cultural contact and changes. The "borrowing and lending customs, practices and vocabularies" happened at such a rate that it is illusionary to believe in carving out original cultures.[1] Nonetheless there appears a cultural repertoire. Wendy James remarked, that on a "deeper, perhaps the 'archival' level, there would seem to be in this region elements which have long circulated between the various 'pre-Nilotic' peoples".[2] González-Ruibal refers to this archival level as the *archaeology of being Mao* and adds to the Nilotic elements, the Omotic and Cushitic traits: "if we excavate the different layers we will find a variety of technologies (social, religious, historical, and material) coming from Koman, Gonga and Oromo backgrounds."[3]

Appreciating the cultural traits will give both an idea about the identity of the people in the shatter zone, as well as for the feeling of change that the Mao and Komo endure.

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[1] Triulzi, *Salt, Gold, and Legitimacy*, 54.
[2] James, *The Listening Ebony*, 362.
[3] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 266.

The cultural and political forces that impinge on peripheral groups led to different reactions among different groups.[4] The Mao have chosen forms of "cultural mimicry" and adaptive mechanisms,[5] while the Komo have tended to seek refuge on the frontier stiching their culture together from deep rural elements.[6]

In the following I want to first look at the complex existence of xenonyms and self-designations and their impact on the identity of the people. This builds the parenthesis for a presentation of shared cultural elements in regards to cultural changes and the practices of memory.

Ethnic terms and ambiguities

The focus of this thesis are the titular groups of the Mao-Komo *special wäräda*. This needs some clarification as the term Mao is quite misleading and used for various groups in the wider region. The Mao of this thesis are mostly speakers of *twa gwama* and the Komo, speakers of *taa komo*. Both languages belong to the Koman cluster of the Nilo-Saharan language family.[7] The Gwama and Komo, together with the Uduk, Opuo and to a lesser extent with the Gumuz form a group of culturally related people of the Sudanese Ethiopian borderlands.[8] These groups have been coined "pre-Nilotes" by the Italian ethnographer Grottanellli, a term that has later been taken on by Murdock in his general ethnographic overview on African people.[9] This term has

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[4] Jon Abbink, 'Conflict and Social Change on the South-West Ethiopian Frontier: An Analysis of Suri Society', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 3, no. 1 (2009): 22–41.

[5] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*.
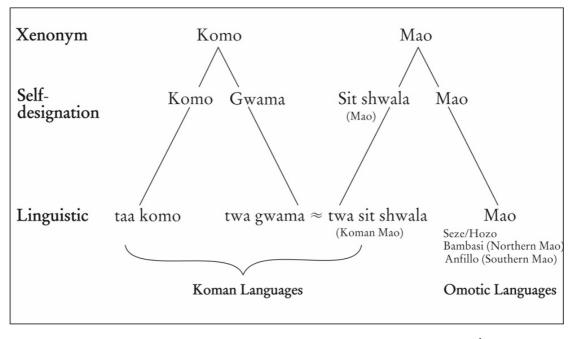
[6] Theis, *Nach der Razzia*.

[7] The Koman family consists of *twaa gwama*, *taa komo*, *twam pa* (the languge of the Uduk) as well as *taa po'*, the Opuo language and the (today extinct) Gulé language (cp. Marvin Lionel Bender, 'Proto-Koman Phonology and Lexicon', *Afrika und Übersee* 66, no. 2 (1984): 259–97.

[8] Comparative work and analysis has mostly been begun by Wendy James and more recently been persued by González-Ruibal (cp. Alfredo González-Ruibal, 'Generations of Free Men: Resistance and Material Culture in Western Ethiopia', in *Beyond Elites. Alternatives to Hierarchical Systems in Modelling Social Formations*, ed. Tobias L. Kienlin and Andreas Zimmermann (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 2012), 67–82; González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*; James, *'Kwanim Pa*; James, *The Listening Ebony*).

[9] Grottanelli, *I Mao. Missione etnografica nel Uollega occidentale*; George Peter Murdock, *Africa: Its Peoples and Their Culture History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959).

recently been criticised by González-Ruibal as implying a form of double primitiveness: as the primitive ancestors ("pre-") of a primitive people ("Nilotes").[10]

Xenonym	Komo	Mao
Self-designation	Komo Gwama	Sit shwala Mao
		(Mao)
Linguistic	taa komo twa gwama ≈ twa sit shwala	Mao
		Seze/Hozo
	(Koman Mao)	Bambasi (Northern Mao)
		Anfillo (Southern Mao)
	Koman Languages	**Omotic Languages**

After Küspert, 2015

Komo today is an ethnic term that mainly identifies speakers of the Nilo-Saharan language *tta komo* and is also sometimes used for Gwama, the speaker of *twa gwama*. The Komo live in Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State, especially the *Mao-Komo special wäräda*, as well as Gambella. Both Komo and Gwama are also living in the Sudan.

The term Mao is used in Ethiopia as a social label (which I will discuss further below), as a xenonym for both Nilo-Saharan and Omotic groups, as well as a self-designation. As an autonym, it is used by the Anfillo Mao, the Bambasi and Didessa Mao (e.g. *Màwés Aas'è*, 'the mouth of the Mao'[11]), which are referred to as northern Mao, as well as the Omotic Hozo (e.g. *maw shulojo*[12]) and Sezo (e.g. *maw sedjo*). These latter two languages are also often referred to as Begi Mao. Mao is an Omotic term and refers to "man", or "people". "Mao" also appears as self-designation among

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[10] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance,* 29.

[11] Michael Ahland, 'A Grammar of Northern Mao (Màwés Aas'è)' (PhD thesis, University of Oregon, 2012).

[12] Küspert, 'The Mao and Komo Languages in the Begi – Tongo Area', 8.

Gwama of the Mao-Komo *special wäräda* and the Begi area (in the latter area speakers of *twa gwama* often refer to themselves as *sit shwala*, "black people"). In an area in which Oromo is the *lingua franca*, all groups frequently refer to their language as *Afaan Mao*.

As such the terms Mao and Komo are both used as ethnic terms as well as social labels and their usage depends on a complex web of historical perceptions and interactions between "indigenous" and immigrating groups as well as between the state and its subjects (table above). The term Mao is also a blanket term, applied by the western Oromo to designate the western border peoples which will be referred to here as Omotic Mao, Koman Mao (Gwama) and Komo. In his seminal article, Bender noted that the term Mao was used by the Oromo "to refer to the very dark-skinned people of the area, much as the general Ethiopian term "Shankilla" is used".[13] I don't think the term Mao is as generic. It rather depends on the social proximity between "black people" and Oromo. Also, Wendy James noted that the prevalence of the term Mao largely depends on the cultural neighbourhood of the border people with the Oromo, and specifically on a historical patron-client relationship between the two.[14] Today the Koman Mao (see map p. 247) use the name Mao regularly, while the lowland Koman (Gwama and Komo, see map p. 247) are usually referred to as Komo and also do rather refer to themselves as Gwama (mostly as Komo though) but never as Mao. A distinctive self-determination is the self-reference "sit shwala" by the Koman Mao who live in Oromia. Almost in an act of "defiance" this section of the people rejects the term Mao.[15] Names are cultural and political practices that can highlight the general features of inter-ethnic relations and patterns of identity formation. Gwama groups do also live in Gambella, but here they are "invisible" among the Komo groups and also use the name Komo for self-reference. But both the

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[13] Bender, 'The Mao Problem', 128.

[14] James, 'From Aboriginal to Frontier Society in Western Ethiopia', 62.

[15] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 262. On a similar point see: Küspert, 'The Mao and Komo Languages in the Begi – Tongo Area', 10. Wendy James noted, for the case of the former slaves, reabsorbed in the valley communities: "the appellation 'Shankalla' has a wide ambivalence which can work to the advantage of the valley people, since a racial category applied by highland society can be read as a social claim, almost a claim of fellow citizenship, on the part of the Gumuz speakers of the valley." (cp. Wendy James, 'Lifelines: Exchange Marriage among the Gumuz', in *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*, ed. Donald Donham and Wendy James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 144.

self-designation Gwama and Komo indicate a social and political distance and independence from majority groups.

Processes of migration and movement have created a complex web of ethnic affiliations, based on assimilation and integration within these different groups and into neighbouring communities. Thus, a dynamic ethnic ambiguity seems to be a feature of these groups as contrary to the attempts of the Ethiopian government to territorialize the groups in specific region, *special wäräda* or *killil* (the federal state).

A brief Ethnographic Overview of the Mao and Komo: Past and Present

The historical experiences of the Mao and Komo are very complex and a coherent ethnographic background is difficult to give, especially since the various groups are either of very different origin and retain completely different identities and make no reference to each other. The influence of other groups has been tremendous and the adaptation of the Mao and Komo to outside forces is a vital aspect of their internal survival. Since the focus of this thesis are the Koman Mao and Komo I am mostly referring in the ethnographic section to the Gwama and Komo.

The Territorial and Social Organization

The history of the Mao (Gwama) and Komo is framed by migration and dispersal. Samuel Burns in 1947 noted in his sketch grammar on Sudanese Komo that Komo "have occupied roughly the same territory for more than 150 years or longer".[16] But he also indicates a migration from their previous Ethiopian settlements. Caught between "anvil" and "hammer", the "Nilotics to the west" of them and "the Bertas and Gallas to the east", continues Burns, the Komo were dispersed by and subjected to slave raids.[17] For Burns the Koma were, due to dispersal and flight, "broken and scattered", and "fled to live in widely separated sections".[18]

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[16] Samuel Burns, 'Notes toward a Grammar of the Koma Language' (Sudan Interior Mission, 1947).
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

The Gwama and Komo often refer to each other as "brothers". They refer to a constant migration between Banga and Gemi, as well as the joint experience of hunting together, marrying and holding celebrations together.[19] But especially the experience of dispersal and flight unites these groups. Garra Gemi is recognized by the Komo as the ancestral homeland, while the Gwama refer to Garra Banga in the Mao-Komo *special wäräda* as their homeland. The Komo settlements of Garra Gemi are said to be abandoned today, although respondents often told me they would go visit Garra Gemi in the dry season, "because we believe this land is ours".[20] Banga, in the western lowland of the Mao-Komo *special wäräda* is a *kebele* known to be inhabited by Komo (Gwama and Komo).

Today the Komo and Gwama live in four largely detached sections. In the Republic of South Soudan there are settlements along the Yabus, and another along the Daga and Kigille (all in Upper Nile Province), a third section lives in Ethiopia in the area referred to as Sombo Garre (it is part of Wallaga, south-west of Mugi) and in the Mao-Komo *special wäräda* and a forth near Gambella (in Bonga) and in Pokung (Itang *wäräda*) in Gambella Regional State.[21]

Population numbers are ambivalent. The colonial administrator Frank Corfield saw the "Koma" close to extinction.[22] Samuel Burns accounted for a population of 3,000 Komo. There are a few estimates but no official and clear numbers. The religious NGO *Joshua Project* accounts for 4,100 Komo (central Komo) in the Sudan.[23] For the Ethiopian side their numbers are no less ambivalent. Especially the blanket term "Mao" employed in the Ethiopian national census makes it almost impossible to know the numbers for the Mao and Komo. Though I shall come back to the numbers and representation from the census in Chapter 8, I guess it is appropriate to assume the number of Komo is not much higher than 1000 in Ethiopia and the Gwama population may account for approximately 20,000 people. In Ethiopia, these Komo and Gwama live under three regional administrations today. Though western Ethiopia (I am referring here to the Western Wallaga zone of Oromia, Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz) is generally an understudied area, it is probably not an exaggeration to say that these ethnic formations belong to the least studied groups in

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[19] 9/2011: Interview with Komo elder, government clerk, Asosa, 01 September 2011.
[20] 2/2011: Interview Komo elder, Gambella town, 13 August 2011.
[21] Theis, *Nach Der Razzia*, 63.
[22] Corfield, 'The Koma'.
[23] https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/12767/OD (last access, 19 July 2016)

the area. Benishangul-Gumuz emerged from the historical regions of Bela Shangul, which after 1991 was merged with the mostly Nilotic lowland areas of former Gojjam. The constitutionally recognized ethnic groups are the Berta, Gumuz, Shinasha, Mao and Komo. Gambella emerged from the Nilotic lowlands of the former province of Illubabor. Its main ethnic groups are the Anywaa, Nuer, Majangir, the Komo and Opuo. The Mao and Komo also live in areas in what is today Western Wälläga Zone of Oromia.

a. Clan Structures

The Mao and Komo are divided into a large set of patrilineal clans. Many researchers have made an attempt to identify the different clans in the region, both the Omotic groups and the Nilo-Saharan units.[24] The most strinking point that emerges from a preliminary comparison of the different Mao groups, is that there exist trans-ethnic clan names. González-Ruibal based on pottery excavations recently argued that the Nilo-Saharan groups (usually seen as the earliest inhabitants of the region) were already in contact with the Northern Omotic groups two millennia ago, which could "explain many of the cultural similarities".[25]

According to the following list (Tables on p. 66 and 244) Madego, Yaalo, Bambasho, Makiisi and Makambo, Mawaap, etc. do occur as clan-names among Nilo-Saharan as well as Omotic groups. I assume that mostly the *sit shwala* have adopted the Omotic names. I take this to be an indicator for a long experience of contractual "inter-ethnic clan relations": at a certain point in history, groups with different background may have made a mutual decision to regard each other as brothers. In such cases one may speak of collective adoption.[26] From this "brotherly" interaction, one might assume those who refer to themselves as *sit shawla* developed their identity based on Nilotic and Omotic cultural traits. They can be regarded as the result of a trans-ethnic history.

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[24] The most comprehensive list can be found in *Grottanelli, I Mao. Missione etnografica nel Uollega occidentale,* 279–84. I have attached a list of clans to this thesis (s. p. 244). The list is not comprehensive, and shows only the groups I have been able to record.

[25] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 254.

[26] Günther Schlee and Abdullahi A. Shongolo, *Islam & Ethnicity in Northern Kenya & Southern Ethiopia* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2012), 170.

The occurrence of the name Yaalo/Yaala/Yaya among all groups is another fascinating feature. The existence of the village of Yala, which was described by Schuver (s. Chapter 3) is particularly noteworthy.[27] Schuver's Yala was situated in the Gwama speaking areas south of Fadasi and a cultural meeting place. I take it as an indicator that both Nilo-Saharan groups and Omotic groups met there and departed from there again taking with them the collective name Yaala. Alliances complement the sphere of inter-ethnic relations.

Also in the case of the Komo and Gwama the primary marker of identity was the patrilineal clan (Komo: *m'os*), that used to reside in a clearly defined area.[28] The clan base is still an important territorial orientation of origin but makes only but little sense today and is overshadowed by new territorial markers and markers of identity. This patrilineality is nominally emphasized, but there are strong "matrifocal tendencies":[29] the role of the woman is very strong and there is a belief that the mother transfers the identity to the child (a child becomes Mao, Komo or Gwama through the mother, who spends time with it and educates it). This perspective also becomes very important in the discourse on transmitting the language and the "culture" to the children. This matrifocal perspective is also strongly emphasized by Joachim Theis in his work on the Koma groups of the Yabus valley.[30] For Theis, the relation the Koma have with their mothers is of seminal importance, which, according to him, also reflects in the use of the word *kum* ("his/her mother", by which many words are formed). Samuel Burns noted that the self-identification of the Komo (*gokwom*) would mean "their mothers".[31]

[27] James, Johnson, and Baumann, *Travels in North-East Africa*, 151.
[28] Theis, *Nach Der Razzia*, 79.
[29] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 70–71.
[30] Theis, *Nach Der Razzia*.
[31] Ibid., 71.

Koman Mao		Omotic Mao	
Gwama	Sit shwala	Hozo	Sezo
	Ba(m)basho		Ba(m)basho
Bosho	Bosho		
Hisgullu[32]	Sit Gullu		
	Kurro		Kurro
Kuguul	Kuguul		
	Madego		Madego
	Makambo	Makambo	
	Makisi	Makisi	
	Mawaap		Mawaap
Yaalo	Yala	Mayaalo	Mayaalo

b. Economic foundation

The Gwama and Komo groups today mainly are agriculturalists. They practice shifting cultivation. They do not own oxen, which they occasionally rent from Oromo farmers. Maize and sorghum, beans, depending on the area, pumpkin and okra, are planted. In Benishangul the Mao engage in charcoal production and selling of bamboo on the local markets. The women come to sell pottery and trade salt bars (Amh. *amole*) with locally produced alcohol. In many areas, the Mao and Komo are known to be specialists for honey production and beehive making. Villagization and large-scale land investments currently underway in some areas have led the Komo to abandon hunting and apiculture. They also have been villagized and now feel that they

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[32] Hisgulu according to word comparison also speak *twa gwama*. Other informants said that there is a difference between Hisgulu/twaa 'sgulu and Gwama (see field notes, and 15/2011: Interview with *sit shwala* elder, Qama, Begi *wäräda*, 07. September 2011). The word *maa guluu* denominates "Gwama" in Hozo.

were alienated from the forest, and they more and more abandoned hunting and the collection of honey. Where honey can still be collected the Mao and Komo also sell it on the markets. In some areas of the Mao Komo *special wäräda*, Oromo traders come to visit the villages to buy honey and sell it in the markets. Honey is also, on special occasions, added to the traditional beer (*shui* and *shul)* in Komo and Gwama respectively), otherwise it is prepared with sorghum and water. Women earn some money by selling local alcohol and beer during the market days in the villages. Only limited numbers of animals are domesticated and kept. Mostly the Gwama and Komo own chicken and goats, but depending on the region and the group some Mao also own cattle. Also, the absence of donkeys as beast of burden is striking in the Mao and Komo villages. Only very few Mao own donkeys, while for the Berta and Oromo the use of donkeys is very widespread. Dogs are kept and live comparatively near the families; dogs are allowed in the houses and are companions on hunts. Historically reference is often made to the domestication of pigs, but I could not find any traces of this.

Political ownership in the federal states as well as power sharing among the indigenous groups has helped some Mao and Komo into parliamentary and administrative posts. These posts are few and mostly connected to substantial bargaining for political ends within the party system of the region.

c. Some Observations on Trans-Ethnic Cultural Elements

There are specific cultural elements that seem to differentiate the groups in the borderlands and their descendants. These elements are internal markers of identity and form a cultural repertoire of the people. The pre-Nilotic cultural inventory is under threat, both by mainstream cultures, or government and development discourses. While sometimes cultural features seem to have radically changed, in some cases the cultural resistance is outstanding.

Ritual scarification and especially the removal of the incisors, both among women and men, when they reach adolescence are still practiced among the Komo. According to information from interviews, it was not practiced among the Gwama, although I believe that assumption was partially based on the political discourse of "harmful cultures" and shows the divide between lowland and highland Koman as well as the

influence of "mainstream culture".[33] Among the Komo and Gwama as a rite of passage the usual explanation is that it is a 'beautification', and neither man nor woman should marry without undergoing the removal.[34] I understand, though, that the removal of the incisors is an optional practice.

The consumption of *shui*, often acknowledged as a highly important cultural feature, a form of social glue and cultural identification, seems to be practiced more widely among the lowland than the highlands Koman people. The drinking culture is an important feature of the daily life of the Gwama and Komo. In the lowland Koman areas and Gambella the joint consumption of beer in alternating homesteads (often for working parties and during other festivities) was rather frequent. Exposure to mainstream religion (s. further below) like Islam and Christianity has had some impact on this culture of drinking in the highland areas. The consumption of beer is an important expression of the social cohesion of the Koman groups and of their egalitarian social contract. The beer, usually prepared from fermented sorghum and maize), is offered in a pot and usually consumed through drinking straws ("pinse" in *twa gwama*). Sometimes it is filtered (*shui dam*) and drunk from in calabash that is passed around. Women and men drink together.

In the following I want to elaborate on three other trans-ethnic elements that I found indicative of "social change" and a matter of frequent discussion concerning identity and cultural pride: hunting, religious practices and marriage.

Hunting

Many observers of the minority groups have already identified a strong hunting tradition, "a hunting ethos"[35] or a "hunting culture".[36]

Both Triulzi for the Berta[37] and González-Ruibal for Mao[38], have documented the traditions of hunting ceremonies as form of group identification. The ritual hunt of the

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[33] From a Mao/Gwama perspective the proximity to the Oromo may have led the Mao to abandon this practice. Gwama living with the Komo have similarly practiced tooth removal. But also among the Komo this practice seems to recede.

[34] A more "scientific" explanation I got from some elders was that in cases of foot-and-mouth-disease sick people could be fed through the hole in the jaw/teeth with the *pinse*, the straw that is used to consume the beer.

[35] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 72.

[36] Grottanelli, *I Mao. Missione etnografica nel Uollega occidentale*.

[37] Triulzi, *Salt, Gold, and Legitimacy*, 32–37.

Berta, known as *feda*, was traditionally carried out at the end of the harvest season. The *feda* was organized among different Berta clans and led by their respective *agur*. According to Triulzi the *feda* was a symbolic manifestation of the settlement patterns and the group identification.

> *Feḍa* was apparently officiated by each *agur* in turn and involved complex preparations and an elaborate ritual aimed at stressing the new principles of Bertha society: the sanctioning of the land division, the role of the *agur* as the new leader of the community, the equal sharing of spoils, and the new sense of unity which it was meant to emphasize symbolically.[39]

González-Ruibal documented the importance of hunting for some Mao groups in Benishangul.

Similar ethical elements are stressed which strongly resemble the hunting culture of the Berta and indicate the diffusion of ideas of social structure and territorial organization:

> […] there is stress on the cooperation, equality, unity, the importance of the forest and its resources, and the ownership of territory. These values were played out through walking the land together. There is also the possibility that the Mao adopted the ceremony from newcomers, but hunting has always played an important role among the indigenous Koman peoples, to which the Mao belong […][40]

In this regard, the author stresses the fact that also the Komo have a hunting master.[41] I was not able to get to know hunting master in the interviews I undertook, though the forest and the hunt are recurrent themes in the interviews I conducted. Especially also the use of medicines, and spiritual powers deciding over the outcome of the hunting were recurrent topics. The consumption of raw meat either of antelopes or warthogs seemed quite common to me during visits in the villages. The forest, the search for

[38] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 306–20.
[39] Triulzi, *Salt, Gold, and Legitimacy*, 32–33.
[40] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 181.
[41] Ibid.

honey and the hunt for animals play an important role in the coming of age of peoples, like the following interview excerpts might show.

> A: When I was eleven years, my father said come to me...do you know me...he showed me the honey...he said climb up, and bring the honey down. I was afraid of the bees and wanted to run away. I climbed up the tree and when the bees attacked I fell off the tree. My father was beating me and I went back up on the tree to collect the honey.

> Again, another day, my father took me to the bush; we did not have any water with us. We slept near the river, but I didn't know there was water. He was teaching me the rules of the bush. I was crying to him to give me water, but he said, 'I am sorry we don't have water'. Then he gave me honey to eat and I got even thirstier. But he didn't give me water. Then in the morning he showed me the river and I ran into it to drink like a cow.

> He also showed me how to hunt and gave me a gun to kill the buffalo. When I shot the buffalo, he was proud of me and said 'you are really my son'.

> The next time he gave me an ax, a *panga* and a spear; he gave me all these things and said 'you can build your own house'. Then I built my house. He said 'you are my real son, I already showed you all the things'.[42]

The Komo were known for their hunting skills beyond their territory. As skilful hunters, they were also employed by other groups, as the following story shows. It clearly speaks about the pride related to hunting:

> A: There is some people called *Gindaberet*. They also spoke Oromiffa. They used to kill buffalo and elephants to show that they are heroes. After the killing they cut of the tail of the buffalo to take it to their home to show that the have killed the buffalo. I was hunting with them. When they came, they had no gun. When they came, they asked the people who knew the place of the buffalo and the elephant. They asked the *akui*,[43] "Do you have a gun?"

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[42] 2/2011: Interview Komo elder, Gambella town, 13 August 2011.

[43] *Akui* is a village headmen or local leader.

Then the *akui* gave them a gun, for the price of five bullets. If they didn't give us the five bullets, we didn't give them a gun. If we give them the gun, they would shoot you and kill you. So, we went with them by two and only gave them the gun the minute we had the buffalo to be killed. We made a trick: because we know how to kill the buffalo we told them that our shot killed the animal, and that he doesn't have a right to dance and sing; because we killed it. Because the place which their bullet hit, is not bleeding a lot, and the place where I hit, is bleeding a lot. So, the chance is mine to sing and dance. Then we discuss and make them pay the tail (5 *birr*), the meat (30 *birr*), the horns (50 *birr*); then they can take the things home and sing and dance and be a hero. I was hunting with them a lot. I made a lot of money with this. After the *Därg* came the *Gindeberet* did not come anymore.

The mother will be happy, because her son is strong; she will put butter on the head and beads around the neck; "you are fighting with buffalo you are strong…" and then they prepare *shui* for the celebration; he will not do any work for five days, for five days everybody contributes maize and sorghum to make the *shui* and everybody will sing and dance.

Q: What about elephants?

A: We are looking for his footprint and follow. The elephant is very serious. When they open and shut their ears it gives some sound. The place where they are you can hear when they are moving their ears. Here it is. When we are strong men, three or four, we say here it is and then we go for it. The person who knows his behaviour is me. When the wind is blowing in the direction of the elephant, then we will not move forward; we have to change the side and come from another side. Elephant seems like a good animal, but it is not; when we are very close, we shoot. We shoot with automatic! The elephant starts shouting, if we run away, the elephant will finish us! We stand and keep shooting. The other elephants are coming to help him and if we run away, they will follow us and kill us.

When he died, we take off his teeth…(whispers) we took it to our home. One is a round 2,000-3,000 *birr*, the other one we exchange it for the gun; three

guns plus bullets. At that time we were afraid of the Nuer, we were fighting
with the Nuer.

Sister-exchange marriage

The institution of sister-exchange marriage is one of the central Koman institutions in
the research area. Exchange marriage has received some attention and has been studied
in the context of the Uduk, Gumuz and Koma.[44] In Ethiopia, González-Ruibal
indicated that sister-exchange is still occasionally practiced among *sit shwala* in
remoter places.[45] It also appears that the Gumuz still practice it. Specifically, for a
Komo and Gwama perspective, it was most thoroughly studied in the Sudan by
Joachim Theis.

There are regional and local variances in the system. The essence of the exchange is
that the groom gives his sister or cousin to the family of the bride in exchange in order
to keep and exact balance between the marrying parties.[46] According to Theis'
observation, in its ideal form it guaranties the reproductive capacity of the patrilineal
clan, since children from exchange marriages belong to the line of the father, while
children from other marriages belong to the line of the mother.[47]

There are two things particularly interesting about exchange marriage in the research
area. First it was attested to me both by Omotic and Koman groups as cultural history.
Since it belongs to the *deeper* Koman culture, the Gonga population seems to have
taken up this system and hence affirmed the inter-cultural relations that might have
been the beginning of the previously mentioned inter-ethnic clan relations. All groups
have indicated during interviews that the "original" form of marriage was through
sister exchange. But this brings out the second interesting point which indicates that
the system has been largely abandoned. Among the highland Koman population a
frequent statement is that the tradition of exchange marriage has been changed to a
system of bride wealth: "we now do it like the Oromo". In the lowlands it is often

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[44] Wendy James, 'Why the Uduk Won't Pay Bridewealth', *Sudan Notes and Records* 51 (1970): 75–84;
James, *'Kwanim Pa*; James, 'Lifelines: Exchange Marriage among the Gumuz'; Theis, *Nach Der
Razzia*.
[45] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 266.
[46] James, *'Kwanim Pa*, 241.
[47] Theis, *Nach Der Razzia*, 123.

related to governmental influences. But the time is not clearly indicated. Some people referred the *Därg* time, other to the present government.[48] Either way in several interviews the appraisal was, "the government told us to stop". A regular reason for the change was that "people who don't have a sister cannot marry". Bride-wealth today includes money, lifestock (mostly chicken and goats), cloth and alcohol.

The vanishing of sister-exchange, to my understanding, did not significantly alter inter-ethnic marriages. Inter-marriage between e.g. Oromo and Mao is rather rare anyway. But the changes are surely socially significant, especially since exchange marriage has also been an act of defiance and cultural integrity in the face of the hegemonic neighbours.[49]

Religious Traditions

The culture of the Mao and Komo has been changing tremendously. Mainstream society has been imposing majority cultures on the people and the Mao and Komo continue living between adaptation and avoidance. Today mainstream religion is Islam although rigorous attempts to proselytize can be felt both from protestant and catholic groups.

A Komo elder in Pokung once made an eloquent point, when I was asking for the origin of the brick-built church building. He said, that when the missionaries come, "we're either Protestant or Catholic - the rest of the time, we are Muslim. But we drink *shui* and we pray in the house of god (*gubbi waal*)."[50] *Waal* is either a *supreme being*, or the term for the *sorcerer*, or the *diviner*. "Since the missions are here, god's house is empty" was the response of another discussant during the same visit in Pokung.[51] I take this as an important hint for the understanding of social change among the Komo. The missions (new religious hegemony that indicts the consumption of alcohol charismatic movements that recently try to get into the Komo community) contribute to the declining of traditional rituals and social practices. For some time now, other missionary societies have also become short term employers and a possibility for income generation. Some Komo men could recently make money by

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[48] Wendy James indicates in her 1979 Uduk ethnography that the Komo of Ethiopia stated to abandon the system (cp, James, *'Kwanim Pa*, 244).

[49] Jędrej,, *Ingessana*, 6; James, 'Lifelines: Exchange Marriage among the Gumuz'.

[50] 26/2010: Komo elder, Pokung, Gambella, 24.10.2010.

[51] 26/2010: Komo elder, Pokung, Gambella, 26.10.2010.

assisting the construction of a church building. But, and I take the previous statement as a delightful resume of the relation the Komo have with outside forces: the Komo are able to adapt to outside forces but retain their cultures below the surface and thus protect them.

Similarly, I was once told by a Mao (*sit shwala*) elder in Begi, that he doesn't understand why Islam forbids beer. For him (being a self-declared Muslim) the beer was of almost spiritual importance as it embodied the corn as source of life.[52] But with a smile he said, that next time I would come, the community would prepare beer for me.[53]

This secret persistence of cultural elements against what can be regarded as a mainstream culture reflects the persistent ability of the Mao and Komo to preserve their cultural repertoire in light of various emerging cultural influences.

Regarding the first point, the diffusion of cultural elements has been an important feature of the various scholarly approaches to the region. Some examples are sufficient to illustrate this point. Based on the report by Cerulli from the 'Como' (most probably Gwama), Triulzi assumes the veneration of the dog has influenced the dog-killing rites of the Berta, as well as the diffusion of the same rites in the historical record of the Shilluk, Anywaa or the existence of rainmakers and diviners among the Nuer, Shilluk, Dinka and Berta.[54] The movement of cultural practices is an important feature of the region and its people.

A contemporary example that illuminates this point further is the existence of the term Yere, a supreme being, that is found in various groups and contexts. Yere can be found as a name for both the Christian God or Allah,[55] as well as in various forms among the Omotic-speaking Anfillo Mao to the Nilo-Saharan areas of Benishangul.[56] The Gwama

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[52] 22/2010: Mao elder, Qama, Begi *wäräda*, 16.10.2010.

[53] For similar incident see: González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance,* 263.

[54] Triulzi, *Salt, Gold, and Legitimacy*, 51–54.

[55] Examples from the language development efforts currently undertaken by the Norwegian Mission in Benishangul is the short reader *Yan a Yere gi ttwa Gwama*, "Worship god in the Gwama language". A Gwama speaker once told me "Yere simply means Allah" (22/2010: Mao elder, Qama, Begi *wäräda*, 16.10.2010).

[56] At a very early stage of the research, when I found evidence for Yere to be known among the 'Mao' in my research area, I was convinced that the people I sat with were Omotic-speaking Mao, only to realize that they were Gwama-speaking Mao.

and Mao have adopted the term Yere "the paramount divinity of the Gonga peoples".[57]

> Although the Busase were nominal Christians, they also had "pagan" gods. Their supreme deity was the god of the sky god Yére, similar to Yeró of Kaffa. As in Kaffa, there was a superstition of a man-hyena called Kuoro.[58]

This syncretism of monotheistic elements with local spirits, demons and the belief in diviners and sacrifices is a prevalent feature also among the Nilo-Saharan Mao and Komo of today.[59]

Some observations I made during consecutive occasions regarding religious beliefs and practices might be illustrative at this point. On one occasion a ritual was staged for me. I had bothered my host with several questions so that he decided at one point to ask the local diviner (*sit bish*) to perform a worship. The ritual beer was water and the chicken that would under real conditions be sacrificed was left alive. During the ceremony in a *swal kwama*, in the area of Begi, the participants, all wearing Muslim attire (*jallabiyyas*, scarfs, and prayer caps) were squatting around in the fire place holding their hands in front similar to Muslim prayers. The *sit bish* lead the ceremony. He spoke a prayer of which every sentence was answered by the people with the words *yere siezi* ('God is Great'). The *sit bish* passed the calabash of water (beer) and everyone who drank, spit some beer in the fire for blessing. The *sit bish* blessed all attendants by sprying beer on them.

The *swal gwama* is an interesting feature of the Mao culture. The staged ceremony took place in what Grotanelli had referred to as beehive huts (*campanne alveare*); it was lying a little outside the main settlement and certainly further away from the Oromo houses. González-Ruibal has documented the use and structure of these houses both among *sit shwala* and Hozo groups, which he took as proof that these cultural huts were a "pan-Mao phenomenon".[60]

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[57] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 73.

[58] Girma Mengistu, 'The Busase of Anfillo, Qellam, Wallaga (A Historical Study)', 5.

[59] Ernesta Cerulli remarked, quoting Grottanelli's observation, that the Komo (our Gwama) pray to a supreme being Yere Siezí on their knees, which, according to her, goes back to Muslim influences (Cerulli, *Peoples of South-West Ethiopia and Its Borderland*, 33).

[60] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 296.

A powerful reminder of the fact that the Mao create "spaces of cultural persistence" with these houses where the Mao and Gwama retain their culture is a remark by González-Ruibal:

> The *swal kwama* and the Mao cannot be separated. They are the same. It is like the mosques for the Muslim and the church for the Christians. We pray there to our god. The *swal kwama* has to be perpetuated through generations. The moment the *swal kwama* ceases to exist, there will be no more Mao.[61]

Despite the importance of what is perceived as deep cultural tradition by the Mao, the influence of other religious concepts is striking. The following is a song, a young informant had texted in the Gwama language. He was a young Christian Mao and went to the *Mekane Yesus Church*, which is attended by the Oromos of the region: *Hoyo Yer(e) mini - Set gabit na - Yase mashagna - Qinde maguse - Hune maguse - Gashi man kule.*[62]

A year after I had met this young man, I had the opportunity to follow a SIL-led mission to record songs from Koman and Omotic Mao in order to use the melodies as a cultural tool to proselytize and give the melodies new Christian wording in the respective language. For this purpose, the SIL had invited an ethno-musicologist who was a respected specialist for such kind of endeavours with long field experience from other parts of Africa. After several discussions and small games and exercises the respective groups of Omotic speakers, and Nilo-Saharan speakers were asked to perform a song which they "found representative of their respective culture". The groups surrounded by the already Christian Mao, the performer of the earlier song, who was invited to the workshop because he was already seen as key figure to access the Mao community, presented no songs (war songs, hunters songs, etc. like the Omotic groups), but staged a dramatic enactment of the visit of a man to the *swal gwama* and the killing and sacrifice of a chicken, the consumption of beer and the blessing thereafter. All in all, they lengthily performed the visit of a man at the diviner with precisely all the aforementioned ritual aspects. A broom was used as the spear of

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[61] Ibid., 299.

[62] 4/2012: Begi, Mao youngster, Begi town, 04.October 2012. Translation: Come my Lord—Shake my hand—It becomes morning—The dark has gone—The sickness has gone—I stand. I am grateful to Klaus-Christian Küspert. It was during joint research, that I was introduced to the informant and that we recorded this song.

the *sit bish*, a piece of cloth was the chicken, an empty basket functioned as the calabash for the beer. All the performers, men and women, were very clear and precise in the ritual steps they presented to the audience.

The workshop leader was puzzled though because there was hardly any melodically aspect and the ritual sacrifice of chicken was not of any help for the ethno-musicological mission.

Both enactments of the sacrifices for Yere show how important this aspect of traditional religion for the Mao (Gwama) still is and how it retains a cultural space of their history.

Five encounters with identity

Citizenship and the idea of belonging are largely defined by the history of the inter-ethnic encounters. How a society opens to new-comers, leaves political space for its minorities, etc. should be discussed before the historical encounter and growth of inter-ethnic relations. We will see in the selected cases below, how ethnic labels, history, and webs of meaning define questions of belonging to the region, to the nation, or to the cultural neighbour. The area of concern is peripheral, and hence a structural challenge to national citizenship. Ethnic groups and individuals often feel neglected by the government and marginalized. These feelings are often being presented on the basis of historical perceptions, as we will see in the course of the thesis.

Apart from cultural relatedness of Mao and Komo that I have presented earlier, there is also a historical relatedness that informs much of the self-identification and the identification by others, and the marginal role they have inherited in their relations with other groups as well within consecutive state systems. Ethnic groups are usually studied in separation. The case of the Mao and Komo provides space for a comparative approach to cultural history. I take it for granted that ethnicity and ethnic groups are hardly stable complexes and that social structure is not a "equilibrium".[63]

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[63] Cp. Edmund Ronald Leach, *Political System of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1964), 4. I take it from the same author that, "real societies exist in time and space. The demographic, ecological, economic and external political situation does not build up into a fixed environment, but into a constantly changing environment. Every real society is a process in time" (Ibid., 5).

[…] "ethnic groups" and "culture" are cumulative historical constructions, and evolve not in isolation but in interaction, often within a regional or wider political-economic network. This statement implies that there is no primordiality to be ascribed to "ethnicity" except at the danger of reifying difference, and essentializing "culture" (including language). This does not mean that the cultural complexes and ethnic identities referred to by people and elaborated in ritual, world-view, and values have no meaning or are arbitrary bricolages of cultural material. On the contrary, they are a rich source of belonging and group-esteem and show a measure of internal cohesion. But they are dynamic and changing. They cannot be pinned down only to criteria like language, a common territory, a common "psychological make-up," whatever that is, or shared economic life.[64]

Ethnicity, as I already indicated earlier, is a dubious identifier. Today, identity discourses and ethnic identification are important due to the political circumstances of politicized ethnicity that we find in all corners of Ethiopia. I also cannot not deny that there is a certain coherence of identification among the Mao and Komo themselves. Historically, population movements, inter-ethnic encounters, and marginalization have framed the history of these groups. Also, assimilation into other groups and language shift seem to have frequently occurred. Framed by such history, the descendants of these different ethnic formations today live under rather precarious circumstances in three regional states. The following *encounters with identity* will give a first idea of the complexities that emerge in such a socio-cultural environment.

First encounter: A term among the various Gwama clans is that of the Arab Gwama. I crossed the refugee camp Tongo 1 and Tongo 2 in late September 2012 and headed to Wanga Gitten, where I talked to a respected and widely known Mao elder. He had been named severally as someone I needed to talk to, and finally we met. The following is an excerpt from an interview conducted with this elder[65] in his homestead ca. 2 hours from Tongo:

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[64] Jon Abbink, 'Comparing Cultures in Southern Ethiopia: From Ethnography to Generative Explanation', *Northeast African Studies* 7, no. 3 (2000): 2.
[65] 10/2012: Interview with Kring elder, Wanga Gitan, 15 October 2012.

A: We came from Sudan. Through Khartoum, to Sherkole, to Ya'a Mesera, and then to Wanga Gitten. First our people came to Giten Keshe, they had cows and goats. And all the cows and goats got sick and died. So our people migrated to Bure. Kutu (Gelja) was calling all the people and together they left to Bure. Some Mao left to Bure. The Yaalo went to Begi. Those who were coming from Sudan are those who are living here. The Yaalo have been in Ethiopia before.

Q: What is your group?

A: We are Mao-Arab. The family of Kutu who left to Bure. The Yaalo and we are different. We marry each other but we are different. Half of my family lived in Bure. But when we came back we settled here. Before we were Arab, since the Ethiopian democratic rule we are the "Mao". Before we were *Bergawi*. I am speaking the Mao language of those who are living close to the river. I am the speaker of Giten. We call our language Gwama. When I came here we spoke Arabic, but when we came here we learned this language ("goKwama" i.e. *twa gwama*).

These Mao of Arab-Sudanese descent became the ruling group in the area, who, with the ascent of Kutu Gulja (s. below, chapter 3), managed to defend a certain territory against other forces, such as the Oromo and *watawit*, and eventually were incorporated into the economic system of the area as lower landlords (*balabbat*).

Second encounter: In the house of *sit shwala* elder[66] in Qama not more than 12 km from Begi along the old airfield, people spoke Gwama and insisted their self-name was "*sit shwala*". At the same time the elder emphasized that they were "Mao". I discussed this Mao-enigma with a politician of Mao descent in Asosa,[67] and following are excerpts from the interview:

[66] I visited this homestead several times between 2010 and 2012. Qama is a small *kebele* centre in Begi *wäräda* near to Begi town in Oromia.
[67] 16/2012: Interview Mao administrator, Asosa, 23 October 2012

Mao is a term that comes from Anfillo and was used for black people by the Oromo, for the Kurrio,[68] Gwama and the people they found around Begi and Tongo. […] 'sit shwala' ('black people' in *twa gwama*) is my own language (*twa gwama*); *sit shwala* is a reaction to the use of the term Mao. It is a matter of dignity. The Oromo try to assimilate the locals (through marriage) to get the productive land.

Third encounter: In Laki, I talked to a group of elders who had been introduced by the village headman as Komo, during our discussion one elder got angry and said "if you come to ask about the Komo, you also have to ask about the Gwama".

Fourth encounter: Once, asking a local administrator in Gambella for research permission, we discussed my research application, which stated that I was looking for analysis of oral traditions of the Mao and Komo. He told me that there were no Mao in Gambella but I should go to Benishangul and Oromia for that. "But for Komo – no problem". He did not seem much impressed when I told him that there were speakers of Gwama living in Gambella under the name Komo that were called Mao in other parts of the country.

Fifth encounter: A Mao youngster explained his life history to me.[69] He was three years old when his parents died. One of his Oromo neighbours took him and adopted him (*guddaficca*). Thus he grew up as an "Oromo". He did not know he was a Mao. But he played with Mao children, and went to the bush with them and for fishing.

At the age of 10 he was sent to the bush to plant trees. He met an old man, and friend of his dead parents. The old man asked him whether he knew he was from Mao. He laughed at him. But the old man told him the story of his family and where his sister and brother lived. He became interested in his family history: The old man told him, 'if you visit me, come in secret and I will tell you more'. So, he went to visit him frequently. When his *gudaficca*-family found out about this, they beat him. After which he ran away from this family and escaped to his brother and sister. His brother

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[68] Kurrio is a blanket terms that appears regularly in the research area. I understand that it designates the Omotic-speaking Mao of the research area (16/2012: Interview Mao administrator, Asosa, 23 October 2012): "Kurrio is similar to Anfillo; they speak an Omotic language; they are the people of Gumma Garra Arba, etc."). Cp. also the Kaffa link described on p.74 of this thesis. Grottanelli though holds that Qorio (also Šákkō) is used in Anfillo to designate the Anywaa (Grottanelli, *I Mao. Missione etnografica nel Uollega occidentale*, 39).

[69] 4/2012: Begi, Mao youngster, Begi town, 04.October 2012. I am grateful to Klaus-Christian Küspert. It was during joint research that I was introduced to the informant and that I recorded this episode.

and sister lived with a protestant Oromo family. He was taken to church and baptized. His elder brother was taken into the *Därg* military by force. After some years the brother came back and the government gave them land, because they were regarded orphans. The three started to live together until his sister married a Mao and his brother married and Oromo woman. When he was 15, he had an argument about inter-marriage between Mao and Oromo. The argument was taken to the elders. They argued that if Mao girls were to marry Oromos also the Mao should be able to marry Oromo. In this conflict, the Mao elder made an ultimatum, saying, if the Oromos will not accept Mao to marry Oromo girls the Mao girls should come back to their families. After this the Oromo elders accepted and allowed inter-marriage.

He met an Oromo girl at the market. She was looking for help and he helped her carrying coffee. They got married and today they have two children and take care of a nephew.

Fractured or fragile identities?

Comparing these encounters poses many questions but at the same time opens ways to enquire into the Mao-Komo enigma. Obviously, a large population of Gwama speakers (otherwise omitted from the ethno-administrative landscape of western Ethiopia) is currently divided in three groups: the Mao group of Sudanese Arabic descent, the 'Oromized' *sit shwala* and the lowland Gwama, who are identified and even identify with the term Komo.

Despite the common language, processes of migration and territorial control have largely alienated the groups from each other. It is explicitly at the intersection of patterns of control and the current federal border regime that led to, and will strengthen, the alienation of the groups among each other.

In the following section, I will investigate more closely the forces and factors that contributed to the splintering of Mao and Komo identity, set in a regional comparative approach. It will look at the changes in the society from a regional-economic actor based perspective, mainly considering the historical, socio-political circumstances.

In the later part of the study I will focus on the ethnic territory of the Mao-Komo *special wäräda*, and the Mao and Komo as the alleged beneficiaries of this territorialized approach to self-determination. Thus, against the historical background

of state-encroachment, social-stratification, territorial control and changing patterns of minority-majority relations in western Ethiopia, this study aims at analyzing the historical process that has led to the creation of the *special wäräda*. As a synchronic and diachronic political ethnography of the Mao and Komo, the study looks at the functions of ethnic federalism in a micro perspective and offers a glance at the changes and continuities of majority-minority relations under the current political framework. This will contribute to an analysis of the 'accommodation of diversity' with regard to the stated aims of political empowerment and national integration.

Chapter 3

Serfs, slaves and freemen on the border: Approaches to regional history before the integration into Ethiopia (ca. 1870–1930)

Identities are and were in constant flux in the research area. Xenonyms and self-designations are overlapping in travel literature, interviews or government reports. With traders, refugees, conquerors, and eventually researchers, more labels have appeared. But not only the terminological landscape has been changing. The social formations in this area, as elsewhere, resulted from "social alignment" as well as "adoptive responses" due to economic and social circumstances and emerging group integration.[1] This means that groups diffused into stronger or more powerful neighbours "taking over" their culture and sometimes their language. Marco Bassi's notion of *primary identities* focuses on the emergence of identities which are processed by migration as well as the clustering of peoples. Primary identities have often been overwritten and incorporated into new structures; the primary identities can then still be found in clan names and oral traditions.[2]

This part of the thesis will give a brief overview on the primary identities in the research area as well as the social and political formations before the emergence of the Ethiopian state. Several written accounts as well as oral accounts will help question the ethnic landscape immediately before and at the time of the arrival of the Ethiopian state. The area was visited by several western travellers. Most important and exhaustive are the notes taken by Juan Maria Schuver (1852–1883), edited in an immensely helpful

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[1] Abbink, 'The Deconstruction of "Tribe"', 21.

[2] Primary identities according to Bassi are defined "as the main and most immediate symbol qualifying belonging to a major group that establishes access to a set of natural resources." Marco Bassi, 'Primary Identities in the Lower Omo Valley: Migration, Cataclysm, Conflict and Amalgamation, 1750–1910', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5, no. 1 (2011): 131.

volume by Wendy James, Douglas Johnson and Gerd Baumann.[3] Schuver was a Dutch traveller who explored large parts of eastern Sudan and western Ethiopia and made remarkable historical and ethnographic notes. His visits date back to the 1880s and give an image of the area shortly before its incorporation into Ethiopia. Most importantly, besides visiting Benishangul, he travelled south beyond of Fadasi and took unique notes on encounters with Gwama and Komo. Among others he visited the Oromo *mooti* Bulla (Jote Tullu see further below) before Jote's tributary relations with the Ethiopian centre began. Other travellers before him were the Austrian Ernst Marno, the Italians Pellegrino Matteucci and Romolo Gessi.[4]

From these reports, we learn that the regions of Benishangul and Wallaga were marked by intertwined and overlapping attempts of territorial supremacy. The area was parcelled in several points of control. In Benishangul, Funj descendants, locally known as *Hamaj*, and *watawit*, descendants of Arab Sudanese immigrants, ruled small pockets of the area which was crisscrossed by several free peoples, detached from the direct influence of the local petty rulers. This web of authority and territorial control had been under the influence of the Turco-Egyptian Sudan (1820–1885) and the Mahdiyya (1885–1897), until the region eventually was incorporated into the expanding Ethiopian empire after the campaign of *ras* Mekonnen, the father of the future Emperor Haile Selassie. South of Fadasi, where Egyptian control ended, the Oromo country was also increasingly marked by political transformation of the traditional *gadaa* system towards territorial-based hereditary rule over people and land.[5] In all areas systems of tribute extraction and control were in place, which deeply affected the social systems of the Mao and Komo. Some were reduced to serfs and slave-status and other became middlemen within these political systems.

[3] James, Johnson, and Baumann, *Travels in North-East Africa*.

[4] Gessi, *Seven Years in the Soudan*; Ernst Marno, *Reisen im Gebiete des blauen und weissen Nil: im egyptischen Sudan und den angrenzenden Negerländern, in den Jahren 1869 bis 1873* (Wien: C. Gerold, 1874); Matteucci, *Sudan e Gallas*.

[5] Herbert S. Lewis, 'A Reconsideration of the Socio-Political System of the Western Galla', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 9, no. 1 (1964): 139–43; Herbert S. Lewis, *Jimma Abba Jifar, an Oromo Monarchy: Ethiopia, 1830-1932* (Lawrenceville, NJ-Asmara: The Red Sea Press, 1965); Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History, 1570-1860* (Lawrenceville, NJ-Asmara: Red Sea Press, 1990); Paulos Daaffa, *Oromo: Beiträge Zur Politischen Geschichte Äthiopiens. Der Wandel der Politischen und Gesellschaftlichen Strukturen von der Segmentären Gesellschaft zur Militärherrschaft am Beispiel der Mäčča Oromo in der Provinz Wollega*, Sozialwissenschaftiche Studien zu Internationalen Problemen 95 (Saarbrücken: Breitenbach, 1984); Tesema Ta'a, *The Political Economy of an African Society in Transformation*.

The Gonga Frontier and the 'Mao Problem'

Historical accounts concerning the Mao and Komo often take a south-eastern, which is an Arab, Funj, *watawit* perspective.[6] While this is certainly an important feature of the groups' past, as we will also see later on, the view from the Sudan has to be supplemented by a view from the east, framed by what happened on the Ethiopian side of the border.

The existence of different Mao groups in western Ethiopia has puzzled various observers.[7] Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to substantially contribute to this historical problem, a few words seem necessary to understand the connection between the different Mao groups. The main problem for the historical reconstruction of the ethno-genesis of the Mao is the lack of linguistic research to establish the link between the different Omotic Mao languages, their diffusion in western Ethiopia as well as their relation to the Nilo-Saharan. [8]

Historical linguistics suggested that the Mao problem is part of the widespread existence of an Omotic Gonga population roughly between the Abbay and Käfa (evidence are pockets of its northern-most extent: the Boro language of the Shinasha). The Mao languages may be remnants of a once wide-spread Omotic population that has been "split up by Nilo-Saharan incursion from the west, and later Oromo invasion from the east".[9] Recent research has established a strong presence of *Gonga memories* in the Benishangul area and especially the existence of a Busase past in the region.[10] The Busase are splinters of a Käfa nobility, which migrated into the area of Tullu Walal somehow before the settlement of the Oromo, and subsequently conquered and subjected the areas and population of the Anfillo forest, i.e. Omotic Mao and adjoining Nilo-Saharan groups like the Kwama (i.e. Gwama). [11] This nobility subsequently

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[6] Mainly framed by the aforementioned travel accounts, as well as modern Sudan based perspectives (e.g. Corfield, 'The Koma'; Theis, *Nach der Razzia.*

[7] Bender, 'The Mao Problem'; Fleming, 'The Importance of Mao in Ethiopian History'.

[8] This problem has recently received revived interst; s. Küspert, 'The Mao and Komo Languages in the Begi – Tongo Area'.

[9] Bender, 'The Mao Problem', 141.

[10] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 248–49.

[11] Girma Mengistu, 'The Busase of Anfillo, Qellam, Wallaga (A Historical Study)', 11–12. Quoting d'Abbadie, Girma also states that in 1843 the Anfillo were both at war with the Oromo and waged wars against the Massango (i.e the Manjangir and other Nilo-Saharan groups of lowland Illubabor); s. Ibid., 11.

established what came to be known as the kingdom of Anfillo. This process proves to have been a most decisive event in regard to later events north of present day Anfillo.

While my own research has brought little new in this regard, a brief overview of what seem established facts is necessary at this point. The most comprehensive theory for the existence of the different Mao groups as well as the establishment of the Busase in Benishangul and Wallaga is another frontier episode: the Busase, overlords of the Mao, migrated to the region of present-day western Wallaga adjoining areas today under Benishangul, and brought with them their patron-client system they exercised over the Mao in Anfillo before. Hence as Fleming put it, the Busase came to rule over their kinsmen.[12] González-Ruibal has substantiated this linguistic argument. Based on pottery excavations he argues that the Nilo-Saharan groups (usually seen as the earliest inhabitants of the region) were already in contact with the Northern Omotic groups two millennia ago, which could "explain many of the cultural similarities".[13] The Busase introduced their patrimonial system of rule to the region; and within this system also Gwama came to be incorporated into a semi-feudal structure, becoming *Mao*.

A comprehensive account of the Busase' quasi-feudal production and relation to the Mao is described by Enrico Cerulli.[14] For Enrico Cerruli the Mao were near to Masongo (cp. Majangir). I assume that he saw them as Nilo-Saharan groups, though he describes the Mao language as an Omotic language.[15] Oral traditions of the Mao and Anfillo concur in so far as the Mao were conquered by the Busase and retained a subaltern position in the Anfillo society.[16] The Anfillo ruling families had whole Mao families/lineages/clans they were ruling over and which they protected from external raids. The Mao served and supplied the Busase with agricultural products and served them with labour. The term for slave in Käfa was also "mawo".[17] The Mao also served as soldiers deployed if there were internal problems within the Anfillo clans. Hence sometimes Mao were fighting against their kinsmen.[18]

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[12] Fleming, 'The Importance of Mao in Ethiopian History', 31.

[13] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 254.

[14] Cerulli, *Etiopia occidentale*. For an extensive appraisal of the Busase and Anfillo Mao see Chapter 13 in volume 2.

[15] Ibid., 91.

[16] Ibid., 87.

[17] The serfs in the Kafa state were known as *mawo.* (cp.Werner J. Lange, *History of the Southern Gonga (Southwestern Ethiopia)* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982), 260).

[18] Cerulli, *Etiopia occidentale*, 88.

The emergence of the Oromo in the area in the 18th century led to continued wars as well as forms of adaptation and exchange. Intermarriage between Busase, Mao and Oromo successively led to the *Oromization* of the area and the groups. Lambert Bartels mentions that the Mao may have accepted serfdom under the Oromo because intermarriage with Mäčča meant the consequent status change of the children to free Oromo, "an ambition not possible" under the Busase. The Busase married and integrated into the Mäčča society and adopted Oromo names.[19]

The Oromo migration turned into a fascinating process of state-formation in western Ethiopia from which emerged several highly structured and complex principalities such as Naqamtee or Leeqa Qellem.[20] These kingdoms stood at the end of a long process of social stratification and differentiation within the Oromo societies, which changed the *gadaa* system gradually, substituting it with hierarchical social structures based on the inheritance of property.[21] These complex polities also exerted power and influence over the different Mao and Komo groups in the area.

The Emergence of the 'Mootis': The Significance of Jote Tullu

The Oromo migration changed the ethnic landscape in Ethiopia tremendously. This is due to the various cultural mechanisms of adoption in the Oromo culture, the ability to incorporate groups into their own lineages as well as the successful subjection or annihilation of resistant groups during their campaigns. The assimilation of non-Oromo and the emergence of the Oromo of mixed blood (so called *gäbaro*) is famously recognized by the Oromo of Wallaga themselves:

> The old Galla-saying "Nine are the *boräna* (pure Galla) and ninety are the *gäbaro*" is also known in this Ethiopian far West, at the same time, the Galla

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[19] Bartels, *Oromo Religion*, 22.

[20] Lewis, 'A Reconsideration of the Socio-Political System of the Western Galla'.

[21] In the case of Neqamptee this has been documented with oral testimonies. Cp.: Alula Pankhurst, ed., *Ethnological Society Bulletin* (Addis Ababa: Department of Sociology and Social Administration, Addis Ababa University, 2002).

here are conscious that the number of real *boräna* decreased, according as they moved westward.[22]

The Oromo during their expansion also assimilated large parts of the Komo, Mao and Gwama societies they met on the western fringes. There exists of course a significant bias in favour of Oromo view of events. Contrary to the Mao and Komo, who have to a large degree 'lost' their historical memories due to assimilation and/or annihilation, a bias in the regional history is feasible in favour of the Busase and Oromo historical discourse.[23]

Researches on the oral traditions of the different Mäčča sub-groups frequently make reference to the pre-Oromo populations of present-day Wallaga. People mentioned are the Gabato, Agadii, Kaza, Daamota, Waragoo, Ganqaa,[24] Konchii, the Mao-Busaasee, the Kewgu, and the Kwama (Koomoo).[25] Tesema Ta'a and Daniel Ayana mention the Mao as Nilo-Saharan people, which probably corresponds with Negasso's Kwama (Koomoo).[26] Daamota (Damot) and Ganqa (Gonga) refer to past kingdoms. Most of the names are now vanished. The survival of the names Mao, Kwama and Komo in oral traditions and in actual life is most important for us.

Due to processes of inter-ethnic contacts, inter-marriage, adoption and cultural amalgamation, the historical Sayoo Oromo may have been quite heterogeneous, as "residence rather than kinship played a prominent role."[27] In effect this heterogeneity and cultural amalgamation could have contributed to the growth of more hierarchically structured societies, both as a sheer necessity to contain conflict as well as due to cultural borrowing, since some of the early kingdoms, like the Mao-Busasse (Anfillo) kingdom, where highly structured and complex societies.[28]

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[22] Ibid., 139. In his descriptions of the Koma (our Gwama, s. further below) Schuver also mentions that the "mulattoes of Leeqa are a result of "crossing Galla with Koma"; cp. James, Johnson, and Baumann, *Travels in North-East Africa*, 152.

[23] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 243.There exists not only a local Oromo hegemony but also to some degree scholarly reproduction of this hegemony. The expansion of the Oromo and the memory of their conquest build the baseline of the scientific treatment of history of ethnicity in the region. To a certain degree this is unavoidable and largely the result of the historical process, but nonetheless noteworthy to understand our image of the regional past.

[24] In some oral accounts the "Busase" and "Ganga" appear as clan names of the Oromo in the Begi area.

[25] Negaso Gidada, 'History of the Sayyoo Oromoo of Southwestern Wallaga, from about 1770-1886' (Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe-Universität, 1984), 86.

[26] Tesema Ta'a, *The Political Economy of an African Society in Transformation*, 31.

[27] Negaso Gidada, 'History of the Sayyoo Oromoo', 86.

[28] Ibid.

Since oral accounts and scholarly analysis are blurry on the sequence of Oromo settlement in the area of Gidami, it is safe to begin the history of the Oromo presence around the mid-19th century. It may have been the mid-18th century that the Sayyo had settled in the area north of Tulu Walal. The Leeqa subsection of the Mäčča on the other hand had reached the area of Gidami and both Oromo groups were in permanent conflict with each other. At this point the *gadaa* system was still in place. By the mid-19th century, Tullu the first *mooti* of the Leeqa of Qellem and the father of Jote (see below) had united the several Leeqa sub-groups and abandoned the ritual sequence of authority organised under the age set system. He thus transformed electoral rule into a hereditary sequence.

The historical origin of the Oromo *mooti* Jote Tullu of the Wanaga clan poses numerous complex questions and is in fact one of the many frontier episodes. While Jote was without doubt the seminal local ruler of the region, his background in fact neatly connects to the historical complexities of the frontier as a political realm. Bahru Zewde, based on oral testimonies, gives the following genealogy of Jote: Jote – Tulu – Guda – Sefi – Boye – Nedi – Dicho – Wanaga. According to the same source, Wanaga was of northern descent ('Abyssininan', for that matter). He is said to have come from Gojjam. According to this theory, the names were oromized (e.g. Sedi from Sayfu, Boye from Abboye, Nedi from Nadaw, and Wanaga from Wanag Seged).[29] Noteworthy is the fact that Wanaga on his trek to the south settled near Naqamptee from where his grandson Boye moved towards the region where the family later settled and defeated *abba* Bisqana, a native leader of the Ganqa, who ruled over the local Oromo. Bisqana in Bahru's account and collection of oral materials is portrayed as a "negroid ruler".[30] After the death of Bisqana and the liberation of the subject-Oromo, the Wanaga family integrated into the local Oromo groups and thus emerged the Wanaga clan that came to fame under the rule of its first *mooti* Tullu. Further information provided by Lambert Bartels suggests an alien origin of Jote. According to this story Jote's father was an Amhara who divorced his wife, who then married Tullu, a local lord. Tullu adopted Jote and took him for a son, hence the name Jote Tullu.[31] Whether this story is true or not, whether it is a historical construction for whatever purpose of self-identification under the given political circumstances under

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[29] Bahru Zewde, 'Dejasmach Jote Tulu (1855-1918)' (B.A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1970), 4.
[30] Ibid., 5.
[31] Lambert Bartels, 'Studies of the Galla in Wälläga', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 8, no. 2 (1970): 146.

which they were collected, it is a noteworthy account. First it recalls the integration of "alien" people into the local society and their gradual rise to power. A motif that runs through the local frontier history from the Arab *wise stranger*, to the *näčč taro* (the white king) of the Käfa, Busase and Anfillo. Furthermore, it makes the Ganqa visible. Although they most probably were not a Nilotic group, but, with regard to our previous account, a possible Mao/Busase polity present in the area of Wallaga.

For the purpose of this thesis, based on the memories of the Mao and Komo, the figure of Jote Tullu, regardless of his origin and his historical impact on the Mao and Komo is quite significant.[32]

Jote's rise to regional power happened in the shadow of the rise of the eastern kingdom of Naqamtee under Bekeree who gave power to his son Moroda, then a contemporary of Jote. Jote Tullu expanded his territory considerably at the expenses of the Sayyo, Anfillo and eventually also came to control trade routes between the Sudan and Ethiopia. The rise of both strong-men, the changing patterns of the *gada*-based ritual transmission of power to territorial control of land and the hereditary transmission of power within one family followed similar patterns. According to Teferre Woldetsadik, similar to highland Ethiopian patterns of conquest and control, the two strong-men managed to unite territories under their leadership, leaving the conquered chiefs tributary but autonomous in their territories, given they provided tributes, military contributions for new conquest, and showed absolute loyalty.[33] The Mao and Komo were in part Jote's vassals and endangered by the slave raids he conducted. Before he was confirmed *däzzazmatch* under the over-lordship of the Ethiopian centre of Emperor Menelik II., he had already been significantly shaping the course of regional history and that of the Mao and Komo.

The available sources are quite congruent about the heavy impact Jote had on the surrounding Mao and Komo groups during his rise to power. Although it is difficult

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[32] According to Schuver, Jote in his youth was known as Bula, which is the name Schuver uses to describe him (cp. James, Johnson, and Baumann, *Travels in North-East Africa*.: xcviii). It might be interesting to mention, but no trace I will follow here, that Paulos Daffa in his account of the strong-men of Wallaga, has contemporaries Jote in Gidami and Bula Djarso of Begi (cp. Paulos Daaffa, *Oromo: Beiträge zur Politischen Geschichte Äthiopiens*, 39). This is obliviously another indicator for the immense complexities of power relations, and actual geographic local ability of territorial claim and rule based on oral accounts. For the argument presented here it wouldn't make a great difference if there was another strong man in the region of Begi with whom Jote was at loggerheads.

[33] Tereffe Woldetsadik, 'The Unification of Ethiopia (1880-1935): Wälläga', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 6, no. 1 (1961): 74.

to ascertain which groups were under his control, Yasin Mohammad notes that the Komos' traditional social structure was destroyed and substituted by the introduction of vassalage in which the local leaders were made representatives (*warra gofta*) of Jote and responsible for collecting tributes.[34] Also Oromo, loyal to Jote were put in control over the Komo in order to oversee the extraction of produce (this is also referred to as *warra gofta*).[35] Items used for tribute were honey, ivory and grain.

Jote's general influence and power is seen in the following statement by Schuver, who visited his court in the 1880s:

> If I call Bula a 'King' it is because a man, who can easily raise 20 000 spearmen, without counting his slave-troops and negro-vassals and who enjoys power and authority comparatively greater than any constitutional monarch, cannot well be called by the same name as the first small village 'chief'.

With the decline of the *gadaa system* at the expense of territorial control and the diversification of hierarchical structures, several Oromo clans and sub-clans lay in constant fight over territory, property and people with each other. In Western Wollega, Jote Tullu strengthened his position raiding Anfillo, Galaan, and Begi. In Anfillo he subjected the Mao and Anfillo as slaves and in Begi he was able to gain control over the Sudanese trade routes.[36]

Jote's success was based on the subjection of territory and people to his rule, and the gradual establishment of a centre of power and capital in Gidami.[37] The highly stratified social structure neatly fit into, and was coopted by the merging Ethiopian state when the region was put under control by the centre.

Based on offices similar to those of the *gadaa* system, hereditary and institutionalised political offices emerged. Below the *mooti* were the *kooro* (cp. *abba qooro*). They built the connection between the landlords (*balabbatota*) and the king.[38] They were chosen by a council of landlords but had to be confirmed by the *mooti*. The *kooro* were in principle judges and collected tax. The messengers of the *kooro* were the

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[34] Yasin Mohammed, 'The Komo of Gidami', 4.

[35] Ibid., 14.

[36] Paulos Daaffa, *Oromo: Beiträge Zur Politischen Geschichte Äthiopiens*, 51.

[37] Ibid., 52.

[38] Pankhurst, *Ethnological Society Bulletin*, 139.

wame.[39] These offices were similar both in Naqamtee and Qellem and were also applied in the Mao regions further north as we shall later see. Based on these new structures a semi-feudal system emerged that based property at the centre on hereditary rule, and enabled a certain degree of social mobility within the offices.

Any generalization on the relation of the Mao and Komo with the emerging Leeqa kingdom is prone to failure. There were quite different relationships in place. And these relationships also changed through time. Some Mao and Komo were in close trade contact with and visited Gidami. Other groups had increasingly fallen under vassalage and paid tribute to the Oromo.[40] Other Mao fought fiercely and ambushed the Oromo caravans wherever possible. Again, others were probably assimilated into the emerging Oromo society (*gudaficca*) and vanished, becoming *gäbaro* ("non-pure" Oromo), again others became peasants on the fields of the Oromo *balabatota* and were assimilated into the Oromo peasantry.

'Funj Mystique' and the Meks on the Mountains

Further north, the historical province of Bela Shangul, south of the Blue Nile, was the scene of age-old and highly dynamic population movements and migrations. The area has been a buffer between the Sudanese and Ethiopian political economies. Here too, like in the case of the Oromo frontier (in areas of Leeqa), the autochthonous Mao and Komo were exposed to an *Arab frontier*. This frontier was described in great detail by Alessandro Triulzi, who focused on the cultural encounter of Sudanese Arab immigrants and the indigenous Berta population.[41]

Originally inhabited by Nilo-Saharan peoples, the first wave of immigrants were probably the Berta from Fazoghli – part of the Funj kingdom of Sinnar – who entered the area around the 17th century and displaced the local Gwama, pushing them further south.[42] Following this migration, the Berta clans established themselves on the mountain ranges in upland Benishangul.

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[39] Paulos Daaffa, *Oromo: Beiträge Zur Politischen Geschichte Äthiopiens*, 69.

[40] Corfield, 'The Koma', 134.

[41] Triulzi, *Salt, Gold, and Legitimacy*.

[42] For the oral tradion of the Berta, see: Triulzi, 'Myths and Rituals of the Ethiopian Bertha'. For an archeological approximation to the time of settlement see also González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 180.

A second wave of immigrants, Funj nobility, followed suit and integrated into the local Berta clans, gradually coming to rule the Berta. The *agurs* (Berta kings) defined their claims for power around Funj descent and bore the titles *meks* or *manjil*, indicating association with Funj royalty.[43] Locally, this new nobility was referred to as *jäbelawin* (Arabic for mountaineers).

> In time, Funj settlers came to absorb the Bertha by forcing their political institutions on them: yet by a process of mutual assimilation and adaptation, they seem to have lost other aspects of their original culture. They spoke the Bertha language, adopted Bertha names and were even said to have become illiterate. Funj political titles like *Mek* stretched in a broad territory from Bela Shangul to Kirin. Islamic influences found its way into Bertha society and this was further accelerated later on following the settlement of groups of Arabs in the region of Bela Shangul [...].[44]

These groups of mostly riverine Sudanese Arabs, coming as preachers and traders (*jallaba*), from Ja'alin, Danagla or Rubatab families, constituted the third wave of immigrants.[45] They gradually established what came to be known as the *watawit* sheikdoms.[46] Religious patrimony and intermarriage led to the gradual formation of a *watawit* ruling nobility referred to as "the wise strangers"[47], emphasising their contribution to the spread of Islam; other sources refer to them as or the "vampires of the borderlands"[48], highlighting their influence in the cross border trade and the expansion of the slave trade. These diametrically opposing descriptions emphasize

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[43] A. W. M. Disney, 'The Coronation of the Fung King of Fazoghli', *Sudan Notes and Records* 26, no. 1 (1945): 37–42.

[44] Atieb Ahmad Dafalla, 'Sheikh Khojale Al-Hasan and Bélä Shängul'.

[45] Anders Bjørkelo, *Prelude to the Mahdiyya: Peasants and Traders in the Shendi Region, 1821-1885* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jay Spaulding, *The Heroic Age in Sinnār* (East Lansing, MI: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1985).

[46] Atieb Ahmad Dafalla, 'The Origin of the Sheikhdoms of Bela-Shangul; A Paper Prepared for Discussion at the Historical Seminar Deprtment of History', n.d., IES; Triulzi, *Salt, Gold, and Legitimacy*.

[47] According to Alessandro Triulzi, "as in other peripheral areas of the Nile Valley, the 'legend of the wise stranger', who teaches the barbarous peoples civilized habits and who founds a new (Muslim) dynasty through a marriage alliance with a local (Bertha) kings' daughter, has found a fertile ground in the Bela Shangul region." Alessandro Triulzi, 'Trade, Islam, and the Mahdia in Northwestern Wallaggā, Ethiopia', *The Journal of African History* 16, no. 1 (1975): 59.

[48] Spaulding, *The Heroic Age in Sinnār*.

both their respective influence as teachers of the Quran as well as their ruthless integration into a slaving economy. Eventually by the mid-19th century, the descendants of Arab traders and local Berta, had "through intermarriage and skillful policy participation in internal politics, taken effective power from their Bertha protectors."[49]

The area was tributary to various hegemonic polities. The *meks* payed tribute to the Ottoman Empire, which held posts at Dul, and their tributary patrols reached as far as Agoldi and Kiring.[50] Slavery, assumed Anthony Arkell, was non-existing under the Funj rule,[51] but was certainly accelerated through the tributes levied on the *meks* by the Egyptian government. The *watawit sheiks* on the other hand were already integrated into a slaving economy and slavery seems to have played an immense role in their economic activities.

Visiting the area in the 1870s, the Austrian traveller Ernst Marno left us a lively picture of the interaction of the various groups, the interplay of *watawit*, *meks* and the peasant Berta. He described a journey he undertook together with *sheikh* Khojali (i.e. Khojali Adam of Benishangul (proper), the father of Torr el Gurri). It gives us a good image of the time and the emerging *watawit sheikhs* engaging in the vibrant trade between Sudan and Ethiopia. The narrative follows the track of Khojali transporting goods and slaves from Fazoghli to Benishangul. The road leads along several trading posts and through the territory of the Ingessana, who are said to be a threat to the conduct of trade, as they ambush the caravans. The description of *Jebel Aqro* is quite illuminating for our understanding of the wider economic and ethnic landscape of the area: The *mek* of the mountain took tribute from the passing caravans. It seemed common for all caravans to pay tribute at every stronghold of a *mek*.[52] At the time of Marno, the *watawit*, it seems, were engaged in trade and lived among the Funj nobility as traders and preachers, but every *jebel* and its surroundings had a *mek* who controlled the local population.[53] Jebel Aqro was inhabited by Bertat (i.e. Berta), *Gebelauin* (*jebelawin*) and *Uatauit* (*watawit*). Marno mentions that the *jebelawin* and

[49] Triulzi, 'Trade, Islam, and the Mahdia in Northwestern Wallaggā, Ethiopia', 59.
[50] Anthony Arkell, 'A Note on the History of the Country of the Berta Lying East of Kurmuk… with Special Reference to the Recent Discovery of a Considerable Import of Berta Slaves into the Sudan (Sketch Map Attached)', 1928, 1, SOAS London.
[51] Ibid., 2.
[52] Marno, *Reisen im Gebiete des blauen und weissen Nil*, 51.
[53] Ibid., 65.

the *watawit*, both "seemingly" Muslim claimed supremacy over the "pagan" Berta, who lived as their servants but not, as Marno makes clear, as their slaves.[54] This may indicate instead a form of feudal bondship (s. Chapter 5).

The *watawit sheihks* were not united. Rather small regional centres emerged around their political and social influence. Some of the *watawit* like Khojali Adam opposed the Egyptian government and sided with the emerging Mahdiyya and others opposed the gradual Mahdi rule.[55] The area came under short rule of the Mahdiyya and the *watawit sheiks,* where they had gained supremacy over land and people, transmitted the tributes levied on them to the peasants and local population. Tor el Gurri was able to use the rule of the Mahdiyya for his own ends and extended his territory and influence as far as Fazoghli.[56]

At the end of the 19th century the most important of these *sheiks* were Abd ar-Rahman Khojali of Qebesh, Maḥmud Muḥammad of Khomosha, al-Hasan Muhammad of Aqoldi, and Muḥammad Hasan of Fadasi.[57]

In 1897, with the end of the Mahdiyya, the Ethiopian army entered the region and subjected the *watawit* rulers. Some, we will see later, sided with the Ethiopian central army immediately, some opposed and entered into battle. The successful Ethiopian army for a while put the region under control of *ras* Dämissäw and eventually it was the famous *sheikh* Khojali al-Hasan who came to administer the region. He expanded his territorial claims well into the Mao country south of Fadasi and emerged as one of the most infamous slave traders in the region.

The Amam and Gwama, the "Last Republicans"

A group that we know from writing about the region since the early 19th century are the Amam. They are of special interest because the Amam is the closest we can get to an historical picture about the Mao of Benishangul. The Amam play a significant role in the 19th-century travel reports. The name is usually applied to populations just south below the sphere of influence of the Egyptian Sudan, around the area of Fadasi.

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[54] Ibid., 52.

[55] Herbert Weld Blundell, 'A Journey through Abyssinia to the Nile', *The Geographical Journal* 15, no. 2 (1900): 116.

[56] Arkell, 'A Note on the History of the Country of the Berta Lying East of Kurmuk', 2.

[57] Triulzi, 'Trade, Islam, and the Mahdia in Northwestern Wallaggā, Ethiopia'.

Some of these Amam groups seemed to have successfully resisted slave-raiding. Still a blanket term, it is not easy to identify the groups subsumed beneath, but it may be safe to assume that Grottanelli's 'northern Mao' (Omotic Mao) were among the Amam. Also, further south in the area of present day Begi, the term seemed to apply to speakers of Gwama. The term Amam has been replaced with the term Mao due to growing influence of the Oromo on the expanse of the Arabs.[58] Most interesting are the observations of Schuver, in regard to the distinction between Koma and Amam, which clearly recalls the dividing line between todays Mao and Gwama (see further below).

Before Schuver, the Italian travellers Gessi and Matteucci recorded information on the Amam: The Italian soldier Romolo Gessi visited Fadasi in the 1870s. Fadasi was known to Gessi as a prosperous salt market. Salt was traded from the Sudan and entered Ethiopia through Galabat. At Fadasi Oromo traders came to exchange iron, oxen, horses and honey.[59] Fadasi was the border between the Arab dominated areas of Benishangul and the Oromo countries of Western Wallaga. The fear of the Amam found its expression in the recollection of Gessi:

> [The Amam] occupy both banks of the Yabus; they have no laws, no faith, are regardless of every tie of discipline or morality, and live exclusively by rapine and plunder, practiced on caravans of the poor Gallas when returning from the salt market.[60]

The reputation of the "fierce Amam" obviously echoed through much of the region, as we learn from a passage of Schuver's travel log; quoted is a statement of the governor of Famaka:

> Go wherever you choose, but may Allah preserve you from falling in with the Amam. They are so ferocious and hostile against strangers, that they not only kill them, but even their horses, mules and donkeys revenge their intrusion on Amam ground.[61]

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[58] James, Johnson, and Baumann, *Travels in North-East Africa*.: lxiv, xc.
[59] Gessi, *Seven Years in the Soudan*, 166.
[60] Ibid.
[61] James, Johnson, and Baumann, *Travels in North-East Africa*, 49.

The "aggressiveness" of the Amam is explained by Schuver by the sheer devastation of the country by the *razzias* of Turkish soldiers during the Turkish occupation of the Sudan. While all previous attempts to travel beyond Fadasi (by Marno, Gessi and Matteucci) failed, it was actually Schuver who for the first time was able to investigate the westernmost Oromoland and visited the Amam beyond Fadasi. Schuver found the Amam in three areas "situated exactly to the south of Fadasi". The first area Schuver identifies is on the road between Fadasi and Leeqa, where he found three villages. The inhabitants were not able to levy taxes on the trade on this route but engaged in the trade as carriers and cattle drivers.[62] The inhabitants of these villages, Schuver goes on, lived in peace with Fadasi and the Leeqa. Schuver mentions another village complex west of the first on the road to Koma country. This should mean towards the lowland and what are today Gwama areas. Furthermore, Schuver mentions

> the wild and outlawed Amams, who occupy the Shugru Mountains to the East of Bega [i.e. Begi], subsist on marauding and are the scourge of their neighbours the Leeqa and Sibu Gallas. As they dare not appear in the markets of Gorgura and Bambeshi, the Galla-slaves they occasionally kidnap are passed over by them to the Bega Amams, who sell them at Gogura.[63]

He locates the third Amam village (Swalakala[64]) near Fadasi. Here the inhabitants have sought refuge on Egyptian soil.[65] Schuver mentions Swalakala to be "as a colony of the Amams driven from their own country and tributary to Fadasi".[66] After passing Swalakala, Schuver's party entered Bega (present-day Begi). Begi was a rather prosperous settlement of the Amam under a certain *mek* called Toza.[67]

The population of the Amam is estimated at that time at around 8,000 people and "spread over dozen villages".[68] Schuver's meticulous description of the Amam is interesting to recall in full detail:

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[62] Ibid., 40.
[63] Ibid., 41.
[64] The name is interesting because in Gwama 'swal' means house.
[65] James, Johnson, and Baumann, *Travels in North-East Africa*, 40.
[66] Ibid., 46.
[67] Ibid., 50. I was not able to record any information on Toza in present day Begi.
[68] Ibid., 40.

This tribe has enjoyed for a long time a much exaggerated reputation for ferocity and inhospitality. The origin of this myth must be sought in the defeats which they inflicted on the vanguard of irregular troops of Mohammed at the time of the Turkish conquest. Happier and above all more obstinate than the Berta, the Amam set up a barrier against Mohammedan invasion, a barrier so invincible that they succeeded in hiding from the covetous Turks the existence of the rich and fertile Galla country of which they kept the keys, so to speak, involuntarily. It is said that the Amam showed themselves so jealous of their independence that they went so far as to massacre without pity the horses and donkeys of the fallen invaders […].[69]

The actual identity of the Amam is hard to establish, and I was not able to evoke any memories with the term. Yet in the 1970s, according to interviews by Alessandro Triulzi, the Amam were remembered to have ben subdivided in 14 clans. The interview eventually only mentions two, the "Yaala" and the "Kuguul."[70] The latter are a sub-group of the Gwama and the first is a trans-ethnic clan name that is mentioned among Gwama, *sit shwala*, Hozo and Sezo speakers as a clan of their own.[71]

The existence of the village of Yaala is particularily noteworthy with regards to the distinction Schuver makes between Amam and Koma. The village of Yala (s. above the possible overlap with the trans-ethnic clan-name) is situated in Koma country. Yala was the residence of a notable Koma who gained influence by marriage to the sister of an Oromo chief.[72] Alliances complement the sphere of inter-ethnic relations. Schuver's description of the Koma is vivid:

I saw in the Koma a striking contrast with all the other negro tribes on this side, a people who did not seek to procure slaves; in fact, I did not find any individual of a foreign race, except the Galla princess married to the notable of Yala. […] A surplus of goodwill, a general contentment, a lack of strongly marked egoism seemed to me to characterize this race.[73]

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[69] Ibid.
[70] Field notes of Alessandro Triulzi (Asosa-Begi, a-bg 4, p.1).
[71] Interviews in Benishangul, 2010-2014
[72] James, Johnson, and Baumann, *Travels in North-East Africa*, 151.
[73] Ibid., 152.

In the course of his further description it turns out clearly that Schuver actually traveled in Gwama territory, as he visits a place called Maganza and the "widely dispersed village of Bosho"[74], names, today preserved in Gwama clan names (s also pp. 66 and 244 for a list). Hence, we see an example of the division between the highland *sit shwala*, which are Schuver's Amam and the lowland Gwama (Schuver's Koma) are already laid out. Furthermore, the existence of the Yaala as a clan name in various groups may indicate that Yaala was a permeable boundary for cultural elements of the Amam (Arab, Oromo influences and the Gwama Nilotic) and that the place became a meeting place of different groups hence the diffusion of Yala as a trans-ethnic clan name.

The Gwama of this era were still rather unaffected by the outside influence and also the exposure to slave raids was still little.

He accounts also for the fact that the Amam are most certainly related to the Koma and speak a corrupted dialect of the same language. This recalls the lingusitc variations between highland and lowland Koman.[75] He believed the 'Goma' (Koma) and 'Amam' to be "remains of an aboriginal race", driven into the mountains by successive invasions of the Oromo from the east and the Dinka for the south.[76]

So, while the Gwama had already been in contact with the Oromo, their habitat was still rather unaffected by the intruders. The term Mao had not been introduced into the region by the 1880s and the influence of the Oromo was not yet as strong. The history of the Amam is intriguing and opens an interesting way into the ethno-historical speculations about the Amam identity in relation to the history of the Mao. Especially the contemporary cultural differentiation of highland and lowland Koman seems to resonate in Schuver's description.

"The House of David": The Making of a Mao Nobility

All the above already testifies to a highly complex frontier mosaic, in which indigenous groups, traders, refugees, and rulers competed over resources, and for controlling space and territory. The power was mostly distributed between *meks,* who

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[74] Ibid., 154.
[75] Küspert, 'The Mao and Komo Languages in the Begi – Tongo Area'.
[76] James, Johnson, and Baumann, *Travels in North-East Africa*, 330.

ruled over territory often confined to the surroundings of mountains and organized trade between the Sudan plains and the fertile highlands of Ethiopia. The most powerful rulers of the immediate area were the *watawit sheikhs* of Bela Shangul and Jote Tullu to the south. Between these strongholds lived smaller groups, Gwama and Mao. The Koma (of Schuver) and the Amam seem to appear as the forefathers of the present-day *sit shwala* and Gwama. The investigation on the history of the Mao inevitably leads to the figure of Kutu Gulja, first described by Grottanelli as a half-caste landlord of the Mao.[77] This history is directly connected to the enigmatic clan names that appear in any approach to this history. These names are *Kiring,*[78] *Wärrä Dawd, Wärrä Issa, Wärrä Sätta.*[79] Together, these important clans in the Begi area connect the Koman Mao to a history of Sudanese immigration. While obviously clan names such as Yalo or Bosho and Kiring refer to place names, clan names such as Wärrä Sätta, Wärrä Dawd or Wärrä Kutu clearly relate to names of founders of lineages. In Schuver's time Begi was under *mek* Toza,[80] but this prosperous Amam settlement soon became the site of far-reaching changes in the history of the Mao of Begi (*sit shwala*). We have already seen in an earlier interview excerpt, that there are Mao who refer to Arab descent and eventually settled in Wanga Gitaan (cp. map 244). This migration is directly connected to the history of the Mao clans of the Wärrä Dawd.

An interview excerpt will show some of issues that have to be clarified:

> A: We came from Dawd [*we are descendants of Dawd*]. There was nobody when Dawd came here. When he came he could not find anybody here. He

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[77] Grottanelli, *I Mao. Missione etnografica nel Uollega occidentale*, 78.

[78] Also Kring, Kiring (cp. Küspert, 'The Mao and Komo Languages in the Begi – Tongo Area', 23.: "Kirin is mainly reported from some villages around Tongo, such as Bobos Ishkaba and Wanga Git'en, as well as from Tongo town (op. cit). There is one isolated reporting from Lak'e in the lowlands. In all cases, Kirin as a linguistic term stands in contrast to Gwama and Komo. The information that Gwama and Kirin are mutually understandable indicates that Kirin here designates a variety of Koman Mao." Wendy James et. al. mention Kiring as a Berta dialect (cp. James, Johnson, and Baumann, *Travels in North-East Africa*, 60).

[79] Although all these groups belong to the list of Mao clans one can gather today from the people around Begi, the Sättä and Issa are said to be basically oromized and not to have Mao identity anymore. Nonetheless they belong to the mosaic of clans, and hence point into the direction of a Mao history.

[80] Probably of Funj descent but the name did not arouse any memories during my investigations on the history of Begi. Instead the enigmatic first "Mao king Bek", "who lived on the mountain besides Begi" is often referred to as the namesake for Begi today.

continued walking without knowing the direction and met Jote. Issa and Said (Sättä) were the sons of Dawd.

Q: Where did Dawd come from?

A: Dawd came through Sudan. He was a trader. And they remained here. He married with the *sit shwala* [the black people]. Dawd made an agreement with Jote to live brotherly. After the agreement was made in Oromia, Dawd came back to Tongo. Joto was a landlord from Wanaga [*an Oromo sub-clan*]. After he came back from Gidami he stayed with the Arab Gwama. Jote was *mooti* in Gidami.

Q: What was the relation between Joto and Dawd?

A: They met and discussed. When they met they discussed on land and peace, and made a peace agreement; they decided to marry from each other.

Q: How many generations have passed since Dawd?

A: Many, many, many! We can take one example: Harun Soso – Soso Kutu – Kutu Gulja – Gulja Sätä (Said) and Said Dawd.[81]

This interview excerpt gives a very condensed image of the various incredibly complex notions of migration and inter-ethnic relations. Dawd obviously belonged to Muslim traders who entered Ethiopia on the *hajj*. The most prominent example is the highly venerated *sheikh* Ahamd Umer who eventually settled in Ya'a and whose shrine today is a centre of the Tijjaniya cult in western Ethiopia as well as a centre for ecumenical pilgrimages that attracts thousands of Muslim pilgrims but also Christians. Pilgrims seek spiritual blessing or are attracted by healing qualities e.g. of the holy water of Ya'a.[82] The account above quite obviously mixes the history of Dawd with that of Kutu Gulja (s. further below) who was according to other oral accounts the

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[81] 3/2013: Interview with Mao elders, Shorshor Betuji, Tongo wäräda, 04. November 2013

[82] For the history of Ya'a and especially the account to *al-faki* Ahmad Umer, s. Minako Ishihara, 'The Life History of a Muslim Holyman: Al-Faki Ahmad Umar', in *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIIIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Kyoto, 12-17 December 1997*, vol. 2 (Kyoto, 1997), 391–402.

contemporary of Jote Tulu. Nonetheless, the story is consistent in so far, as the Tukrir traders and pilgrims seemed to have settled in the area of Begi and established themselves among the *sit shwala* who were the Amam of Begi. At this point, according to the local traditions, the exact emergence of these *Arab Mao* is still quite speculative, but after migration from Kirin, the Mao may have taken political control over the Amam of Begi, where they took over local rule by marriage into the local nobility. This theory recalls similarities of integration and patrimony with the case of the *watawit*. It is worth mentioning also that "Cutu" is also a place indicated on Italian maps of the 1930s as well as a place mentioned by the Gwynn mission who carried out surveys in the region in the attempt to demarcate the border between Ethiopia and the Sudan (s. further below). As far as this evidence allows us, we might speculate that sections of *watawit* migrated southward from Mount Kiring to the area of Begi/Tongo/Kutu where they took over the Gwama language and gradually became a ruling linage of the highland Gwama.

Kring itself stands out in the history of the Mao of Begi and some further considerations may substantiate the speculations about the ethnic origin of the *Wärra Kutu*. Kiring is the name of a mountain near Asosa. It was the important trading post and meeting place of various peoples in the late 19th century.[83] The first European to visit Kirin was the Dutch traveller Schuver. His description is highly illuminating:

> Kirin looked a queer place. The huts, in far greater number and far more compactly grouped than we had seen anywhere. They looked more like birds' nests than human dwellings, built as they are on and amid the massive boulders of the steepest and barrennest of murrains, a gigantic avalanche of titanic blocks reaching from the plain till some 400 feet on the mountainslope. [...] Several of the neighbouring Arab Sheikhs of the Bertas entertain at this important place a kind of consuls, who have to look after the safety of their traders and other subjects, who resort hither during the middle and end of the dry season (February-April) to trade with the Abu-Rôf nomads. These latter convey sea-salt to Kirin on their camels and also *domur* and in return Galla-horses, iron and Galla-cows; [...] The scene in prosperous years was described to me as very lively one, the Arabs, Gallas Amams and *jellaba* [Bedouin] all

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[83] It seems to me that today the most regular usage of the term Kirin is a self-identification of Mao elders who refer to their Arab descent.

having their different fenced-in camps of tent or leafy huts in the plain below. The Kirin people take no part in the market except in so far as their personal necessities are concerned but their Agur takes a slight tribute from the Amams & Gallas and receives presents from the Arab traders.[84]

The description of Kirin is vivid and one can easily imagine that at such a meeting place the frontier shows its full socio-cultural aspects. People marry, mix customs and habits, slaves are being brought from everywhere and fill local social strata. The description of Kirin, "the largest Berta village, even overhanging Bela Shangul", is extremely interesting for another reason: For the people today, Kiring is a clan name of the Mao. More precisely it is a clan name both for the Gwama speakers and the the *sit shwala* Mao. The *agur* of the Kirin in Schuver's description points to the fact that ethnically Kirin was inhabited by Berta, and the Amam (the highland Mao) had to pay a fee to the *agur*; so the intriguing question is how and when did Kiring become a section of the Mao. "We are Kiring by blood", said *Sheikh* Harun Soso, the grandson of Kutu Golja.

The emergence of Kiring as a Mao linage illustrates the fascinating complexities of the frontier process. In search for land Dawd had been going to Fadasi but was unable to settle there with his people. In typical frontier manner, he moved further south in the direction of Begi and settled among the Begi Mao, who his lineage gradually came to control.

In the competition of traders to settle among and control sections of the local population, the people of Dawd settled eventually in the areas of the Mao or Amam and gradually took control. Through time and inter-ethnic clan alliances, the *Wärrä Dawd* became a section of the highland Gwama, adapted their language and parts of their custom, and continued to control them.

Against this background, and from the linage of the *Wärrä Dawd*, emerges the chiefly figure of Kutu Gulja, a contemporary and opponent of Jote Tulu, who both fought over supremacy of the Begi area.

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[84] James, Johnson, and Baumann, *Travels in North-East Africa*, 135–36.

A Brief History of Kutu Gulja

The frontier strongly influenced the ethno-genesis and historical memory of the Mao. Kutu Gulja, mentioned both by Abdussamad Ahmad as a "Mao king"[85] and by Grotanelli as a "half-caste landlord"[86] provides an important point of entry to the history of the Mao.[87] During my research I got in touch with the descendants of the Mao king and hence from their memories some conclusions can be drawn concerning the ethno-genesis of this section of the Mao.

As is expected on the frontier, the origin of Kutu is obscure. Especially in regard to present-day identity politics, the descendants of Kutu and their relation to the black Mao is often disputed: local Oromo historiography indirectly incorporated him on the basis of cultural adoption (*luba basa*). According to this, Kutu was of Majangir descent and made a landlord by Jote Tulu, who was his adoptive father, and gave the Begi area to Kutu to administer.[88] This version of the local history is most likely more evident for Oromo claims over Begi, than actually a very likely story about the origin of Kutu. Another assumption about the origin of Kutu Gulja that is quite well-known is that he came from Bornu, which makes him Nigerian immigrants (Fallata/Tukrir).[89]

In the following I am compiling a few information that I have collected from Mao elders and the descendants of Kutu. There is usually certain coherence in the oral accounts and certain continuity: the Mao were the first inhabitants of the Begi area, the Arabs ruled the area of Kiring and Kutu became ruler of the Mao. Kutu Gulja, who was later given the title of *fitwarari*, was also known as the leader of the *Araba* (Arabs).[90] Kutu and Jote were fighting for supremacy in the area of Begi and after the

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[85] Abdussamad H. Ahmad, 'Trading in Slaves in Bela-Shangul and Gumuz, Ethiopia'.

[86] Grottanelli, *I Mao. Missione etnografica nel Uollega occidentale*.

[87] This part of the Mao history that I presnt in the following is the synthesis of several interviews and recurring stories I have collected in Benishangul between 2010 and 2014.

[88] 24/2010: Interview with Oromo elder, Begi town, 16 October 2010.

[89] 5/2009: Interview with Fadashi elder, Bambasi town, 17 November 2009. There is a small group of Fallata still in the region that live among the Gwama, Fadashi and Oromo in Ya'a. They are mostly descendants of the immigration of Ahmed Umer. They retain though to a large degree an autonomous identity while the descendant of Kutu are clearly regarded as Gwama /Mao. For the Fallata (Fulɓe) link in Ethiopia s.: Dereje Feyissa and Günther Schlee, 'Mbororo (Fulɓe) Migrations from Sudan into Ethiopia', in *Changing Identifications and Alliances in North East Africa. Volume II: Sudan, Uganda and the Ethiopia-Sudan Borderlands*, ed. Elizabeth E. Watson and Günther Schlee (New York-Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009), 157–78; Ishihara, 'The Life History of a Muslim Holyman: Al-Faki Ahmad Umar'.

[90] Cp.: Field notes Alessandro Triulzi (Asosa-Begi, a-bg 1, p. 2).

fight *sheikh* Khojali was able to gain supremacy over the region. According to oral information during the time of the *Ansar*, Kutu already ruled over the Mao. When *ras* Goobana came to assist Jote in his fight against the *Ansar*, probably also the time when Jote became powerful enough to expand his territory, Kutu became a tributary to him and followed him into battle against the Mahdi. Before the arrival of Gobana Daci the capital (stronghold) of Kutu was Wanga Giten (a mountain near Tongo also known as the capitol hill of the Mao in my interviews).

> Kutu had managed to rule over almost all these Mawo clans of Begi. Although the people of Kutu Gulja speak their own peculiar dialect, we still call them Arabs, because they speak Arabic like the people of Hojele and are Muslims. They themselves say that they are *Araba*.[91]

Like the other regional strongmen, Kutu Gulja was significantly engaged in the subjection of other groups in the region. He also was known to the border demarcation survey of Major Gwynn as a regional ruler and had a district under his name controlled by him (s. further below).

The following is an excerpt of an interview with a Mao (Hozo) elder I conducted in the Shonge *qäbäle*.

> Kutu Gulja's tribe was Sättä. They are Arabs. They liked to fight the other tribes. They were dangerous. They were known for fighting. The Yaala fled because of the fighting. Also, the Kuguul fled. When Shogele came here, he came as a *shifta*; he was hiding. But he had gold. He gave the gold to Haile Selassie to rule the country and then he was given half the country to rule. By selling the Mao, Kutu bought guns. We Mao fought Kutu by war, we used shields to protect ourselves from the spears. The Mao won against Kutu and he could not move further than Harrodima. The Mao area started from Tobbi. Kashmandu was Mao area. There was no leader within the Mao but when there was a common enemy, we blew the *tunnji* (trumpet) and came together. We come together and discuss in one place and decide on war. This was also done to bring people together to protect the animals [*domestic animals, A/N*] from wild animals. There was no centralized political power. I

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[91] Field notes of Alessandro Triulzi (Asosa-Begi, a-bg: 2, p. 8).

don't know how much people were fighting. But the Mao from Gitaan were fighting alongside Kutu. On this side we did not want to be with Kutu. Those Makiisi and Makambo (from Gitaan) wanted to be with Kutu. Yalo, Kurro, Kuguul wanted to be with us. We were related through marriage. Until Shogele went to Haile Selassie to take permission to take the Mao they had their freedom. Kutu had his Mao and until today there is enmity between the Tongo Mao and the Begi Mao. Starting from the beginning there is no agreement, there is fighting. Until today there is no agreement. We are different people. We are close to the Oromo. We love them. In Tongo there are different Mao. There are differences. Form the beginning there is no agreement. Even if we are related through marriage, we are not the same. The Quran teaches us to love each other, and one of my children is in Tongo. But still today there is no love.[92]

This excerpt gives us a first impression of the highly complex clan alliances and of the shifting power structures in the ensuing quest for territorial control among the different Mao groups. While this is merely speculation at this point, it might show that the Omotic groups (Makiisi and Makambo, also *sit shwala* clans today, according to the list on p. 66) allied themselves with Kutu, a factor that might have contributed to the emergence of Koman speaking clans of the same name today. The interview definitely shows this rift—along whichever lines it may have emerged—as well as the sentiments between the different Mao sections until today (cp. "Kutu had his Mao and until today there is enmity between the Tongo Mao and the Begi Mao. Starting from the beginning there is no agreement, there is fighting"). Remarkable is also the alliance with the Oromo, who as major competitors have most certainly also affected the relation between the different Mao sections.

The importance of Oromo influence can be presumed from various oral traditions that attest to the territorial gains Jote had made at the climax of his rule.[93] Also the competition between Jote and Kutu eventually led to the downfall of Kutu who migrated to Bure with his followers, where he eventually died. After the death of Kutu the descendants of Kutu, especially his two sons *al-mak* Soso Kutu and Burayu Kutu came to claim the old territory of their father. At this point power relations had

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[92] 21/2010: Interview with Mao elder (Hozo), Shonge *kebele*, Begi *wäräda*, 15 October 2010
[93] Field notes Alessandro Triulzi (a-bg 1, p. 6).

already changed again and Begi had come under the rule of *sheikh* Khojali al-Hasan. These changes had also happened in consequence of the emergence of the Ethiopian empire in the region.

Chapter 4

The Making of a Periphery (ca. 1898-1930)

In the attempt to understand citizenship as the legal place a person or a group of people hold in society, the actual patterns of state formation have to be looked at. The entry points are either the way people appropriate or react to the state. Another perspective is to look at the way the state actually governs, administers, and rules.[1] State formation has become a major concern in the social sciences and history[2] and has also been a matter of scrutiny in Ethiopian historical studies.[3]

 The peculiarities of Ethiopian state formation have led to a very strong narrative of state expansion and enforced a highly influential centre-periphery perspective. In this reading of Ethiopian history, the state culture radiated forcefully into the peripheries which were eventually integrated or are currently being integrated.[4]

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[1] Helga Baitenman, 'Counting on State Subjects: State Formation and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Mexico', in *State Formation: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Christian Krohn-Hansen and Knut G. Nustad (London, Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005), 171.

[2] John Gledhill, *Power and Its Disguises: Anthropological Perspectives on Politics* (London-Chicago, IL: Pluto Press, 2000); Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*; Christian Krohn-Hansen and Knut G. Nustad, eds., *State Formation: Anthropological Perspectives* (London-Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2005); Ferguson and Gupta, 'Spatializing States'; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1998); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2008).

[3] Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001); Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994); Merera Gudina, *Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalisms*; Markakis, *The Last Two Frontiers*; Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia*. Of course this is a vast topic and publications are voluminous. I am concerned in this thesis mostly with the publications that emphasize the creation of a modern Ethiopian state based on the expansion of the "Abyssinian core" after the Battle of Adwa, of which the previous publications mentioned are also only exemplary.

[4] The last frontier is the lowland peripheries in the reading of Markakis, where the state apparatus is still weak and not yet fully developed (Markakis, *The Last Two Frontiers*, 16). This view though is too

So far, we have looked at the early frontier history of the region and its overlapping and intertwined processes of consecutive cultural and political renewal. At the end of the 19th century, another player emerged on the scene: the imperial Ethiopian state. There is a problem of simplification here, as the image created is that of a unified periphery that was integrated into the expanding state at once. The process was much more complex. There were notably different forces at work in e.g. the case of the Oromo kingdoms and the *sheikhdoms* of Benishangul, and it was a gradual process that was not finished at a certain point. The Oromo kingdoms, like Leeqa Qellem and Leeqa Naqampte, had already been subjected to Ethiopian overrule and accepted the dominance of the Ethiopian Emperor, while the areas of Benishangul and the *sheikhdoms* of the *watawit* were integrated into the newly expanding state at the end of the 19th century, a process that continued throughout 1897 and 1898. Up to around 1913, the status of Benishangul was very much uncertain, as we will see in the upcoming chapter. In the research area also, the process has been non-lineal and profoundly affected inter-ethnic and state-subject relations. Some groups were reduced to serfdom, rulers were created and new elites rose to power, while other elites were annihilated and vanished into oblivion.

Understanding the processes behind state formation, the penetration of state culture, the exploitative encroachment and extractive force, and the impact it all had on the local population is the aim of this sub-chapter. The assumption here is, in order to understand the complex history of modern citizenship formation in Ethiopia, it is utmost importance to appreciate the complex nature of state formation and how the state at it different stages of development related to is margins. The expansion of the Ethiopian state has been the clearly the most important socio-political phenomenon in 20th-century Ethiopia. The question is to what extent or rather in what way the people of this newly forming entity were integrated and what effects it had on their customs, values systems or the inter-ethnic relations. Or, to put it differently, how important the event of state formation actually was for them. In which way did the patterns of social stratification evolve in the newly forming state? This is the point where the nature of the entity has to be questioned and defined. What is it, at the end of the 19th century, that the various ethnic groups were incorporated into? A colonial state, a traditional Abyssinian polity, or an empire?

Centre and Periphery: Imagining a State

> "[I] ntegration is a concept that usually refers to the process by which people interact to form some kind of viable political system. The broadness of the term has, however, let to feeling that it may not be an overly useful notion."[5]

Were the expansion of the Ethiopian state and the permeation of state culture into the different areas that were forcefully incorporated into the new emerging entity a process of political integration? Eventually this question is difficult to answer and probably has to be understood to be an ongoing process. The very notion of integration is probably ill-suited in the Ethiopian context. It has been assumed by some writers that the concept of integration was an open-ended process to construct political order.[6] Have not rather different centres, with their own peripheries, become connected by economic dependence? A problem that emerges is the almost untameable idea of an integrative centre. The centre, according to this perception, eventually will have incorporated the periphery. Centre and periphery in this perspective are bound to become one. The nature of Ethiopian state expansion has posed many conceptual difficulties. Descriptions and analysis range from unification to national oppression or even colonization.[7] Furthermore it makes the periphery look quite helpless and exposed to the predatory practices of the centre. This in fact is true to a certain degree and of course the periphery is best described in terms of power imbalances. The perspective that subjects the periphery to the mercy of the centre often neglects the inter-group relations and stratification in the periphery itself.[8] The periphery is not a unified whole. This is to say that for a regional noble life in the periphery has been decisively different than for an average peasant.

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[5] Ronald Cohen and John Middleton, *From Tribe to Nation in Africa: Studies in Incorporation Processes* (Scranton: Chandler, 1970), 5.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Merera Gudina, 'Contradictory Interpretations of Ethiopian History'.

[8] Jean-Nicholas Bach pointedly criticized the centre-periphery paradigm and its applicability (cp. Jean-Nicholas Bach, 'New Trends, Old Views: The Ambivalent Centre-Periphery Paradigm of Ethiopian Studies', in *Movements in Ethiopia, Ethiopia in Movement. Proceedings of the 18th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. Eloi Fiquet and Ahmed Hassan (Addis Ababa: CFEE-IES, forthcoming). He states that, "the image of 'radiation' itself denies the capacity of the 'peripheries to innovate (supra note). Moreover, it totally ignores the fact that these 'peripheries' were often former political centres that actively took part in the (re)negotiation of the national political order, among the plural state and non-state actors (supra note)"; cp. Ibid., 281.

Despite all valuable criticism, the interaction between centre and periphery is a matter of great concern and for any problem that arises from the analysis of state formation cannot be neglected. The centre/periphery paradigm has been highly influential in the last decades and has guided much historical analysis since *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*.[9] In his seminal article concerning the fundamental nexus between centre and periphery, Donham calls for "some appreciation" of the centre that dominated the peripheries, i.e. of the structure of the central highland, the Abyssinian society and its institutions, in order to understand the impact these institutions had on the conquered areas.[10]

Before the expansion of the core Abyssinian centre, this core had already radiated outwards and expanded into adjacent areas. The Abyssinian core expanded along the granting of *gult* rights, intermarriage between local women and soldiers who were granted *gult* rights, "and over time the intermarriage of local elites of mixed parentage."[11] Contrary to the European models of feudalism, though, the lords were not the owners of the land. In European feudalism, the "lord's power extended into the production process".[12] But in the Ethiopian context the *rist* rights were hereditary and the lord only had rights to the labour of people. Hence, the landlords "sent their agents at harvest time to collect tribute, often as much as they could, but played no role in organizing or directing production."[13] This very much reads like the blue-print to the patterns of rule and dependency that developed in the newly conquered areas.

Although again these patterns cannot be generalized, the famous typology of newly incorporated lands is a noteworthy achievement of Donham's treatise of the "periphery". Donham systemizes three forms of rule after the conquest: these were the semi-independent enclaves, the *gäbbar* areas and the fringe peripheries.[14] The periphery thus is a highly relative term. The expansion of the Ethiopian state system and its incorporation of the various parts of Ethiopia has been an ambitious and highly ambivalent process. It forged a quasi-state under the pretext of the colonial scramble

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[9] Donham and James, *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*; Wendy James et al., eds., *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & after* (Oxford - Addis Ababa: James Currey, 2002); Markakis, *The Last Two Frontiers*.

[10] Donham, 'Old Abyssinia and the New Ethiopian Empire', 10.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 14.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 37–44.

for Africa, destroyed and annihilated long existing traditional societies, in search for resources to feed the expanding Abyssinian core.

The notion of the centre as the epitome of political power reduces the peripheries to mere recipients of state culture. It negates the fact that the peripheries actually often already had centres themselves with their own peripheries. A potent counter-narrative that the history of Wallaga has in store are the emerging strong men and later *mootis* of Naqamte and Qellem.[15] An example that also provides a counter-narrative is the palace of Khojali-al-Hassan in the centre of Addis Ababa, which I will treat herein further below.

Local rule and the emerging Ethiopian state system

The conquest of western Ethiopia by the Ethiopian armies was based on military confrontation and "territorial competition", to use the expression of Caulk, between northern Abyssinian rulers.[16] The competitors were Täklä Haymanot, king of Gojjam, and Menelik II, then still king of Shäwa. Their aim was to control the resources of the western Oromo principalities. The term conquest may be a little misleading as it suggests a military aggression, victory, and submission of one side to another. The competition was ongoing and already in the 1870s Moroda, the *mooti* of Nekempte, had pledged loyalty to Täklä Haymanot through the latter's general Däräso. By this time Moroda had "by a blend of diplomacy and conquest" gained control over many Oromo groups and areas, among them Ghimbi, Arjo, Nejo and Babo Gambel.[17] Moroda in bargaining his own position vis-à-vis ongoing territorial competition sided with *ras* Gobana Daci and kept out of the ensuing battle of Embabo between

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[15] Much in conjuncture with the criticism expressed by Bach, Clapham already in 1975, pointed to the relativity of the centre-periphery paradigm: "…peripheral areas vary both in their connection with the central government and heir access to sources of mobilization outside Ethiopia. The Galla of Walaga, as much allies as victims of the invading Ethiopians, are most closely associated with the highland core" (Christopher Clapham, 'Centralization and Local Response in Southern Ethiopia', *African Affairs* 74, no. 294 (1975): 74).

[16] Richard Caulk, 'Territorial Competition and the Battle of Embabo, 1882', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 13, no. 1 (1975): 65–88.

[17] Tereffe Woldetsadik, 'The Unification of Ethiopia (1880-1935): Wälläga', 74.

Menelik's forces and Täklä Haymanot's forces.[18] Moroda managed to forge an alliance of non-alliegned Oromo groups (except for the *Gindä Beret*) which kept out of the battle, hence enabling Menelik's general to win.[19] The battle of Embabo in Horo Guduru in 1882 was won by Menelik's general *ras* Gobana Daci. Moroda was made *däjjazmatch* and was given rule over the different areas, foremost the Sibu country, he had fought for a long time.

At this point Jote (it might be noteworthy to say, that he was the son-in-law of Moroda[20]), was still relatively untouched by imperial control. He controlled the main trade routes connecting the Sudanese trade with the Oromo trade and had a tight grip on the areas beyond Fadasi.[21] Meanwhile he was faced with another danger: the invading troops of the Mahdi from Sudanese territory. Jote called upon *ras* Gobana for help, and eventually the Mahdiyya was defeated in Wallaga at the battle of Gutu Dilli, after which Jote's autonomy practically ended in 1888. He was likewise given the title *däzzazmatch* and endowed with autonomy to rule his territory on the premise that he would pay tributes to the emperor.[22]

Moroda's son, Kumsa, later baptized Gäbrä Egziabeher, inherited provincial rule and direct tributary relation to Menelik. The changes brought about by the emerging Ethiopian state system were manifold. For the acephalous Mao and Komo groups within the regional mosaic changes brought about depended on their relations with and proximity to the different rulers.

When the British border mission under Major Gwynn visited western Ethiopia in order to evaluate the region and demarcate the border, he found all labour in the "Galla country was done by slaves and women." Menelik II, the report further explains, had submitted the father of *Däjjzmatch* Jote, who was given Abyssinian ranks and titles. "A small Abyssinian party was left to form *Däjjzmatch*'s personal guard, but the great majority of the armed men of the country are Gallas, and authority is vested in local men." Concerning the status as a "semi-independent

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[18] Alessandro Triulzi, 'Neḳempte and Addis Abeba: Dilemmas of Provincial Rule', in *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*, ed. Donald Donham and Wendy James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 52.

[19] Tereffe Woldetsadik, 'The Unification of Ethiopia (1880-1935): Wälläga', 79.

[20] But according to information collected by Alessandro Triulzi, Moroda was also married to the sister of Jote; (field notes Alessandro Triulzi, Asosa-Begi, a-bg 4: 14).

[21] Triulzi, 'Trade, Islam, and the Mahdia in Northwestern Wallaggā, Ethiopia', 66.

[22] Tereffe Woldetsadik, 'The Unification of Ethiopia (1880-1935): Wälläga', 80.

enclave" in relation to the elaborations of Donham used above, the report gives us some valuable hints:

> The Gallas have refused to join the Abyssinian armies fighting at a distance, but for local defense they are well armed, and would be formidable. They are not afraid of the Abyssinians and only admit to owing allegiance to Menelek himself, though for him they have great regard. If Menelek had tried to impose Abyssinian officers on these people he could not have kept them in hand at all as the approaches to the country are very difficult, and rebellion would have been easy. Such Abyssinians as I saw had no authority even with the blacks; and evidently have no idea of making their authority felt where they are not backed up by physical force. [23]

The Mao during the Ethiopian expansion

> There was no taxation in this region in the modern sense. The chief, when he wanted to collect tribute from his people, asked this in terms of kormā, which may mean young slaves, or oxen, sheep or goat.[24]

From a Mao perspective and from the oral accounts a clear chain of events is hard to establish. The most persuasive picture of the time can be gathered through the memories and accounts on Kutu Gulja. Kutu during the time of the border mission of Major Gwynn was said to be the ruling *sheikh* of a place called Kutu. Oral accounts indicate his seat was in Wanga Gitten, a mountain ridge two hours away from present day Tongo. His sphere of interest extended to Begi. Kutu basically appears as the ruler of Begi in such recollections. Jote Tullu was also aspiring to rule Begi. Hence the area north of Gidami and south of Fadasi became a buffer zone between Arab control and Oromo influence. Kutu is said to have paid tribute to the *ansar* once[25] and local tradition confirms the soldiers of the Mahdi marched through the area of Begi. At this point, although I cannot properly establish the background to it, Kutu and Jote made a

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[23] All quotes here from "Reports of Major Gwynn, R.E., and Major Austin, R.E. on the Country in the neighborhood of the proposed boundary between the Sudan and Abyssinia" (FO 1/44).
[24] Field notes of Alessandro Triulzi (Asosa-Begi, a-bg, 4: 20)
[25] Field notes Alessandro Triulzi (Asosa-Begi, a-bg, 4: 19)

peace deal, and Kutu accepted the overrule of Jote and started paying tribute to him. Kutu consecutively became one of Jote's generals in the ensuing fight against the *ansar*. After the defeat of the *ansar* the generals of Jote, together with the soldiers of *ras* Gobana Daci, defeated a certain Gushuppo at (Guma) Gara Arba and also fought against a certain *abba* Saba in Anfillo. After the subjection of the Mao areas south of Fadasi, Kutu Gulja was given the title of *fitawrari* by Menelik. The emperor recognized Kutu as a *balabbat* in Begi. It is here that the overlord-ship of the Kutu family over the Mao in the area of Begi was institutionalized.

The Ethiopian influence only reached Guma Gara Arba. The areas of Benishangul, north of Fadasi was still independent. Thus, the integration of the Mao into Ethiopia began from the southern reaches of their territory.

Eventually a battle broke out between Kutu and Jote. The battle took place at Wanga Gitaan. Although Jote took over the rule of Begi, Kutu was given land and lordship over parts of Illubabor and ruled in Bonga (Gambella) and parts of 'Mäsango' (i.e. Majangir areas). "He went with his people to Bure and ruled there", is a recurring notion. Still today descendants of witnesses of this migration live in Gambella and Bonga. A Kiring was also active in the government during the 1960s in Gambella, which we will come back to later in the course of the thesis.

While Kutu died in Bure, Jote was in power until about to 1913. His position became marginalized and eventually his realm was handed over to the Abyssinian administration under *ras* Birru Wolde Gabriel for administration. Thus, the area was reduced from being a "semi-independent enclave" to a *gäbbar* area. This led to mass flight from the Oromo country from Qellem and Gidami, and Oromo flocked into the Begi area. This change in turn had far-reaching consequences for the relations between the Mao and Oromo.

> [...] we became *neftegna*. At that time, the area of Begi was free and we escaped to that area. Shogelle at that time said, 'all the refugees come to me'. There are a lot of Oromo refugees coming what should I do?' Menelik gave him money, 'buy a food for them and oxen'. At that time one oxen is eight *birr*. And all the people who saw this, the other Oromo, followed the people to Begi. Menelik and Shogelle had a relationship. Shogelle gave the gold to Taytu, and she asked Menelik to help Shogelle always. Shogelle said, 'the

Oromo who come are making my people slaves again. They make them plow for them and work for them'. [26]

The asylum offered by Khojali to Oromo during this time is legendary, and affirmed by various sources. From the perspective, on the other hand, of the Mao the immigration of the Oromo brought enslavement and marginalization. The Oromo, for their part, remember fearing the "fierce Mao", who stole their cattle and killed their people.[27]

The history of Begi shows the tremendous complexities of the regional social fabric. Begi was the epi-centre of several overlapping ambitions of control. Jote and Kutu lay in completion over it. *Sheikh* Khojali was able to exploit this competition and gain control over it. It is probably during this time the name *Mao* manifested itself more and more in the region. An informant once said it was during this time "that both Khojali and the Wanaga [*the clan of Jote A/M*] took the country of the Mao" and it was in this regard that he mentioned that Khojali gave the name Mao to the people ("before that we were *sit shwala*").[28]

We will see later on that the fight over Begi continued well into the post-1991 period and required a referendum to delineate its position either in the newly created federal state of Benishangul or Oromia. For decades Begi has been the venue of overlapping frontiers and the Mao were at the centre of these developments.

Sheik Khojali and the economic interdependence between center and periphery

Khojali's role cannot be underestimated in the whole region. Beyond the name of Jote and Kutu he is the single most decisive point of reference for the historical memory of the Mao and Komo. His career was longer than that of Jote or Kutu and while both Kutu's and Jote's immediate families stayed connected to regional power, Khojali became the most notorious and long serving lord and his son was only deposed from

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[26] 7/2011: Interview with Oromo elder, Gidami, 22 August 2011.

[27] Alessandro Triulzi, 'Social Protest and Rebellion in Some of the Gäbbar Songs from Qelläm, Wällägga', in Joseph Tubiana (ed.), *Modern Ethiopia. From the Accession of Menilek II to the Present. Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Nice* (Rotterdam: AA Balkema, 1977), 177–96.

[28] 15/2011: Interview, *sit shwala* elder, Qama, Begi *wäräda*, 07 September 2011.

the administration of Begi with the overthrow of the monarchy in 1974.[29] His name immediately raises memories of slavery and evokes the image of the middle-man who negotiated his own personal gain through the exploitation of the surrounding people. The career of *sheikh* Khojali al-Hasan is clearly related to the military expansion of the Ethiopian centre and his own power grew with the consolidation of imperial rule during the rule of Menilek II, *lij* Iyasu and *ras* Täfari. The history of Benishangul is relatively well explored prior to Khojali's ascent to power.[30] *Sheikh* Khojali himself received most attention in the context of slavery as a prominent representative of the *watawit* rulers of Bela Shangul.[31]

As was already discussed earlier, due to the expansion of the Ethiopian Empire, the established local networks of power were being challenged and shaken. Jote Tulu and Kumsa Moroda came under vassalage of Addis Ababa. There were lesser rulers, like Kutu, who were also tied to the pyramid of power and tribute, but on the lower end. Gold, ivory and slaves were the tributes laid on the rulers. Also, military contributions were demanded and thus Jote and Kumsa participated in the conquest of their northern neighbours in Bela Shangul, in 1897-98.

Bela Shangul was splintered into various realms of domination. Among the main competitors Tor el Gurri seems to have been the most powerful and while political unrest and economic instability appear to have dominated Bela Shangul's final years of independence.[32] Hence the resistance to the emerging Ethiopian military was not unified. The confrontation between Abyssinian military led by *ras* Mekonnen and the troops of Tor-el-Gurri and the Ethiopian contingents is remembered vividly locally and the courage of Tor-el-Gurri praised: a messenger of Mekonnen delivered a note visualized with a sack of grain, which symbolized the number of soldiers that were waiting to attack. Tor el Gurri sent the messenger back with even finer grain, stating that he had even more soldiers and they were ready to receive the attack of the Ethiopians.[33] The defeat of the *watawit* allies was devastating. It is noteworthy though, that the *watawit* were no unified force at this point and some *sheikhs*, like

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[29] Rashed Mohammad, 'A Biography of Däjjazmač Abdulrahim Khojele'.

[30] Atieb Ahmad Dafalla, 'Sheikh Khojale Al-Hasan and Bélā Shängul'; Triulzi, 'Trade, Islam, and the Mahdia in Northwestern Wallaggā, Ethiopia'; Triulzi, *Salt, Gold, and Legitimacy*.

[31] Bahru Zewde, 'Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935'; Jay Spaulding, 'The Business of Slavery in the Central Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1910-1930', *African Economic History*, no. 17 (1988): 23.

[32] Triulzi, *Salt, Gold, and Legitimacy*, 172.

[33] This episode is also published in Ibid., 177.

Khojali (s. below) had cooperated with the invaders. The country was severally raided, handled in part as a fringe periphery. Visiting the area in 1897 Reginald Koettlitz remarked:

> Their chief, Abd ur Rahman [*Tor el Gurri, A/M*], is an Arab, and resides at a village called Beni Shongul by previous visitors, but not known by this name in the country. Our visit was ill-timed, for twice recently had the country been raided by the Abyssinians, once by Ras Makunen and again by Dejaj Demisi.[34]

On the advancement of the Ethiopian forces under *ras* Mekonnen, and the consecutive battles, the area was raided and devastated, and still at around 1900[35] when the British undertook surveys they found Khomosha under control of *ras* Dämissäw. A certain *Fitawrari* Gululatti [*probably Gullate, A/M*] was stationed at a place called Goha, with 30 men and *däjjazmatch* Demise [*Dämissäw, A/M*] administered the area.[36]

Although Khojali had cooperated with *ras* Mekonnen in the first attacks on the *sheikhdoms*, he conspired with the British authorities in the Sudan and negotiated for an autonomous area, which led to his imprisonment by Menelik. Benishangul was given to Kumsa Moroda for administration.[37] Local histories emphasize the wit of his wife *asit* Amna[38] who "fascinated Menilek" for the gold of the area bailed her husband out.[39]

It was only in 1912 that *lij* Iyasu made Khojali the ruler over Bela Shangul.[40] But Khojali was not welcomed by the other *watawit* rulers, in as much as they even would

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[34] Reginald Koettlitz, 'Notes on the Galla of Walega and the Bertat', *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 30 (1900): 51.

[35] After the conquest of 1898 the sheikhs of Bela Shangul were imprisoned in Addis Ababa (Triulzi, 1981) and only released after 1908. During this time the region was fist administered by *ras* Dämissäw and later put under the Wälläga ruler Kumsa Moroda.

[36] FO 1/44, Major Gwynn, Blue Nile Survey Party, Appendix VI, Notes on Ghomosha, Assosa, Kirin, Fadasi, Abdul Wadi's and Kutu.

[37] Atieb Ahmad Dafalla, 'Sheikh Khojale Al-Hasan and Bélā Shängul', 49; Triulzi, 'Neḳempte and Addis Abeba: Dilemmas of Provincial Rule'.

[38] *Sitti Amna* was a notorious slave dealer like her husband and we will give her role more attention in the next sub-chapter.

[39] 6/2010: Fadashi elder, 2010, Bambasi town, 20 September 2010.

[40] Atieb Ahmad Dafalla, 'Sheikh Khojale Al-Hasan and Bélā Shängul', 57; Bahru Zewde, 'Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935', 180.

have preferred direct rule from Addis Ababa.[41] Kumsa, who had succeeded Dämissäw, was at that time (1916-17) his immediate superior.[42] But it was not before 1923 that Khojali after some political bargaining and manoeuvres had managed to claim full control over Bela Shangul.[43]

Khojali's ability to bargain and negotiate his position with the central Ethiopian officials is prominently embodied in the following statement:

> About five years ago [i.e. ca. in 1922, A/N] the Abyssinian Government ordered that Fitaurari Mohammad Wad Mahmud, the petty chief of Dul, was to be arrested for obstructing English gold prospectors. Dejech Igazu, formerly Minister of Foreign Affairs and now Governor of Benishangul, and Sheikh Khojali el-Hassan were told to attack him. They enslaved about 2,100 blacks. Of these 1,100 were kept by Sheikh Khojali el-Hassan and 1,000 were brought to Addis Ababa. During these five years Fitaurari Mohamed Wad Mahmud's district (Dul) have been under Sheikh Khojali el-Hassan, and some of the latter sons have sold more than 3,000 blacks from the district and continue to sell.[44]

In 1907 *Sheikh* Khojali is already mentioned in a list of landlords and governors [1900 E.C. i.e. 1907/8] as *yäabigar kəfl gäži* (Amharic: the ruler of the *abigar* area).[45] Khojali al-Hasan is mainly known for the persistent business of slavery in the region. There has been relatively much interest in the history of slavery, and sources are especially rich due to the interest of the British in the western Ethiopian borderlands. Speculations were put forward quantizing the extent of slavery in the region and the

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[41] Bahru Zewde, 'Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935', 184.

[42] Ibid., 185.

[43] Ibid., 196.

[44] FO 141/571, A.D. Home, Enclosure 1 in Appendix 4, Abyssinian slave raiding, Addis Ababa, (May 2, 1927).

[45] Märsəᶜe Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Yäzämän Tarik Təzzətaye Kayyähutənna Käsämmahut: 1896–1922* ['*The Story of What I Saw and Heard: 1896–1922*'] (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2006), 45. The term *abigar* is a derogative denomination for the Nuer. According to Johnson the term loosely translates as cowboys, originally applied to the Nilotic cattle herders of the Southern Sudan, Dinka and Nuer who were in trade contact with the Oromo, e.g. at the court of Jote Tulu; cp. Johnson, 'On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan, 1898-1936', 232.

sheikh's wealth.[46] The *sheikh* not only sold slaves but more importantly used unfree labour from his subjects. His regional impact is acknowledged by the fact that people coming from the Sudanese borderlands, especially as court and military slaves, were known in Addis Ababa and beyond as *Hojale*.[47] Some Berta also referred to themselves as "Xoyalee or Hoyalee".[48] "We were all *Tsugel's*[49] children" is a statement also found among Komo descendants to describe their relation to Khojali[50]. The Swedish gold miner William Avenstrup who visited Khojali in Addis Ababa (s. below) briefly lived in the court of his son Al-Madhdi Khojali who ruled on behalf of his father and contends that the *sheikh* had over "two million slaves" as a source of manpower for gold-washing and domestic activities.[51] Slaves and gold were also the main tributes demanded by the centre. A letter from king Menelik to Khojali, as early as 1897, shows the demands of the centre and the interdependence of the two. It reads as follows (translated from Amharic):

> The conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah Menilek the second, elect of God, king of kings of Ethiopia. May this arrive at Säh Hojäle Alhasin [*sheihk* Khojali al-Hasan] How have you been? I am fine praise be to God. I know that you will bring for me gold in great quantity, as you yourself thought about, but I have not informed you in the contract about the slaves [*yäbarwa nägär;* "the thing with the slaves"]. Let it be that also slaves you will bring for me in large number. Additionally, I would like it so that more females than males would come to me. Written in the city of Addis Ababa in the month of Nähase 24, 1890 E.C. (August 24, 1897).[52]

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[46] Bahru Zewde, 'Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935', 175–77.

[47] Alessandro Triulzi, Atied Ahmand Dafallah, and Lionel Marvin Bender, 'Some Notes on the Ethiopian Berta and Their Language', *Anali: Instituto Orientale Die Napoli* 36, no. 1 (1976): 3–4.

[48] Enrico Cerulli, 'Three Berta Dialects in Western Ethiopia', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 17, no. 3 (1947): 157–69; Triulzi, Atied Ahmand Dafallah, and Bender, 'Some Notes on the Ethiopian Berta and Their Language', 3.

[49] Tsugel or Ugel are names used for Khojali by the Komo (cp. Shogel(e), Hogel(e)). The Uduk, who also have a significant memory of the time of slavery an slave trade, refer to Khojali as Kujul (cp. James, *War and Survival in Sudan's Frontierlands*, 14.

[50] 26/2010: Group interviews, Komo and Gwama, Pokung, Gambella, 23-26 October 2010.

[51] William Avenstrup, *Abessinien Kors Och Tvärs* (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Natur och Kultur, 1935), 103.

[52] Menelik to Sheikh Khojali, Nähase 24, 1890 E.C. (from the files of the Asosa Museum).

The position of the *sheikh* grew stronger during the reign of Menelik's successor *lij* Iyasu. He also aligned himself with *ras* Täfari (the future Haile Sellasie). He was "required to supply ras Täfari regularly with 'recruits' for his army. Most of these were captive Koma […]".[53] A letter by *ras* Täferi on the occasion on the coming coronation shows the direct dependency between the Emperor and Khojali:

> "The Lion of the tribe of Judah Haile Selassie the first, elect of God, king of kings of Ethiopia. May this reach *Shihojäle* [*sheikh* Khojali]. How have you been? Thanks be to God we are fine. I have received the letter you sent. You are concerned every time, you did not quit giving. But however the debt of the bank gives our country a bad name and results in a disadvantage. Because of the seriousness of the matter, I send you back even before attending the throne celebration [*yä zäwd ba'al = coronation*]. It has been considerate of you to send the 240 *wäqet* [1 *wäqet* = 28grams]. I thank you for that and may God bless you. Now please do as much as you possibly can, to the business we have planned. After the land [*sänga = territory assigned to a tribal chief*] was damaged by the dry season [*bona*] a loss of more than sixty to seventy thousand *birr*. Work diligently, as usual, so that the money will not remain in vain without serving its purpose implementing the planned gold mining [*yäwärq sera = the gold work*]. Yekatit (February) 11, 1931.[54]

The almost legendary gold of the region (not so much the hardships of those who had to dig it as tribute) has always been a motive in the regional history. In some cases, slavery and gold have inspired the imagination of travellers and observers like in the case of Byron the Prorok, who described the 100-year-old "Mad Sultan Ghogoli":

> "Tales of his savage cruelties were legend; the mere mention of his name is enough to terrorize the natives. (…) parties which had tried to cross his territory had disappeared and never been heard from again".[55]

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[53] Johnson, 'On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan, 1898-1936', 229.
[54] Haile Selassie to *Sheikh* Khojali, Yekatit (February) 11, 1931 (from the files of the Asosa museum).
[55] Byron Khun de Prorok, *Dead Men Do Tell Tales* (Creative Age Press, Inc., 1942), 76.

The periphery in the centre

Surrounded by such legend, *sheikh* Khojali al-Hasan continues to be an ambiguous character in Ethiopian history. Partially neglected by Ethiopian historiography, he ruled Benishangul with an iron fist, yet his visitors described him as remarkably friendly and intelligent.[56] There was another, metropolitan side to him, which is manifest in his urban presence embodied in his palace in Addis Ababa.[57] Apart from his trading activities, gold concessions and slave trade, documents kept in family possession in his Addis Ababa palace, suggest investment activities in the capital: he built a variety of houses around Piassa, Cinema Adwa and Photo Mebrate, in Addis Katäma, and around the train station.[58] These were rented out to businesses, craftsmen and companies.

Khojali is best described as a middle-man, who negotiated both central demands and personal gain. Khojali's palace is a powerful symbol of political and economic might; this is especially true considering the actually marginalized position of Benishangul in Ethiopia's political economy today. It is even more outstanding considering that Khojali is a rather obscure or even obscured figure in Ethiopian history.

He was in part responsible for a large number of slaves and workers that were needed in Addis Ababa's modernization process.[59] By the time the palace was built, in ca. 1910, observers estimated a number of ca. 15, 000 "Shankillas" and "Benishangul" in Addis Ababa mostly for household work and slave labour.[60] We might assume that most of them were trafficked to Addis Ababa through Benishangul. *Sheikh* Khojali obviously set up a regime of plunder in the countryside, that enabled him to please the

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[56] Avenstrup, *Abessinien Kors Och Tvärs*, 49; Grühl Max, *The Citadel of Ethiopia* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), 375.

[57] The areal on which the compound was built, in a quarter in Addis known as *Shogälle midär*, is estimated at 340 000 sqm. Only one half of the building still exists; the other half was demolished during the *Därg* time and a mosque was built on the ground (allegedly to please Muslim sentiments in the area during the revolution). According to information of the family, Armenian, India and Turkish craftsmen were employed to build the palace; the tin-roof shows the logo of a French company.

[58] Also Qəddus Rufa'el (an orthodox Christian church in the proximity of the *gəbbi*) was donated by him; Information from the Khojali family, Addis Ababa 28 June 2012.

[59] I recorded a statement about Mao men who were traded to Addis Ababa "to work day and night". I had the opportunity to hear some recollection about one person who returned to the Begi/Tongo area. Information from Benishangul 2014.

[60] Reminick, *Addis Ababa*, 87.

centre and at the same played into his own pocket. Local traditions depict him as cleverer (but also more ruthless) than the other rulers, e.g.: "he made us dig out 300 *wäqet* of gold, 200 were for his tributes, and the other was for himself".[61]

Accordingly, the Swedish traveller Avenstrup describes of hearing about the fortified house on top of Mount Kiring, where the tributes and taxes that were taken from the population were hidden.[62]

In order to fully understand the relationship Khojali al-Hassan had with the centre, as well as to connect to the socio-political circumstances of the subaltern peoples in the periphery, a more thorough look at the historical antecedents of marginalisation and slavery as a manifestation of the predatory relations between centre and periphery seem necessary.

[61] 17/2011: Group interview, Mao (Gwama) family, Mimi Akobo, 10 September 2011.
[62] Avenstrup, *Abessinien Kors Och Tvärs*, 106.

Chapter 5:

Slavery before Abolition

Slavery is a well-known, though highly ambivalent chapter in Ethiopian history.[1] Especially in the wake of the admission of Ethiopia to the League of Nations in 1923, slavery was strongly contested internationally, despite the ongoing Ethiopian attempts to abolish it.[2] Slavery is still a highly contested terrain, as evolves around the re-imagining of history in terms of a shameful past, and especially the study of Ethiopia's feudal past has overshadowed the historical analysis of slavery.

In Ethiopia, the academic study of slavery is largely disconnected from the legacies slavery, or as Markakis noted: Slavery has "not merited attention in the historiography of the Great Tradition, save as a trade factor".[3] I am convinced that the legacies of slavery today reflect in the manifestation of social boundaries, and significantly affect citizenship expansion.[4] I believe the history of slavery, as a critical motive in the analysis of the centre-periphery relations as well as the Ethiopian state formation, is an important aspect for the expansion of citizenship today.[5] Despite the often uneasy

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[1] From all we know, slavery was an age old system in many parts of Ethiopia. So too, the trade in slaves and slavery was an integral part of the Christian Ethiopian highlands, cp. Richard Pankhurst, 'Slavery and Emancipation in Traditional Ethiopia: The Role of the *Fetha Nagast*, or Laws of the Kings', *African and Asian Studies* 10, no. 1 (2011): 32–40.

[2] Guluma Gemeda, 'Subsistence, Slavery and Violence in the Lower Omo Valley, Ca. 1898-1940's', *Northeast African Studies* 12, no. 1 (1990): 5–19. With all appreciation for the idea that the Ethiopian emperors were willing to end the slave trade and expressed their disdain for slavery, I will portrait slavery as deeply rooted in the centre-periphery relations and analyse its devastating effect on the ethnic relations in the research area. For a general appraisal on slavery, the slave trade and the history of abolition in Ethiopia s. Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800-1935* (Addis Ababa: Haile Sellassie I University Press, 1968), 98–99.

[3] Markakis, *The Last Two Frontiers*, 98.

[4] For another Ethiopian example cp. the recent work by Bosha Bombe, 'Reclaiming Lost Identity. Redemption of Slave Descendants among the Ganta', in *Creating and Crossing Boundaries in Ethiopia: Dynamics of Social Categorization and Differentiation*, ed. Susanne Epple (Münster-Berlin: Lit-Verlag, 2014), 73–90.

[5] Éric Hahonou explored the patterns of social exclusion as background for the denial of equal citizenship in the case of the Ganado, a former servile group in Northern Benin. Cp. Éric Komlavi Hahonou, 'Past and Present African Citizenships of Slave Descent: Lessons from Benin', *Citizenship*

relationship with the topic, framed by shameful memories and uneasy relations between former masters and formers slaves, evidence and memories are multiple in the Ethiopian context (s. also Chapter 8).

Slavery has left an indisputable imprint on the social history of western Ethiopia. As a system of subordination and control it was complex and cannot easily be described without elaborating its many facets and nuances.

In order to analyse the impact of slavery on the social system, I will look at its early manifestations in western Ethiopia, its link to modern state formation, especially in the case of the aforementioned Khojali al-Hassan, as well the impact of the international boundary system and the adjoining administrative system in the colonial Sudan.

Exposed to the predatory encroachment of the Ottoman Empire, the Mahdi state and the Ethiopian state, the people of the Blue Nile /Ethiopian escarpment were continuously affected by several forms of subjection: State formation built on state sponsored slavery; there existed household slavery, and the slave trade itself was a lucrative business. The slave trade was taxed both by regional rulers as well as by the central authorities. This created chains of middlemen who were involved in the trade. These were individual slave hunters or organised bands. And, as we will see, tribute obligations were also paid in people.

One finds certain fluidity between slavery and other forms of unfree labour as well as the payment in humans as tributes and taxes. Many conceptual and theoretical issues arise when one engages with it. James Watson observed a "general reluctance to define slavery", and an "uneasiness" to do so.[6] To make it short, I will here use the term slavery throughout; I will specify the slave trade as a related system, but all forms of unfree labour, the exchange of humans for taxes and the use of un-free labour to large scale produce tributes (e.g. for gold mining), etc. will all here fall under a broad category of slavery.

It is highly revealing to begin with another observation made by Schuver. It shows how complex the analysis of slavery is. The system not only led to the dispersal of

Studies 15, no. 1 (2011): 75–92. We will not find such tangible relations between past slavery and the current of citizenship but I will show in the later chapter that the memory of slavery affects intangible aspects of inter-ethnic relations like the trust one has to the neighbour or the state. For a more general perspective on the post-slavery society I refer to Benedetta Rossi, 'African Post-Slavery: A History of the Future', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 48, no. 2 (2015): 303–24.

[6] James L. Watson, 'Slavery as an Institution, Open and Closed Systems', in *Asian and African Systems of Slavery*, ed. James L. Watson (Berkeley - Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 3.

groups but also changed whole social structures and various groups were uprooted and drawn into the system as middle-men. The remark is an indirect quotation from Schuver's guide, a local *watawit* trader:

> 'You know, I just had an idea? You see this young abid, how amiable and hardworking he is. When we get back from Komaland, I will buy him from the *Agur*. Then: I take him to Agoldi, I give him a cloth, some bracelets, I have him circumcised, I teach him how to fire a gun, I send him two or three times with the hunters against the *abid* and you will see in two or three years he will have caught a couple of more slaves for me and I will be a fool to pick up *farag* myself.' […]

And Schuver himself goes on to comment on this statement:

> [A]nd no doubt the young negro, led to Agoldi and well treated by his master, initiated into the formulas of Meccaism and having learned to despise his pagan brothers, would soon make one of those malleable instruments in the hands of the Arabs, who in exchange for a light veneer of external civilization and an absolutely false price, become the persecutors of their own race and the slaves of their enemies.[7]

The Background to a Slaving Zone

As a "slaving zone" Western Ethiopia was "defined as the geographical area impacted by a given society's demand for slaves."[8] As such western Ethiopia was double slaving zone: both a hub for the Sudanese and Ethiopian slave trade, contributing slaves to the global demand through the Sudan (the Nile route) and Ethiopia (the Red Sea trade). The hypothesis that I want to offer in the following: at the point of Ethiopian state expansion at the turn of the 20th century, Ethiopian interest in slaves from the region, met already existing forms of slavery. The slaving system increasingly entered the living space of the Mao and Komo. To better grasp the slaving frontier, it is important

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[7] James, Johnson, and Baumann, *Juan Maria Schuver's Travels in North-East Africa, 1880 - 1883*, 148.

[8] Jeffrey Fynn-Paul, 'Empire, Monotheism and Slavery in the Greater Mediterranean Region from Antiquity to the Early Modern Era', *Past & Present* 205, no. 1 (2009): 3–40.

to go back to the earlier processes of political formation, to see how the Sudanese Arabic, the Oromo and eventually the highland Ethiopian slaving systems meshed.

The formation of the *sheikhdoms* of Bela Shangul and the authority that was exercised over the local population had been preceded by the tight levies of tributes on the Funj *meks* by the Ottoman Empire. With the Turco-Egyptian take-over in the Sudan (1820), more traders, settlers and refugees came to the region of Bela Shangul. The learned Arabs (*faqi*) held an ambivalent position in the area, but especially in Bela Shangul they were sought after as religious teachers by the local nobility (Funj and Berta *agurs*) in which they gradually integrated.[9] Based on their trade links with the Sudan and increasingly with their integration into the local societies, these *watawit* spurred on the local slave trade.[10] The *watawit* were "willing to ignore the traditional social structure to the extent of regarding the southern subject class as '"abid"'", literally "slaves". A brisk market opened in "orphans", "lost children" and "abandoned wives"".[11]

Obsessed with the existence of large gold deposits, the Turkish penetrated farther into the hinterland.[12] Exercising indirect rule, the Ottoman administration took tribute from the Funj rulers, to be paid in gold and slaves. Turkish rule expended and crippled traditional Funj rule "while the southern subjects were stripped of any defence against the enslavement".[13] In 1821 the *mek* of Fazoghli is said to have paid 2000 male slaves annually to the Ottoman Empire.[14]

The most important change in the northern Sudan (north of Khartoum) through the colonial rule of the Turkiyya was the "transition from traditional pre-capitalist systems of land tenure to one based upon the concept of private property, and the

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[9] Spaulding notes in regard to the wandering *watawit*: "Although the Funj nobles sometimes allowed a limited number of the more respectable variety of merchants to enter their domains under strict supervision for the conduct of trade, they rigorously excluded the bulk of the watawit by directing their subjects to kill them on sight. The impoverished northern migrants thus tended to congregate in those parts of the south which were not under Funj control - the banks of the White Nile and the gold bearing districts of Bela Shangul" (Spaulding, *The Heroic Age in Sinnār*, 282).

[10] In retrospect, and to explain the history of the emerging *watawit*, the Governor-General of the Sudan referred to the *watawit* as "debased Arabs", "who exercise mediaeval feudatory rights over the servile negroid population ("Berta") on the Abyssinian border" (cp. FO 141/571: J.F. Maffey, Governor General of the Sudan, *League of Nations*, Khartoum, 15th April 1929).

[11] Spaulding, *The Heroic Age in Sinnār*, 282.

[12] Ibid., 275.

[13] Ibid., 277.

[14] Blundell, 'A Journey through Abyssinia to the Nile', 116.

transformation of the traditional system of agricultural labour particularly through the introduction of agricultural slavery."[15]

> The institution of slavery in the northern Sudan developed as a logical if lamentable response to the system of enveloping colonial authority; colonial slavery was inseparably interlocked with Turkish policies in regard to land tenure, taxation, commerce, military recruitment and the administration of justice.[16]

The Turkkiyya thus opened the Nile region for the slave trade and with the years the slaving frontier moved further south.[17] Remains of Turkish forts in the area of present-day Benishangul attest for the extent of influence of the exploitive Ottoman system. Also, Major Gwynn with his boundary survey party documented remains of Egyption forts in Dul in Bela Shangul.[18]

The effects of the Mahdiyya on the institution of slavery in the region are especially hard to assess. The Mahdiyya got a tighter hold on the institutions of Bela Shangul after the death of the Mahdi in 1885 under his successor Abdallahi.[19] There is a continuation in the institutions of slavery and the feudal frontier economy that seems to be transmitted through the era of the Turkiyya as well as the Mahdiyya and eventually the rule of the *watawit*. This *genealogy of slavery* is also attested by Bahru Zewde:

> Only after the periodic Egyptian extractions of the nineteenth century and the subsequent ansar raids are the watawit reported to have consolidated their

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[15] Spaulding, 'Slavery, Land Tenure and Social Class in the Northern Turkish Sudan', 2.

[16] Ibid., 20.

[17] Richard Gray, *A History of the Southern Sudan: 1839-1889* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); Øystein H. Rolandsen and Martin. W. Daly, *A History of South Sudan* (Cambidge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 10.

[18] Gwynn remarks: "The remains of the old Egyptian lines are still clearly visible and the remains of the houses built by the Egyptian officers exist" (cp. FO 1/44, Major Gwynn, Blue Nile Survey Party, Appendix IV, Notes on Dul). See also: Alfredo González-Ruibal, 'Monuments of Predation: Turco-Egyptian Forts in Western Ethiopia', in *Slavery in Africa. Archaeology and Memory*, ed. Paul Lane and Kevin Mac Donald, Proceedings of the British Academy 168 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 251–79.

[19] Triulzi, 'Trade, Islam, and the Mahdia in Northwestern Wallaggā, Ethiopia', 63.

ascendancy, and the Berta, reduced in numbers and with their power and unity broken, to have been subjected to slavery (supra note).[20]

While the Berta were the first to be absorbed into a system of slavery, other groups to their south were still spared from. In the 1880s the Dutch traveller Schuver found the Koma still relatively isolated. He attests for very sporadic manifestations of the slave trade among the Koma (cp. Chapter 3, Gwama south of Fadasi). It is useful to look at Schuver's account of his guide Wad Bilal, a trader from present-day Asosa:

> Before leaving home, he had given me, in all sincerity, the following information and instructions.... "The commerce", he had continued, "which we carry out from time to time in Koma country, consists of the exchange of salt, cloth and white beads which we bring to barter for the wild honey and the abandoned women or orphan children of the district […]. It is rare for the Koma to consent to sell us an article against a price decided in advance. In each village they welcome us with demonstrations of joy; […] The next day … they gather and one brings us a goat, one a skin or a gourd of honey and the chief makes us a gift of some orphan or widow. It is only when we are specially looking for a pretty girl at the request of some Sheikh of the Berta, that we buy her formally for a price agreed with her parents.[21]

Wendy James, in her analysis of the same episode remarked the "interesting distinction made in this account, from the provision of slaves as tribute or gift, to their outright purchase".[22] Hence at this point there was still space for an ambivalent practice. I take this as an indicator that the slavery frontier had only started to reach the Gwama areas from the north.

During Schuver's time, we find the system of slavery and tribute already more institutionalized in the neighbouring Oromo country. We have seen in Chapter 4 how Jote's territory was incorporated into the expanding Ethiopian state. Jote levied taxes

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[20] Bahru Zewde, 'Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935', 206.

[21] James, Johnson, and Baumann, *Travels in North-East Africa*, 155.

[22] Wendy James, 'A "Frontier Mosaic": Ethiopia's Western Edge', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies. Festschrift Dedicated in Honour of Prof. Richard Pankhurst & Mrs. Rita Pankhurst* 40, no. 1–2 (2007): 289.

on the trade in slaves through his territory. He used slave labour for production and extracted tributes from the surrounding population as we saw in the preceding section.

Observations made by the boundary survey party und Gwynn and Austin, give valuable information about the socio-economic system under Jote, as well as the dependence with the centre, the report states:

> Tribute is paid to Menelek as he calls for it; and it is collected by Degaz Joti through the district officers. A tax of 2 M.T. dollars [*Maria Theresea dollar, A/N*] for each slave is imposed; and independent farmers, too poor to own slaves, contribute one day's work a week on the farms of the local officials. Menelek draws considerable revenue from the ivory of the herds of elephants in the upper Garre Valley, which he strictly preserves.[23]

There are oral traditions collected by Yasin Mohammed, that indicate resistance of the Komo against the tribute system, which eventually led to a punitive expedition of Jote known as the *dulla komo*, the Komo campaign.[24] This campaign led to the looting of many villages and unleashed for some time slave traders, which descended into the country of the Komo to hunt for slaves. Of interest is the following episode documented by Yasin Mohammed: with the growing slave raids, the Komo and Jote made agreements, according to which every Komo family was working ("every fortnight") for a Wanaga family and paid tribute to them. Failure to provide labour or tribute would reduce the person to slave status again.[25]

This contract was broken eventually as slavery and the slave trade accelerated in the region especially with the incorporation of Qellem into the Ethiopian kingdom.[26]

A recollection of an Oromo elder in Begi gives a vivid account of slavery before the Ethiopian empire actually controlled all areas in present day western Ethiopia:

> There was trade in Yābätā too [Yābätā = slaves]. The Maos were the source of slaves. People went there and made raids against the Maos. Lots of them were captured and brought here for sale. The Maos were the main targets for slave

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[23] FO 1/44: Reports of Major Gwynn, R.E., and Major Austin, R.E. on the Country in the neighborhood of the proposed boundary between the Sudan and Abyssinia"

[24] Yasin Mohammed, 'The Komo of Gidami', 15.

[25] Ibid., 17.

[26] Cp. also Corfield, 'The Koma', 134.

raids. […] They were brought and sold to the Sidāmā. The slaves were carried along the Goǧǧam and Šäwa road in search for markets. During the period of Jote slaves were carried through this area, Sayyo, and were sold to the Sidāmā.[27]

Already before the centre fully emerged in the peripheral areas the trade in slaves as well as slavery were highly developed systems. The areas of Bela Shangul were connected to the Sudanese trade and the southern Oromo areas were connected to the Ethiopian trade networks. In both areas the subjection to Ethiopian rule accelerated the slave trade as the local demand increased. A statement collected by Alessandro Triulzi, which takes Jote as an example but which could almost certainly be extended to any other local ruler and middle man, makes this point very obvious:

> Jote collected all the income and in turn passed it over to Shäwa. This was after Jote had allied with Shäwa. But before that he kept all the income for himself. He had made it his own property. The poor who were at all incapable of paying taxes were told to do all sort of work for Jote.[28]

In the aftermath of the expansion of the Ethiopian state, the slavery frontier would move further inland taking control also of the remoter areas in borderlands. This encroachment of slavery has already been attested by Bahru Zewde:

> The Berta clearly formed the great bulk of the slaves exported from Ethiopia to the Sudan. Next came the Koma, followed by the Oromo, Amam, and Burun. Although most of them were already slaves or children of slave parents when sold, some of the Koma and most of the Oromo were freeborn and sold into slavery.[29]

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[27] Sidama is a reference to the highland Ethiopian/Amhara; cp. Field notes Alessandro Triulzi (a-bg 1, p. 4).

[28] Field notes Alessandro Triulzi (a-bg 1, p. 13).

[29] Bahru Zewde, 'Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935', 204.

Slavery in Western Ethiopia

The incorporation of Benishangul accelerated the local systems of slavery. We have already seen that Menelik II requested slaves from *Sheikh* Khojali (s. previous Chapter). Slaves were used for domestic labour in the household of anyone who could afford them, and were also brought in great number to Addis Ababa where they worked in the houses of nobles.[30]

In the research area under the administration of Khojali, subordinated landlords were used to levy a tax in children on their subjects.[31] Child tributes were levied on the local population and the lesser landlords of the region had to give their subjects's children to the courts of the superior lords.[32] The subordinate peasant population was also forced to give their children as tributes and taxes when they were unable to pay in other form.

With the centre demanding all sorts of tributes, Khojali, escalated slave raids on the Mao and Komo. He "revived the slave raiding, hunting and gold mining using slave labour".[33] The effect was that large numbers of Khojali's subjects were forced to mine gold. The use of slave labour for gold mining was already well established. In about 1900 the field mission of Major Gwynn reported from the land of Benishangul, that "all field labour is done by women and slaves." Regarding Dul, a territory tributary to Khomosha and Keili, which was severally raided by the "Abyssinains" from their headquater at Goha, Gwynn reported that Berta slaves do the gold-washing.[34]

I think it is important to differentiate between the *gäbbar* system and slavery. The *gäbbars* were a feudal institution introduced into newly conquered territories, and in Benishangul forms of domestic slavery similar to the *gäbbar* system already existed when the Ethiopian state expanded its rule. One of the main problems in scrutinizing the slave-economy in Ethiopia is the analysis of the general surplus production in the empire-making process. Western Ethiopia was a *slaving zone* in a double sense: first it

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[30] 16/2014: Group interview, Mao (Gwama) and Fadashi, Ya'a, Tongo *wäräda*, 15 October 2014

[31] 14/2011: Kiring elder, Tongo town, 13 October 2014; this was know and child tribute, *ləǧ gəbər*, see further below.

[32] Interviews Asosa, Tongo, Gambella (2010-2014). Khojali institutionalized the *ləǧ gəbər* (child tribute). See also: "Khojele bred slave children, and when they reached maturity, he sent them as tribute to the central government in Addis Ababa" (Abdussamad H. Ahmad, 'Trading in Slaves in Bela-Shangul and Gumuz, Ethiopia', 438).

[33] Ibid., 437.

[34] FO 1/44, Major Gwynn, Blue Nile Survey Party, Appendix IV, Notes on Dul.

was a reservoir for individual slavery, but also for state-sponsored forms of human bondage and exploitation. The *gäbbar* system, the "unremitting exploitation of the peasantry", "operated as the mechanism by which the ruling class appropriated the surplus of the peasants' produce."[35] Similar to the assessment of Garretson for the Maji area, [36] Bahru Zewde measured the increasingly exploitive forms of this central Ethiopian institution with its distance to the centre:

> While the system originated in the Abyssinian kingdom, it assumed most iniquitous dimensions in the areas conquered by Minilik in the latter part of the 19th century. As the conquered peoples of southern, western and eastern Ethiopia belonged to nationalities different from that of their conquerors, the mitigating effects of kinship or ethnic ties were lacking, and cultural oppression was coupled with economic exploitation.[37]

In this way, the centre created a periphery by proxy in which the centre ruled over the *watawit*, who ruled over the rural subjects. This pattern can account for the situation of economic inter-dependence that evolved: the *watawit* rulers with their own peripheries were sustaining the demand of the centre.

Beyond this institutionalised forms of tributes in humans, there was a lively market in humans also, in which state and traffickers worked together. The Ethiopian-Sudanese borderlands have been an area for slave raids for both Ethiopian and Sudanese actors. Ethiopian state agents cooperated with local elites in the slave trade and individual slave hunters carried out raids in this long established slaving zone well into the 20th century. In 1919 the American envoy to Aden reported what information he had gathered on the slave-trade:

> Many of the slave-raiders are I was informed, Abyssinian officers and soldiers over whom the central government has no control. [..] Most of the raids were reported to have been made by Tigrayan soldiers from northern

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[35] Bahru Zewde, 'Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935', 50.

[36] Peter P. Garretson, 'Vicious Cicles: Ivory, Slaves, and Arms on the New Maji Frontier', in *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology*, ed. Donald Donham and Wendy James (Oxfrod: James Currey, 1986), 196–218.

[37] Bahru Zewde, 'Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935', 50.

Abyssinia, who have come into this western and southern country and have become practically little more than brigands and slave raiders.[38]

Cross-border networks and British interventions

With the demarcation of the boundary between Sudan and Ethiopia in 1902, the British devoted much surveillance and attention to the control of the slave trade and the illicit arms trade.[39] The British also opened a *Slavery Repression Department* in Roseires to deal with captured slave traders and runaway slaves. [40]

Fugitives reported to the British authorities and were "allowed land for building and cultivation in selected localities at least sixty miles from the Abyssinian border." [41]

In a letter sent by *lij* Iyassu to *Sheikh* Khojali in ca. 1914, the emperor gave the *sheikh* permission to fight a group of rebelling slaves, in order to stop them from fleeing to the Sudan side of the border. The letter concluded with the order: "…you have to strongly fight them to keep their crossing to the territory of Britain."[42]

Apart from *sheikh* Khojali, another member of the family became increasingly known in the business of slavery between Sudan and Ethiopia. This was *Sitti* (*asit*) Amna (Amina), the first wife of Khojali. She had migrated to the Sudan in 1905 where she requested to settle and pay taxes. Asit Amna was named *umda* of the area where she settled. She had two hundred slaves digging gold for her and eventually in 1929 she was charged with slavery and put in prison in Omdurman.[43]

A.D. Home in May 1927 noted on the relation between Sitt Amna and Mahdi Khojali, the son of Khojali:

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[38] Borg G. Steffanson and Ronald K. Starrett, eds., *Documents on Ethiopian Politics, Vol 1: The Decline of Menelik II to the Emergence of Ras Tefari, Later Known as Haile Selassie; 1910–1919* (Salisbury, NC: Documentary Publication, 1976), 182.

[39] Cp. The Arkell Papers for the Upper and Blue Nile Region.

[40] Artin, *England in The Sudan*, 104.

[41] Appendix, 6; Mr. Homes, FO 141/571.

[42] *Lij* Iyasu to *Sheikh* Khojali, Hamle (i.e. July 24, 1907 (E.C.); the letter is found in the Appendix of Yirga's B.A. thesis: Yirga Tesemma, 'The Process of Political Integration in Asosa-Beni Šangul/Gumuz: A Case Study'.

[43] Appendix, 6; Mr. Homes, FO 141/571.

When El Mahdi, son of Sheikh Khojali-el-Hassan, wishes to sell slaves across the Sudan border, he sends them to Sheikh Khojali's wife, sit Amna, in the Sudan.[44]

The border had an important impact on the situation both in Sudan and Ethiopia. For the Mao and Komo the border was a possibility to evade the slave raids from the Ethiopian side of the border.[45] Paradoxically the border was also a resource for slave traders and hunters, as it enabled evading the more restrictive policies in the Sudan. Either way, the system of slavery would continue unabated for several more years.

[44] Appendix, 6; Mr. Homes, FO 141/571[2011-01-02 06.06.22.jpg]
[45] Abdussamad H. Ahmad, 'Trading in Slaves in Bela-Shangul and Gumuz, Ethiopia', 437.

Chapter 6

Political and Social Conditions: Changes and Continuities in Western Ethiopia, ca. 1930-1974

Modernisation of the state apparatus under the consecutive regimes would evolve differently in different regions. The relation between the people and the state in various localities deserve case to case scrutiny. With the expansion of the state apparatus the state became a "specifiable third player" in the inter-ethnic relations.[1] The peripheral people, usually seen as marginal to the state making project, were vitally linked to it via the rural economy, providing labour and manpower. Often politically overlooked, they were directly associated to the centre, forming the bottom of a power pyramid that connected the centre with the periphery. The predatory state that built the nucleus of future Ethiopia was inherited with all its features by *Lij* Iyassu and later by Emperor Haile Selassie.

With a short interruption during the Italian invasion between 1935 and 1941 the reign of Haile Selassie was mainly marked by a strong push towards modernisation of the administration, bureaucratisation, and military reforms. The attempt to build a unified nation, a project that involved the promotion of Amharic as a national language and the expansion of Orthodox Christianity as the state religion, was pushed at the expense of local culture, religion, and languages.

Western Ethiopia, like any other region, felt the effects of centralisation in several ways. First, the whole area was put under a more regular taxation system, with the local administration put in the hands of central authorities, while the landlords were

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[1] Dereje Feyissa, *Playing Different Games: The Paradox of Anywaa and Nuer Identification Strategies in the Gambella Region, Ethiopia* (New York-Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 119.

retaining their hereditary position and areas of control. Modernization often meant further marginalization. But large parts of the borderland communities came under a tighter grip of tax collection with the land tax proclamation of 1942. The Mao and Komo experienced the state mostly as an extractor and collector of revenue.[2] The relations between state and the peripheral subjects went from slavery, to tribute enforcement, to modern taxes.

After the Italian War, the area was also territorially reorganized. Benishangul was incorporated into the province of Wallaga as the Asosa-Benishangul *awrajja*. It included also Begi and remained under the *balabbat-ship* of the family of *Sheikh Khojali*.

The whole of western Ethiopia continued to be politically marginal but clearly economically important for the empire. It was a motor of trade and commerce, tribute and taxes. From an administrative point of view, the centre had a largely formalistic view of the periphery: subjects had to be ruled, the provinces had to be pacified and developed; they provided pay-offs to the central elite and in some cases had to be "mollified by concessions of one kind or another".[3]

Also, from a strategic point of view, controlling and securing the borders was an important factor in regional history. Among other incidents, the late 1950s were marked by the beginning of the Sudanese Civil War and the Anya Nya I revolt (1956), which had severe effects on the border population. In its course, the influx of refugees and cross border insurgencies became a recurring pattern in the region that significantly affected the borderland population.

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[2] Although slavery was one of the main concerns of the new administration of Haile Selassie, the question how slavery was eventually abolished or whether it was abolished at all has to be analyzed on a case to case basis. For the peripheral areas, and from the perception of the interviews I will present later on, it seems, that the *gäbbar* system resembled slavery and at the same time expanded and was institutionalized in the periphery. This meant an overlap of the bureaucratization and exploitation.

[3] Clapham, 'Centralization and Local Response in Southern Ethiopia', 75.

The Italian Occupation

The short-lived Italian occupation of Ethiopia between 1935/36 and 1941 brought to light various fault lines within the regional power structure.[4] Despite a relatively wellestablished narrative of a unified and patriotic struggle of all Ethiopians against colonialism, the Ethiopian social contract proved to be fragile, if it was existent at all. Most prominently in this regard was the formation of the Western Oromo Federation: under pressure of growing instability and the uncertain outcome of the evolving confrontation between Ethiopia and Italy, between 1935 and 1936, several local rulers of western Ethiopia established links with Britain, or, like the ruler of Jimma, made preparations to join the Italians and to oust the Amhara settlers from their territory. This alliance shift showed the fragility of imperial overrule. In many areas the memories of the conquest and the loss of autonomy were still fresh and grievances against the forceful incorporation into the Ethiopian state ran deep. As Ezekiel Gebissa prominently put it, "when Italy invaded Abyssinia, Oromos seized the moment to reclaim their lost freedom and sovereign existence".[5]

Eventually with the defeat of the Ethiopian army and the beginning of the occupation of Addis Ababa, the nucleus of the Western Oromo Federation was established. Its leaders, Habte Mariam of Näqämte in alliance with the Gidami rulers Yohannes Jote and Hossana Jote (two sons of Jote Tullu, who both were in Addis Ababa under house arrest), and in coalition with *Sheikh* Khojali of Benishangul, "agreed to unite their people and to offer themselves to the League of Nations as a mandate territory with a view to establishing a future Oromo government".[6] Hossana Jote declared himself ruler over Wallaga as soon as the Italians had conquered Ethiopia. He ruled briefly over the western province on behalf of the Italians before they reached western Ethiopia.[7] The rift between the Amhara overlords and the local nobility was thoroughly exploited by the Italians during their occupation of western Ethiopia in order to undermine the local power system. Especially the employment of

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[4] Charles McClellan, 'Observations on the Ethiopian Nation, Its Nationalism, and the Italo-Ethiopian War', *Northeast African Studies* 3, no. 1 (1996): 57–86.

[5] Ezekiel Gebissa, 'The Italian Invasion, the Ethiopian Empire, and Oromo Nationalism: The Significance of the Western Oromo Confederation of 1936', *Northeast African Studies* 9, no. 3 (2002): 76.

[6] Ibid., 81.

[7] Gidada Solon, *Jenseits der Dunkelheit*, ed. Gerd Röhm (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2003), 52.

lower Oromo chiefs and nobles aimed at raising local support for the Italian rule. Furthermore, reforming the land tenure system and land policies was an aim of Italians. In order to get the backing of the rural population the *gäbbars* were given land ownership and the Italian administrators began to tax livestock and land plots.[8] In some areas of Wallaga and Gambella large-scale economic cotton production was started which did not turn out to be very successful.[9]

For the Italians who approached western Ethiopia with a Fascist racial mind set, the Mao and Komo were at the bottom of the racial spectrum. While Oromo, Arabs and Amhara were seen as 'civilizable', the Nilotic groups were seen to be 'savage' and 'culturally inferior' to their neighbours. From a military point of view, the Italians had several smaller posts and stations in western Ethiopia. These posts were mostly operated with the help of only a few Italian soldiers and more locally recruited irregular troops as well as *askaris* from other parts of Italian East Africa.[10] Their main interest was in the exploitation of the gold resources, and the local population continued to work in the gold mines. The following statement brings out the painful memory of the Italian occupation very clearly:

> The Italians invaded and sent Haile Selassie into exile. The Italian rule of the time oppressed us and extremely exploited us. For mining they took people from Kellem to Yubdo. They forced the people to work on mine fields. Thousands of individuals lost their lives when mine fields collapsed leaving them trapped inside. The Italians did untold harm. For gold mining, they ordered ten individuals from each *koro* [i.e. qorro] for a month-long service. After a month, other tens replace them. When the soil collapsed it killed 50-80 people.

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[8] Etana Habte, 'Adminstration of Wallagga under the Dergue (1974-1991)' (M.A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2007), 14.

[9] Haile M. Larebo, 'The Italian Background of Capitalist Farming in Ethiopia: The Case of Cotton', *Northeast African Studies* 2, no. 1 (1995): 31–60.

[10] González-Ruibal carried out archaeological excavations on three sites in Benishangul; these are Afodu, Was'i and Gubba (cp. González-Ruibal, 'Fascist Colonialism').

When the Italians took over, the assigned individuals as "Kabo" [*capo A/M*], like the sons of Khojali. Abdulrahim Khojali was assigned to Wabera. Here on this side [referring to Begi/Tongo] *al-mak* Soso was administering.[11]

The statement also shows that the Italians were not particularly interested in the local population. Instead they were interested in accessing their labour force and thus kept intact the rural administration through *qoros.* The local elite were retained in power. A statement by the British forces made on the situation in Benishangul during the War of Liberation praised the local cooperation and described the resentment of the Italian:

The local inhabitants and notables have given our forces invaluable assistance by supplying agents, who have brought in accurate information; also they have supplied labour whereby roads have been cleared. [12]

That "nobles" also cooperated might be an indicator for the ambivalence of interests. Seeing the end of the Italians in sight, many nobles might have shifted their alliance again. The same report though, criticised the resistance of parts of the Khojali family against the emerging British forces.

In retrospect, the Italian presence "aggravated the political and ethnic rifts that crisscrossed the local societies and the resulting situation turned out to be more ambivalent and complex in the frontier than in other parts of Ethiopia".[13] Confronted with a new power, the ruling elite had to negotiate their loyalties. Today, in several interviews the Italian time remains relatively obscure. Portraying one's own group as openly pro-Italian is today seen as unpatriotic, but presenting them as Patriots is seen too pro-monarchist (or pro-Ethiopian for that matter), and aligned to a system of regional elitism. The historical account on Khojali can help to illuminate the empirical problems: From his earliest engagement with the Western Oromo Federation we can assume that he was ready to abandon his links with the Ethiopian crown. In 1938 Khojali regained control over Begi, was named *sultan* and given administrative control over the *Benishangul Commissariato*.[14] In 1938 he was compelled to mediate between

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[11] 13/2010: Interview with Tongo elder, 29 September 2010.

[12] WO 106/2618: "Situation Report 16th – 24th February 1941Troops Upper Nile Area, Northern Sector".

[13] González-Ruibal, 'Fascist Colonialism', 568.

[14] Adinew Abtew, 'Political and Socio-Economic History of Asossa Wäräda, 1941-1991' (M.A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2011), 98.

the Italians and groups that were still openly resisting. Among those who resisted the occupation were the rulers of Khomosha and Bela Shangul. According to one source, a rebellion erupted in Bela Shangul, demanding the release of *Däjjazmatch* Mustafa, the hereditary ruler of Khomosha, who was then an Italian prisoner and detained in Asmara.[15] Other sources spoke about a campaign Khojali led against the Gumuz.[16] Many Gumuz though were fighting with the Italians.[17] According to Perham, on the other hand, a revolt broke out with the Italian invasion in which Oromo and "local Muslims combined to attack the Sheikh" [Khojali].[18] It seems established that he was fatally wounded during this campaign and was flown to Addis Ababa where he died in the *Ras Desta Hospital*.[19]

In Gambella, according to interviews, the Komo were more inclined to fight the Italians. Nonetheless, there were *balabbat*s like Abdu Rahim (see below for more information), a Kiring, descendant of the Kutu family who had migrated to Bure and later made it to the position of administrator in Gambella. Also, a certain Mukukullu, a *balabbat* of the Komo, fought against the Italians. After the return of the emperor these men were bestowed with the *kabba* (the "clothes of leadership") and the "people started farming for them".[20]

As Charles McClellan remarked, the Italian occupation bore the chance to re-examine the cohesion of the Ethiopian empire, but he concluded that "the opportunity was not fully used, since in the aftermath of the war, Ethiopians ignored many of the war's fundamental lessons and merely replaced old mythology with new".[21] Instead of re-organizing Ethiopia along more decentralized lines, the lessons from the occupation and the local dissent against imperial rule were largely ignored. The post-war period led to a very strong (re-)centralisation of Ethiopia in the years to come.

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[15] "Some Berta Songs from Asossa-Bela Shangul, Wallagga", manuscript, collected and compiled by Alessandro Triulzi.

[16] 12/2014: Berta elder, Kushmangel, Asosa zone, 10 October 2014.

[17] González-Ruibal, 'Fascist Colonialism', 568.

[18] Margery Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), 327.

[19] His wife, who nursed him in the hospital, later would claim he was poisoned. This became part of the local Berta lore, collected by A. Triulzi. "Some Berta Songs from Asossa-Bela Shangul, Wallagga", manuscript. According to this information Khojali died on 21st of March 1938 at the age of 113.

[20] 8/2013: Interview with Komo elder, Gambella town, 11 November 2013.

[21] McClellan, 'Observations on the Ethiopian Nation, Its Nationalism, and the Italo-Ethiopian War', 57.

Abolition of Slavery

Slavery, the most destructive of the exploitative relations between the centre and the periphery - and the regional elite and the border people - was a matter of much international concern. It was a major preoccupation of the domestic organisation of the Ethiopia already before the Italian war. Slavery had been a main obstacle in the negotiation of Ethiopia's access to the League of Nations, and was a leading propaganda issue during the Italian preparation for war. Lastly it became an obstacle in the Emperor's post-war reorganisation attempts.[22]

In the 1920s the colonial forces in neighbouring countries used the diplomacy of abolition for their own ends. Britain, which was highly opposed to Ethiopia's admission to the League of Nations, and France, which was supportive of it, lay in squabbles over the issue. France eventually wrote a memorandum to support Ethiopia's admission describing the benign character of the Ethiopian slave systems.[23] For the Ethiopian crown membership in the League, so it was thought, would "ensure continued independence", check the British claims on the Tana basin and overall contain the territorial ambitions of the Italians stretching out from Eritrea.[24] Despite all diplomatic agitation Ethiopia had become a member of the League of Nations in 1923. The slavery matter now became an issue of the League and the Ethiopian government undertook various measures to further suppress it. The situation in the peripheral provinces remained unsatisfactory to abolitionists. The state apparatus in the provinces was weak. The local governors were themselves involved in the business of slavery. The governors of the provinces lived of the unpaid labour of the peasants and despite the efforts of the anti-slavery commission "took bribes and showed more zeal in punishing those who stole slaves from their masters than in meting out justice to slave dealers."[25]

The Italians were very vocal about the slavery issue themselves and used it as a background to defend their "civilizing mission" by praising the settlement of freed slaves in their colonial territory and the total suppression of the slave trade in the

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[22] Sterling Joseph Coleman, 'Gradual Abolition or Immediate Abolition of Slavery? The Political, Social and Economic Quandary of Emperor Haile Selassie I', *Slavery & Abolition* 29, no. 1 (2008): 65–82.

[23] Suzanne Miers, 'Britain and the Suppression of Slavery in Ethiopia', *Slavery & Abolition* 18, no. 3 (1997): 267.

[24] Ibid.

[25] *Ibid.*, 272.

Eritrean area. At the beginning of their rule the Italians set up so-called "freedom villages", in which they settled and supported freed slaves.[26] Plenty of propaganda material appeared praising the humanist mission and forecasting the wellbeing that would be bestowed upon the suppressed by the Italian presence.[27] While, as we have seen earlier, the Italians were very interested in exploiting regional discontent, their factual interest in the "natives" of the borderlands was limited and their interest in the gold reserves huge. The Italians relied on forging links with established local rulers, who were able to ensure the supply of gold during the occupation.

From a Komo perspective the Italian invasion brought little effects. A Komo elder once stated that: "When the Italians came they didn't reach the Komo".[28] This was his conclusion on the question whether the Italians had changed anything concerning slavery in western Ethiopia.

A British memorandum on the status of slavery in Italian-occupied Ethiopia in 1938 concluded:

> Slavery has been definitely abolished in Ethiopia, and whilst the natives may be forced to work on the construction of roads, they receive payment. Efforts have been made to provide liberated slaves with the means of making their own living, and villages of liberated slaves have been founded.[29]

Italian presence may in some parts of Ethiopia actually have led to abolition, especially due to the ousting of local governors and *neftegna*, who were the staunchest enemies of the abolition before the invasion. The Italians were insistent on their achievements, because due to their land reform and the return of land ownership to *gäbbars* it looked like the Italians had actually ended serfdom.[30] How important the Italian impact has

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[26] Timothy Derek Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifta: Modes of Production in Pre-Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Shama Books, 2010), 224.

[27] Baravelli's pamphlet is a good example for how wide-spread the slavery discussion was in that time. Cp.: G. C. Baravelli, *Das Letzte Bollwerk Der Sklaverei: Abessinien* (Roma: Società Editrice di Novissima, 1935).

[28] 1/2011: Interview with Komo elder, Gambella town, 11 August 2011.

[29] FO/C.P. 288 (38): Ethiopia. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

[30] Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifta*, 223. The claims of the Italians to have abolished it seem oversimplified and somewhat overstated. It might be true that slavery was already heavily declining before the occupation (Cp. Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifta*, 221).

been or what other economic factors affected the decline of slavery has been a matter of much debate.[31]

In spite of the concerns of the anti-slavery society, that after the restoration of Emperor Haile Selassie the system of slavery would return to Ethiopia, the official end of slavery is usually dated to the year 1942. A decree was issued which proclaimed heavy fines as well as imprisonment for the trade in slaves. Regarding factual slaves, the law provided for a gradual emancipation or voluntary turnover of slavery into wage labour.[32]

Despite this, in the given case the deeply entrenched system of slave labour seems to have lived on. In the areas occupied by the Mao and Komo, notwithstanding the increasingly modernized administration and bureaucratic system of taxation, the lines between serfdom and slavery remind blurry, but emancipation was certainly not achieved with the official end of slavery.

The system of slavery died slowly in Ethiopia and even slower in the western parts of the empire. Thus for the Mao and Komo the legacies of slavery, marginalization and exploitation loom large, both in relation to the state and to their political neighbours. Much of the memories are rooted in the experience of the 1960s as we shall see now, contrary to official historical claims about the end of slavery.

Provincial Administration

After the Italian occupation, the reign of Haile Selassie continued uninterrupted from 1941 to 1974. Eventually, in 1974, the Emperor was deposed by a military coup. During his reign the government was marked by a push towards modernization, the inauguration of a first constitution (1931), a revised constitution (1955), the attempt to realize a tax and land reform (1942, 1966) as well as the official abolition of slavery (1942/43). The Mao and Komo were connected to the events of the centre by the rural economy and on the lower end of the social spectrum.

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[31] Jon R. Edwards, 'Slavery, the Slave Trade and the Economic Reorganization of Ethiopia 1916-1935', *African Economic History*, no. 11 (1982): 3–14; James C. McCann, 'Children of the House: Households and Slavery in Ethiopia, 1900-35', in *The End of Slavery in Africa*, ed. Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (Madision, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 332–56.

[32] Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifta*, 234.

In terms of the development of the idea of citizenship the period signalled little progress. Inheriting a quasi-colonial legacy, the citizens of Ethiopia were subjects of the Emperor and, generally speaking, the idea of citizenship did not gain prominence until the Revolution of 1974 (s. further below).[33] The 1931 constitution was "a modern façade for the absolute monarchy that Haile Selassie was fashioning".[34] We have already seen that in terms of citizenship rights or laws little provision was made. According to the constitution, the Emperor, "sacred", "inviolable" and "indisputable", ruled over the territory of Ethiopia, from west to east and north to south and all its inhabitants were his subjects. Achievements of modernization during this time, the introduction of a new national currency, a state bank, a postal system and development of a telephone service, etc. clearly overshadowed questions of local discontent and regional development. While customarily education had been the realm of tradition institutions like either the Orthodox Church or the Quranic schools or other forms of traditional learning, both the Emperor (during his time as a Regent), and later his wife Empress Menen, sponsored the first modern schools for the nobility (e.g. the *Ras Teferi Mekonnen School*) or the *Medhane Alem* for the children of *balabbats*). In 1930 also a Ministry of Education was set up. Institutions of modern (primary) education were established in the Asosa *awrajja* only after 1947, and run in collaboration with the Imperial government and the Orthodox Church and only in the 1960s the three district schools, of Asosa, Bambasi and Dul (in Khomosha) came under the administration of the Ministry of Education.[35] The schools thus mainly catered for the regional elite. In general, progress bypassed the ordinary peasant in western Ethiopia. In one interview, a Gwama man recalled that while the children of the Mao worked in the fields of the *balabbat*, the *balabbat's* kids went to school, and "when they came from school (i.e. after they finished school), they ruled over the children of the Mao themselves."[36] Jan Hultin summed up the shortcomings of development in western Ethiopia:

> The imperial project of modernisation was hesitative; economic development
> was sluggish and unable to deliver the aspired to benefits of modernity such

[33] Keller, *Identity, Citizenship, and Political Conflict*, 22.

[34] Markakis, *The Last Two Frontiers*, 109.

[35] Adinew Abtew, 'History of Asossa Wäräda', 87.

[36] 17/2014: Mao elder, Ya'a, Tongo *wäräda*, 15 October 2014.

as schools or health care. The school system and the policy of linguistic homogenisation excluded the major part of the population; health care was concentrated in the two major cities.[37]

Hence, what is commonly understood as the modernization of the Empire was ambiguous from the perspective of the Mao and Komo, or for any peasant from the communities of western Ethiopia for that matter.

The family of *Sheikh* Khojali had become successful negotiators of their own political survival and continued to administer in Benishangul between 1941 and 1974.[38] Despite the extending centralization and replacing of traditional rulers with new loyal elites, the family retained its position, at least as *balabbats* of Asosa *awrajja*. Traditional elites thus remained in locally confined positions of authority but the centralization process had reduced Benishangul to the jurisdiction of Wallaga province of which it had become a part.[39] Hence a gradual reduction of autonomy between 1941 and 1974 marks the overall centre-periphery relations during this time.[40] Like in other parts of Ethiopia, the government had "liberated itself from dependence on regional support, and in so doing has largely cut itself off from the political forces being generated at the periphery", [41] and in Benishangul and Wallaga the government ruled via a thin layer of regional authority, hardly covering the gap between centre and periphery.

Also, the Mao nobility of the family of Kutu Golja had been able to return to the area of Begi/Tongo in 1941 and continued to administer the Mao and Komo of this region as *balabbat*. The *balabbat* of Tongo was then *al-mak* Soso Kutu, who was later succeeded by his son Harun Soso, who was deposed by the *Därg* military after the Revolution of 1974 (s. further below).[42]

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[37] Jan Hultin, 'Rebounding Nationalism: State and Ethnicity in Wollega 1968–1976', *Africa* 73, no. 3 (2003): 405.

[38] Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia*, 360.

[39] Berhanu Balcha, 'Restructuring State and Society: Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia' (PhD thesis, Aalborg Universitet, 2006), 157.

[40] Asnake Kefale, 'Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia: A Comparative Study of the Somali and Benishangul-Gumuz Regions' (PhD thesis, University of Leiden, 2009), 129.

[41] Ibid.

[42] It is worth noting that Soso was using the title *al-mak*, probably corresponding to *mek* and indicating some sort of Funj descent. This link, though, was never substantiated by any of the interviews I did with the family.

The *balabbat* system was in place during much of the post-conquest era. It was based on the traditional land holding system of northern Ethiopia. In the northern context it was "conceived as a collective term of identity signifying inherent right of inheritance to both community and country".[43] In the southern and western areas it was a way of co-opting local elites into the state apparatus. In general, the *balabbat* were recruited from the local elite, but they were subordinated to the next higher administrative position, e.g. the lowest *neftegna*.[44]

In the periphery the *balabbats* were serving "… as both objects of central policies of domination and as subjects in their implementation and execution".[45] The *balabbat* collected taxes, reported and judged crimes, and were "compensated for his services with rights over land and labour service, and retained a share – usually a tenth – of the state tax they collected from his people".[46]

The next lower administrative position – below *balabbat* – in western Ethiopia was known as the *abba qoro*. This was also introduced during the time of conquest and based on the administrative practices of the *mooti* or chiefdoms of the Western Oromo. The institution of the *abba qoro* spread in the region, acknowledging further the traditional forms of authority. It is interesting to note that also in the Mao areas under the rule of the *watawit balabbats* the office of the *abba qorro* was employed. These *abba qoro* were practically similar to the *chiqa shum*. The *abba qoro* were appointed by the *balabbats* but recognized also a hereditary office.[47] The tasks of the *abba qoro* consisted of transmitting orders from the *balabbat*, collect taxes, and monitoring the division of land among the peasants. According to Bekele, the income of the *abba qoro* depended on the taxes collected. Additionally, peasants were required to do several services and provide the *abba qoro* with supplies.[48] Fences were prepared and repaired by the peasants, harvest, farming, as well as the cutting fire-wood was done by the people. "In short everything the *balabat* wants to do is done by the

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[43] Abbas Haji Gnamo, 'The Dilemma of Arsi Balabbats: A Study of Socio-Economic Position of Local Chiefs in Southern Ethiopia, 1886-1935', in *Étude Éthiopiennes. Actes de La X Conférence Des Études Éthiopiennes, Paris, 24-28 Aout 1988*, ed. Claude Lepage and Etienne Delage, vol. 1 (Paris: Société Française pour les Études Éthiopiennes, 1994), 587.

[44] Markakis, *The Last Two Frontiers*, 110.

[45] Quoted in Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Bekele Geleta, 'Asosa Awrajja: People and Local Government' (B.A. thesis, Haile Selassie I University, 1968), 46.

[48] Ibid.

people in spite of the fact that they have a legal protection against any compulsory service".[49] In the 1960s there were fourteen *balabbat* in the Asosa *awrajja* (six in Benishangul, and seven in Asosa, and one in Begi *wäräda*).[50] All these *balabbats* were either of the family of Khojale, of *Däjjazmatch* Mustapha's family or the descendants of Kutu.

Under the *balabbatship* of Abdul Rahim Khojali of Begi there were several *abba qoro* who were recruited from the *sit shwala*-Mao community. Those were, among others, Kore Genda and Qofaa Margo. In Ya'a the *balabbat* was Muhammad al-Amin. He ruled with the help of an *abba qoro* who was the son of Kore Genda, a certain Hossana Kore from the Makeeso clan. Muhammad al-Amin according to information from Begi ruled through an *abba qoro* from both a Mao and an Oromo family. He used the labour of "many slaves from the Mao and also had many Oromo slaves. The slaves received only food".[51] Another Mao elder remembered that he was taken to the landlords house (I assume from the approximate age that we talked about the late 1950s) where he had to herd goats, while his mother did grinding and cooking and his father worked as a porter. "Sometimes the landlords used the black people as oxen", he concluded.[52] The same elder substantiated these claims several years later in another interview. In this interview he took the position of an adult and reported about the general treatment of the *balabbat* without specifying the landlord:

> We were farming for the landlord. Even if we worked for him, he used our children to work. […] When the maize was ready he came to collect us to harvest for him. Without payment. We worked for them. We built the house. Our kids looked after the cows. When the house fell down [*collapsed*] he collected us to rebuilt it. If you were absent he will send the police and you will pay honey or a goat as a punishment.[53]

In Gambella also the family of Kutu was able to regain influence. Abdul Rahim from the Kiring clan of Kutu was made *balabbat* of the Komo during the years after the

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[49] Ibid., 45.
[50] Ibid.
[51] 18/2010: Interview with Mao elder, Qama, Begi *wäräda*,14 October 2010.
[52] 14/2010: Interview with Mao elders in Ya'a, Tongo *special wäräda*, 2 October 2010.
[53] 17/2014: Mao elder, Ya'a, Tongo *special wäräda*, 15 October 2014.

war.[54] According to information gathered from Gambella, in Bonga the *semi-slave system* prevailed long after the end of the Second World War.

The following excerpt from interviews carried out in Gambella is very insightful to understand the continuities in the rural economy of Gambella and the continued exposure of the Komo to the systems of serfdom. The memories of slavery again loom large in this excerpt of 2011, when I interviewed an elderly Komo woman[55] in her homestead in Gambella town. Towards the end of the interview we came to talk about the administration of Gambella. The woman told us that she lived in Bonga (several kilometres north of Gambella) as a child and memorized the forceful economic system she and her family were part of:

> A: We were washing gold in Bonga. Where can you find that now?

> Q: Did you get a lot of gold at that time?

> A: Even if we found a lot of gold we could not use it, there is one guy he is called Shami, he is the *akui* of that area, he was working with *grazmatch* Abdul Rahim. They used to buy [a] maize and salt and distribute it to us. We were searching the gold. We had to fill the quill of the big black bird with gold and bring it to them. If we didn't fill we had to go back again the next day. If you filled it, you had to take a rest, but only got the maize and salt you got. The *akui* was collecting in such a way.

> Q: Who was the *balabbat* of that time?

> A: Abdul Rahim [Kusta]

> Q: Was he Komo?

> A: No, he was Arab. He was here during the time of Haile Selassie. He was the administrator of Bonga. If you made a mistake he would tie your hands with *mamitti* (chain).

[54] The time is unspecified but from other sources I estimate the late 1950s.
[55] 6/2011: Interview with elderly Komo woman, Gambella town, 18 August 2011.

Q: Was he a Berta?

A: He was from Kiring

We understand from the interview that the family worked in continuation of the old feudal order for goods on a *gäbbar*-base: if they gained what the administrator wanted, that is gold for tax, in return they would get salt and maize. All other goods they would still have to work for themselves. It is worth more than a side remark, but the weighing of gold dust in feather quills was reported by Reginal Koettlitz upon his visit in Wallaga with the Weld Blundell mission in 1898. This confirms the idea of a traditional system of production extending well into Ethiopia's modern era:

> In these gold districts it is very common to see men carrying a wooden tray-like pan about 2 feet long and 15 to 18 inches wide. This pan is used for gold washing. A small goat-skin bag contains quills in which the gold is kept, and other apparatus. They carry also a neat native-made balance, with weights of pebbles or seeds, fitted into a small basket, by means of which they are able to ascertain fairly accurately the value of their washings. These quills filled with gold dust, or small packets of it, or gold rings of different weights, have a known value, and pass as currency throughout these districts, and there are some markets, notably that of Nago, which go by the name of "gold markets," and are frequented by merchants desirous of exchanging their commodities for gold dust.[56]

In 2014, I met the elderly woman again and she substantiated several of the claims she had made in the years before.[57]

> A: During the time there is man called *Shame*. He came and settled together with *grazmatch* Abdul Rahim, and sent the people for gold. When he came and settled there, they sent us for gold mining. There was no payment, but we were given one cup of salt and coffee.

> Q: Is the family of *Shame* around?

[56] Koettlitz, 'Notes on the Galla of Walega and the Bertat', 51.
[57] 3/2014: Group interview with elderly Komo women, Gambella town, 19 September 2014.

A: How do I know, did I go to a European country?

Q: Was he an *akui*?

A: He was a *mooti*, yes. They measured the gold together with Abdul Rahim. The gold was measured with the feather quill (*aluur* in *taa komo*).

Q: What happened when you don't have enough gold?

A: Nothing will be given to you. You borrow from another person.

Q: Where was it?

A: In Bonga.

Q: Shame was *färänji*?

A: His skin was full of hair? [*A/M: I showed her the hair on my arm but the old lady contended*, "his hair was much more, his looked like cat-hair", the children said 'miau, miau' to him"]

Q: Did he force the people to work for him?

A: Indeh!! It was by force. Even our administration forced us. Who is washing gold today like we did that day? His nation name is *Shame*, I don't know what *Shame* means. It was during Abdul Rahim's time. He was working for himself and not for Haile Selassie. *Shame* and Abdul Rahim shared the gold.

Shame, it turned out, was the Syrian administrator of Gambella Majid Abud al Ashkar. Majid was a Syrian Druze. He came with the Kordofan Rubber Company and eventually rose to the ranks of a frontiers agent and *kegnazmatch* in the Ethiopian military. His shadow looms large over the history of the Anywaa, against whom he led several punitive campaigns between 1916 and 1932.[58] In 1934 he was named "Imperial

[58] Dereje Feyissa, *Playing Different Games*, 124.

Agent for the Nilotic Tribes of Ulu Baboor [Gore] and Sayo-Wallega Provinces" by Haile Selassie.[59] His reputation was of a ruthless man and he strongly influenced the history of the Gambella enclave and the relation between the people of Gambella and what came to be known as the Ethiopian state system.

The modernization of Ethiopia was an ambiguous process for the peripheral people of the empire. Prone to continued exploitation based on traditionally rooted patterns of control and tribute extraction, it is not an overstatement to say, that modernization bypassed the Mao and Komo. Due to the peripheral status of the region it is questionable how the unlawful exploitation of the rural population was being controlled, considering the area's long history of state-sponsored perdition and exploitation. Also in the Asosa *awrajja* the descendants of the Khojali family, who administered parts of the area until 1974, lived of the free labour of their subjects and the landlords are said to have transferred all tax burdens to their subjects.[60]

Borderlands: The First Sudanese Civil War

Border demarcation between the British Sudan and Ethiopia was completed in 1902. The border was both of concern to the British and the Ethiopian government; it was an arena for hide-and-seek of the slave dealers and the illicit arms trade and became a shelter and safe haven for the border people in consecutive cross-border conflicts. We have already seen how the border became crucial in the political contestation and politicization of the slave trade. In Benishangul slaves escaped into the Sudan and sought refuge under British protection (cp. Chapter 5). In the southern borderlands the Nuer and Anywaa made use of the border and fled from Ethiopian tribute and avoid British taxation.

Since 1960s the border was also a passage for refugees fleeing the emerging civil war in the South Sudan. The first wave of refugees came after the formation of the Anya-Nya (Anya-Nya I) and the consecutive Sudanese army retaliation on the southern Sudanese population. The Anya-Nya had been formed in the early 1960s, after the first military mutiny in the South Sudan. This mutiny had developed after

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[59] Robert O. Collins, *Land Beyond the Rivers: The Southern Sudan 1898-1918* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1971).

[60] Rashed Mohammad, 'A Biography of Däjjazmač Abdulrahim Khojele', 24–25.

discontent emerged among the southern Sudanese soldiers as well as among the population about the Arabization and Islamization politics of the post-colonial Sudanese government. [61] In the aftermath of the mutiny several soldiers and commanders had been hiding in the bush and the northern army started to retaliate by burning villages, attacking and punishing the population for their alleged support of the rebel soldiers. It was under the weight of these atrocities that the first insurgent movement formed. The retaliation of the government forces was immediate and the southern regions were under deadlock immediately after the first attack was carried out by the rebels. Gambella had been affected by the Anya-Nya uprising in several ways. There were many refugees living in camps in Gambella and up to 40,000 refugees sought support and school services in Gambella town.[62] Also members of the Anya-Nya as well as from the Sudanese military carried out attacks on Ethiopian territory. The refugee camps became a target of punitive actions to retaliate against supports of the movement, and also Ethiopian citizens came under attack by the Sudanese government forces.[63] The Sudanese military even carried out punitive attacks against villages via air raids, which the Ethiopian government did ignore in order not to jeopardize the relations between Ethiopia and Sudan.[64] Also the Anya-Nya carried out cross-border attacks, which hit several settlements.

The rebellion had ambiguous effects on the population. In the beginning of the rebellion the Ethiopian Anywaa and Nuer were sympathetic to the cause of the Anya-Nya. Trans-border networks were established and the fight of the Anya-Nya, basically a *black population* against the oppressive northern Sudan, was considered to be similar to the struggle of the Anywaa against the oppression by the Christian highland state.[65] The Arab North was likened to the oppressive Ethiopian government. Both were locally understood as predatory states and hence common enemies of the southern population. Both Nuer and Anwyaa *balabbats* helped southern Sudanese rebels to set up military camps in Ethiopian territory.[66] The government of Ethiopia was concerned with the constant influx of refugees and the spreading insecurity in the border regions.

[61] Douglas Hamilton Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, African Issues (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003).

[62] Allan Reed, 'The Anya-Nya: Ten Months' Travel with Its Forces inside the Southern Sudan', 1972, 5.

[63] Ibid., 10.

[64] Ibid.

[65] *Jenub* (also *jenubi*, i.e. "south" in Arabic) is refereed to both the Anya-Nya of the first Sudanese Civil War as well as to Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SPLM).

[66] Dereje Feyissa, *Playing Different Games*, 195.

The government appeared relatively helpless in controlling the arrival of rebels and fighters among the refugees.[67] When, with the emergence of the Eritrean liberation struggle in 1961-62, the Sudan government began its clandestine support of the Muslim cause, the Ethiopian government started to support the Anya-Nya in return.[68] In the course of their fighting the Any-Nya became a largely uncontrollable movement that deeply disturbed local societies. The movement claimed "corvée labour and taxes" from the local population.[69] For the Komo of Gambella the Anya-Nya exacerbated old animosities with the Nuer. Pillage and looting hit several Komo villages hard and especially the settlement of Pokung became target of recurring attacks:

> In the 1960s, many Komo crossed back into Ethiopia in order to escape the forced labor demands of Sudanese military outposts. In 1966, a Sudanese army unit, annoyed at the departure of its servile labor force, crossed the border, burned several of the villages newly built by the Komo, killed animals and took several hundred people back to Sudan. The villages were also raided by Nuer groups associated with the Anyanya insurrection in southern Sudan. The Komo who remained protested to the Ethiopian authorities, who gave them arms and set up a police post, together with flag poles and flags so that they could advertise whose protection they came under.[70]

During many interviews, the Anya-Nya was referred to as factor of displacement. The Gwama of Laki in the Mao-Komo *special wäräda* testified about attacks during the time of settlement in Wadessa: The "*jenub* forced us to work for them. Our wives cooked for them and we were clearing the roads for them".[71] The government of Haile Selassie, in an attempt to protect the border, exploited the old animosities between the Komo and their fear of the Anya-Nya and distributed weapons to the Komo refugees for self-defence. The interview with the Gwama leader concluded: "We fled to

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[67] Regassa Bayissa, *War and Peace in the Sudan and Its Impact on Ethiopia: The Case of Gambella, 1955-2008* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2010), 97–102.

[68] Lovise Aalen, 'Ethiopian State Support to Insurgency in Southern Sudan from 1962 to 1983: Local, Regional and Global Connections', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 8, no. 4 (2014): 626–41.

[69] Dereje Feyissa, *Playing Different Games*, 196.

[70] Alexander De Waal, *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York, NY: Human Rights Watch, 1991), 318.

[71] 12/2011: 05 September 2011, Gwama elder, Laki *kebele* (Mao-Komo *special wäräda*). Wadessa, according to the testimonies, had been the refuge after the slave raids that continued until the 1930s.

Oromia. Haile Selassie gave us guns and we fought the *jenub*. They ran back to the Sudan." Hence a new temporary period of settlement began for the Komo and Gwama in western Ethiopia.

Emerging Resistance in the Periphery

The First Sudanese Civil War ended with the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972. Haile Selassie, since his return to the throne in 1941, had gained much fame as a modernizer and architect of post-colonial African integration. In terms of domestic affairs his record was much more ambiguous though. Often portrayed as a glorious restoration, the return of Haile Selassie was in fact accompanied by multiple conflicts of nationalism and contestation about citizenship. The war and the absence of Haile Selassie had brought to the forefront the fault lines of the centralized empire. From the Western Oromo confederation, to the first *wäyyane* (an open resistance in 1942 against the centralizing policies of the emperor in Tigray that was put down with British air raids),[72] the empire was everything but a coherent national entity that had waited for the return of its leader. This situation is part of the explanation why Haile Selassie drove his policies towards national unity, a process often referred to as 'Amharization'. Forming a coherent national citizenry with Orthodox Christianity as the state religion and Amharic as the language for all became a driving motive of the domestic politics in those years.

In the 1960s an educated young elite of students in Addis Ababa began to publicly denounce the imperial regime of Haile Selassie. A tide of protest started that would lead to the *Ethiopian Student Movement*. In the Oromo regions also, most significantly in Bale - with the Bale uprising - and in Wallaga with the creation of the Mecha-Tulama Association, the Oromo started to denounce the Amharization politics and the suppression of their self-determination.[73]

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[72] Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power & Protest: Peasant Revolts in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrenceville, NJ-Asmara: Red Sea Press, 1996).

[73] Mekuria Bulcha, *Flight and Integration: Causes of Mass Exodus from Ethiopia and Problems of Integration in the Sudan* (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 1988), 55.

Chapter 7

The Civil War and the *making* of the Mao and Komo (ca. 1970-1991)

Since the 1960s ideas about Marxism and socialism spread in student and intellectual circles in Ethiopia, and the liberation of the 'rural masses' from the 'yoke of feudalism' was propagated. These progressive ideas contributed to the Ethiopian revolution of 1974 and were soon hijacked by the military that overthrew the monarchy and established a provisional government under a military council (referred to as *Därg*, from Amharic: Committee). The revolution brought far-reaching changes to the region. In Benishangul and Western Oromia the feudalist economy based on lords, serfs and peasants was targeted by the new Socialist cadres. In Gambella also, the traditional institutions of the Anywaa became targeted as 'feudal'. The main short-term aims were the deposition of the *balabbat* and the introduction of land reform (the nationalization and redistribution of land, which occurred in March 1975) as well as the creation of peasant associations.

In the aftermath of the revolution in order to quell the emerging opposition, the *Därg* carried out a violent anti-opposition campaign known as *qay shibbir*, or Red Terror (1977-79). What followed was a period of violent confrontations between the military regime and emerging ethno-regional opposition movements. Events would eventually lead to the overthrow of the *Därg* regime in 1991.

The legacies of the Empire and the National Question

Factors leading to the revolution were multiple and cannot be discussed here in details. The revolution uprooted the monarchy, which gradually was replaced with a military regime of socialist leaning.[1] But a driving force was certainly the student movement.[2] The Mao and Komo, like millions of other Ethiopian peasants throughout the country, were not part of any urban elite, and had no access to the milieu of the student movement, which became the most pronounced "voice of the oppressed masses" – although one might argue that the rural masses were talked for, they did not speak for themselves. The Mao and Komo did not feel any deeper attachment to the state and during the 1970s it was still very possible to live beyond the range of the state. "During Nimeri", i.e. after the 1972 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement in a brief interlude of peace in the southern Sudan, "half of us left to Sudan, half of us stayed here. We didn't pay tax to anyone". A statement made by a Gwama elder prominently brings out the distance the border people felt towards the state. Nonetheless the Mao and Komo would soon be drawn into national events which eventually affected their communities on either side of the border.

The Revised Constitution of 1955 was created under pressure of international issues. The Eritrean constitution was just being inaugurated, based on contemporary ideas of the rule of law and civil liberties. Feeling the pressure of civil law progress Haile Selassie had his constitution revised by a commission in 1954.[3] Especially interesting from a citizenship perspective was Chapter 3 of the constitution. Here several paragraphs were concerned with the "rights and duties of the people". Under this Article 37 of the constitution claimed "no one shall be denied the equal protection

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[1] Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Edmond J. Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991).

[2] Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987*; Bahru Zewde, *The Quest for Socialist Utopia: The Ethiopian Student Movement, C. 1960-1974* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2014); Messay Kebede, *Radicalism and Cultural Dislocation in Ethiopia, 1960-1974* (Rochester, NY: University Rochester Press, 2008); Randi Rønning Balsvik, *Haile Sellassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952-1977* (East Lansing, MI: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1985).

[3] Ghelawdewos Araia, *Ethiopia: The Political Economy of Transition* (Lanham, ML: University Press of America, 1995), 45.

of the law" and Article 38 stated: "There shall be no discrimination amongst Ethiopian subjects with respect to the enjoyment of all civil rights".[4]

But the proclaimed civil rights largely remained paper work and had no effect on the actual realities of the people. Cultural diversity was strongly suppressed throughout the country, the feudal land order continued largely unabated and the government "allocated special funds for secret agents to lurk in student gatherings and other social activities such as Idir and Senbete, self-help mutual association".[5]

The Revolution was ideologically built on the idea of ending the "feudal oppression" of the peasants, the question of land tenure security, and the contestation of cultural domination.

The *question of nationalities*, eloquently posed by the student union speaker Wallelign Mekonnen in his influential 1969 article, clearly showed the contestation of citizenship and belonging against the backdrop of the idea of national unity that Emperor Haile Selassie had tried to enforce on his subjects. The main question raised in the article was what "Ethiopia was composed of". Wallelign concluded that Ethiopia was composed of nations and emphasized the fake nationalism of the elites that propagated a pan-Ethiopian nationalism.

There is a cultural argument to the demands of this early opposition, which reflects the failure of the monarchy to deal with the cultural diversity of the country. Hultin remarked an atmosphere of ethnic sensibilities led to reversing ethnic denominations such as "Galla" for Oromo, among others.[6] Amharization, similar to what Benedict Anderson labelled "official nationalism",[7] was based on territorial and national unity and integrity, and allowed no attempt to integrate the people of Ethiopia except through "assimilation". To the contrary, "it was basically an elite project, which feared all forms of popular involvement in politics and hence sought to thwart all expressions of political consciousness".[8]

The *question of nationalities* became a larger-than-life issue both the student movement, who almost debated it like "religious sects"[9] But it also inspired the emerging ethno-regional liberation movements. In retrospect, the oversimplification of

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[4] For a reprint of the constitution see: Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia*, 445.
[5] Ghelawdewos Araia, *The Political Economy of Transition*, 41.
[6] Hultin, 'Rebounding Nationalism', 404.
[7] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
[8] Hultin, 'Rebounding Nationalism', 405.
[9] Merera Gudina, 'Contradictory Interpretations of Ethiopian History', 123.

a quest for self-determination, based on clear cut identities, started a process of alleged liberation of the various oppressed ethnic groups. But in the regional liberation struggle this led to the *survival of the fittest* (the stronger liberation movement could make the stronger identity claim), which in return led both to the further differentiation as well as superimposition of ethnic identities. As Wendy James rightly remarked, "the struggle on the ground is not always best understood as between ethnic or religious groups, and drawing boundaries can produce as much conflict and misery as it solves [...]".[10] The interlocking conflict over self-determination merged with territorial conflicts over control and supremacy, further uprooting the fragile and vulnerable minorities.

Civil War and Refugees: Militarization of the periphery

In spite of the measures in favour of the rural masses, the aftermath of the revolution quickly turned western Ethiopia into a battleground. The years between 1974 and 1991 brought complex changes, reconfigured existing power relations, and set the stage for the political *ethno-genesis* of the Mao and Komo. While the evolving conflicts would certainly also expand along claims of cultural recognition and ethnic self-determination, the first resistance to the new regime came from the deposed nobility. Primary resistance to the *Därg* came from the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), a conservative monarchist movement under the leadership of *ras* Mengesha Seyoum. The movement had its strongest base in Begemder and Gojjam, where it held several districts in 1977. Its main obstacle was its lack of mass popular support, since it was based on feudalist claims and basically an Amhara-Tigray elite movement.[11] Despite this, in western Ethiopia its most prominent member and spearhead of the anti-*Därg* movement was *Abba* Harun Soso, the *balabbat* of Tongo/Begi. The EDU had its base in the southern Blue Nile region in the Sudan and a head-quarter in Khartoum.[12] Harun was the first to lead an attack against the town of Begi in 1976. Despite the small scale of the attack it gained him considerable fame in the region. This fame

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[10] James, *War and Survival in Sudan's Frontierlands*, 3.
[11] Gunnar Hasselblatt, *Schreie im Oromoland* (Stuttgart: Radius-Verlag, 1980), 23.
[12] Interviews with Harun Soso, 2010, 2011, 2014.

basically lasts until today.[13] The Komo, whom he was supporting with weapons were his allies.[14] But the EDU lost ground in the region and the OLF could gain supremacy instead, as the main liberation movement. In the late 1970s the OLF also contacted *abba* Harun and both sides opted for military cooperation. Harun had his main base in Daga Post, which was later ambushed by the *Därg* military.[15] In the post-1991 period, Harun became a founding figure of the Mao-Komo *special wäräda* and I will give his personal account more space in the course of this chapter.

In 1977 Oromo students were executed for campaigning for the promotion of Oromiffa (the Oromo language).[16] From the early 1980s onwards the OLF operated in the region of Wallaga. Counter-attacks by the Ethiopian army on the "western front" began in January-February 1982".[17]

The OLF opened a Foreign Relations Office in Khartoum in 1978 and from 1979 onward it started to establish itself in the Blue Nile Region and Western Wallaga.[18] Since the 1980s the *Oromo Relief Association* (ORA) worked in the Refugee Camps in the Southern Funj.[19] In the course of the conflict international issues fuelled the wider conflict scenario. In 1983, the *September laws* of Jaafar Nimeiry enraged the southern population and led to the resuming of the armed rebellion in Sudan. The *Sudan Peoples Liberation Army* (SPLA) was founded. Similar to its predecessor, the Anya-Nya, the SPLA became a player in the regional interlocking proxy wars. The *Därg* government supported the SPLA. The SPLA eventually administered parts of Southwestern Ethiopia, where it had turned the refugee camps of Gambella into military training camps. It also had a headquarter near Itang.[20] On the other hand, the Northern Sudanese government supported the anti-government forces in Ethiopia, like the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), and later the OLF, etc. Refugees who fled from

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[13] Harun died in Tongo in 2015.

[14] Thomas Zitelmann, *Nation der Oromo: kollektive Identitäten, nationale Konflikte, Wir-Gruppenbildungen: die Konstruktion kollektiver Identität im Prozess der Flüchtlingsbewegungen am Horn von Afrika: eine sozialantropologische Studie am Beispiel der saba oromoo (Nation der Oromo)*, Das Arabische Buch (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 1994), 125.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Waal, *Evil Days*, 317.

[17] Ibid., 318.

[18] Zitelmann, *Nation der Oromo*, 116.

[19] Ulrich Braukämper, 'Ethnic Identity and Social Change among Oromo Refugees in the Horn of Africa', *Northeast African Studies* 4, no. 3 (1982): 1–15; Mekuria Bulcha, *Flight and Integration*; Zitelmann, *Nation der Oromo*.

[20] Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, 88; Markakis, *The Last Two Frontiers*, 223.

Ethiopia as well as those fleeing the Sudan were caught between the liberation movements and the government forces. For refugees from Wallaga, the Yabus site became a major refugee camp. Yabus camp, 700 km south-east of Khartoum, had developed from merely a few houses circled around a giant tree to a town hosting over 5,000 refugees. Especially through the work of the ORA it had a clinic, orphanages and all sorts of logistic infrastructure.[21] Many Mao and Komo who joined the OLF participated in the alphabetization campaign of the OLF. The ability to read and write was perquisite for the participation in the OLF.[22] It can be argued that this lead to a certain 'Oromization' among the Mao and Komo also.

In 1987 Yabus had several times been attacked by the SPLA. At this time, already the OLF held a large territory. Yabus had become more of a passage to the liberated areas and was hosting a decreasing number of people.[23] The Yabus region was a strategic location which both northern Sudan claimed was part of the Islamic north, while from a southern perspective it formed part of the southern cultural area.[24]

The situation of refugees put several NGOs and scholars on their guard and there is a bulk of relevant literature that describes the situation of refugees in the Sudan. Many of these accounts make use of invaluable first-hand interviews with refugees.[25] Consistent with this literature the memories of today focus on the following reasons for flight: fear of the forced recruitment into the military; forced labour and harassment by the cadres, as well as by the re-located villagers; restriction of religious and cultural freedom on the pretext of socialist social engineering.

Part of the strategy of social engineering by the government was the relocation of drought-affected people from the northern highlands. Locally, communities were organised in *Peasant Associations* (P.A.) and often forcefully relocated under the

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[21] Gunnar Hasselblatt, *Das geheime Lachen im Bambuswald: vom Freiheitskampf der Oromo in Äthiopien* (Stuttgart: Radius-Verlag, 1990), 31.

[22] Zitelmann, *Nation der Oromo*, 124.

[23] Hasselblatt, *Das geheime Lachen im Bambuswald*, 48–49.

[24] Zitelmann, *Nation der Oromo*, 118.

[25] Jason W. Clay, Sandra Steingraber, and Peter Niggli, *The Spoils of Famine: Ethiopian Famine Policy and Peasant Agriculture*, Cultural Survival Report 25 (Cambridge, Mass.: Cultural Survival, 1988); Jason W. Clay and Bonnie K. Holcomb, *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine: 1984 - 1985*, Cultural Survival Report 20 (Cambridge, Mass.: Cultural Survival, 1985); Peter Niggli, *Äthiopien: Deportationen Und Zwangsarbeitslager* (Frankfurt/Main: Gemeinschaftswerk der Evangelischen Publizistik, 1985).

villagisation program.[26] For the liberation movement these resettlement sites also posed a military threat, as resettlers were turned into militias in the new localities.

> Two types of militia are recruited from among the resettles: those who work inside the camp and those who are sent into the surrounding communities. […] The Oromo Liberation Front has long alleged, that the highland settlers organized as militia groups are used by the Dergue as a tool to control and terrorize Oromo communities whose loyalty to the government is suspect. […] Militia forces from the resettlement camps seem to be involved in the process of Villagization in three ways. First, they serve as a security force for government officials orchestrating and overseeing the move. Respondents from many different areas mentioned that the party representatives, district administrators, and members of the Ministry of Agriculture arrived in their villages surrounded by armed guards "who did not speak our language". Some recognized these guard as settlers from nearby camps. Second, in some cases, the militia oversee the seizure and collectivization of crops and animals. […] Thus, the militia oversee the actual move, including the dismantling and rebuilding of houses. [27]

Torture and extra-judicial killings became part of the consequent militarization of the periphery. Oromo, Mao and Komo peasants were all under collective suspicion by the government militia and military to support or fight with the OLF.[28] The Komo were collectively seen as supporters of the OLF and since they were very mobile in the forest and had links to the Sudan, they were most suspect and targeted by the authorities.[29] The Komo were collectively seen as supporters of the OLF and since

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[26] The resettlement program was designed to relocate and hence rescue victims of the famine in northern Ethiopia in the years 1985 and 1986. These IDPs were then relocated in fertile areas of south-west and south Ethiopia.

[27] Sandra Steingraber, Resettlement and villagization in Wollega: Report on Refugee Testimony Collected in Sudan, May-June 1987, paper presented to the conference on Oromo Revolution in Washington, DC, August 15, 1987

[28] Sandra Steingraber, Resettlement and villagization in Southwest Ethiopia. A Report Based on Refugee Testimony Collected in Sudan, May-June, 1987, (I) Villagization in a War Zone: Refugee Reports from Western Wollega, (II) What happened to the 800,000 after they got of the Trucks? An update on Resettlement, (III) Integrated Settlements in Gambella: Armed Uprisings and Government Reprisals (The Testimonies of Anuak Refugees in Khartoum); all *SOAS archive*

[29] Sandra Steingraber, Resettlement and villagization in Southwest Ethiopia. A Report based on refugee testimony collected in Sudan, May-June, 1987, (I) Villigization in a War zone: Refugee Reports from

they were very mobile in the forest and had links to the Sudan, they were most suspicious and targeted by the authorities.[30]

An unjust tax system levied on the local population and the indiscriminate recruitment into the military led to crop failure and poverty in western Ethiopia during the 1980s. A "uniform tax" for the militias and the military of between 12 to 50 *birr* was imposed.[31] The OLF's public relations organ reported that despite crop failure the government did not send food aid to western Wallaga on allegation that aid would be distributed to the OLF fighters. "Therefore, in order to starve the guerrillas, the regime resorted to starving the whole people".[32] The report concluded that about 500,000 people were affected by the famine in Wallaga and Illubabor with the worst situation in Qellem.[33] Furthermore the government used forced labour both from among the resettles as well as the local population but to construct villages. Also, the forced work of collecting gum arabic killed many people.[34]

> We were ordered to cut big trees to build them houses. We cut everything down and collected the wood into one place. Those who refused were beaten or killed. They would tie his legs and tell him to walk until he falls into a ditch. Sometimes they put pepper powder in our eyes to torture us as a punishment for refusing to build houses. The whole village suffered.[35]

Caught between the Ethiopian and the Sudanese unrest, Mao, Komo and Gwama were targeted by government forces, as well as rebels. Forced labour, and fear of the raids became part of the local social memory.[36] These memories similarly raised ambiguous perceptions about the idea of home:

Westen Wollega, (II) What happened to the 800, 000 after they got of the Trucks? An update on Resettlement, (III) Integrated Settlements in Gambella: Armed Uprisings ad Government Reprisals (The Testimonies of Anuak Refugees in Khartoum); all *SOAS archive*

[30] Steingraber I: Villagization in a War zone: Refugee Reports from Westen Wollega

[31] Ibid.

[32] Oromia Speaks: A Publication of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Foreign Relations Office, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1981: p. 11

[33] Ibid.

[34] Hasselblatt, *Das geheime Lachen im Bambuswald*.

[35] Steingraber (II) What happened to the 800,000 after they got of the Trucks? An update on Resettlement.

[36] Gambella, Benishangul interviews 2010-12.

A: The SPLA made us work for the road, and made us cut the grass and wood and building houses and making the road. Just they were sitting like monkeys, they were only proud and after we built a house and then they left and made us build another house.

Q: But today with the new Sudan would you like to go there?

A: I already forgot about them. If you go to toilet in the morning, do you go back to there again. I don't want to go there again; as the school here is built with the sheet, I want to stay here to build.

Q: So now you are Ethiopian?

A: If I go back there, the new Sudan will make me work again; […][37]

As many interviews recall a history of migration, the wish to settle and a life in peace looms large in many of such statements. The example above shows both the events that led to the migration, but also the wish for durable safety (a school for the children, with a metal sheet roof, according to the example above). It is interesting to note though that the respondent avoided answering the question whether he felt an Ethiopian now, but suggested that living conditions were better here and if he would return to the new Sudan he would not trust the new government either.

Intertwining Struggles for Recognition

Abduction and the resurgence of slavery accelerated the insecurity both in western Ethiopia and the southern Funj.[38] Atrocities of the multiple perpetrators drove many minorities to join the OLF. The OLF would - between the 1980s and 90s - become the most potent of the Ethiopian liberation fronts in the region (the others being the Benishangul Peoples Liberation Front or the Gambella Liberation Front). The cause of

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[37] 13/2011: Interview, Gwama elder, Laki, Tongo *special wäräda*, 05. September 2011.

[38] Africa Watch Committee, ed., *Denying 'the Honor of Living': Sudan, a Human Rights Disaster*, An Africa Watch Report (New York, NY: Africa Watch Committee, 1990), 160: "The accounts of hostage-taking and forced labor that the SPLA may be taking captives and civilians in occupied areas in ways that can be degenerated into slavery".

the OLF was strongly territorial. The program of the front stated its objective was "national self-determination for the Oromo people", which would ultimately only be achieved "by waging anti-feudal, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist struggle, and the establishment of the people's democratic republic of Oromia".[39] The minorities among the Oromo were, based on arguments of a long tradition of cultural interaction as well as their ability to speak *afaan Oromo*, regardless of their actual ethnicity, seen as Oromo themselves. Both Mao and Komo, it was argued, were *black Oromos*. Those Mao and Komo in the OLF who started to question the cause of the war, which basically meant to question the liberation of the Oromo people and eventually the establishment of a state of Oromia, began to meet in secret. Some started to publicly demand the self determination of the Komo in light of the liberation of the Oromo. As a consequence, the Komo fighters were dispersed and put under different commands.[40] In the course of such conflicts, several Gwama and Komo defected from the OLF and joined the *Gambella Liberation Front* (GLF). The following interview excerpt represents the case of one leading Komo, who began to publicly denounce the liberation of the Oromo at the expense of the quest for a Komo identity and recognition:[41]

> A: […] When I was in the ONÄG [Amharic abbreviation of the OLF: *Oromo näṣannät gənbar*], I was thinking about Komo. I was trying to do a lot of things [in order] to have our own group. I don't want to stay with them. At the end, the letter which was written by me, was caught. When they caught the letter, there was a meeting for three days about me only. They wanted to shoot me. It was my sister who saved my life. She was with me in the OLF. She said 'that the idea of my brother is true. It is for the people of Komo. For the language of the Komo. Komo is not under anybody. The idea is correct, and if there is somebody who will take action on him, you do it now and then we see each other.' She unlocked her gun. She was about to shoot. She came out from the meeting. All the Komo took their position (ready to fight). The leader of the meeting was Abba Chala. The second was Kulenni, she was a woman. She came from Germany. Because the ONÄG was in Germany (they

[39] The Oromo Liberation Front, "O.L.F. Program, Finfine, Oromia, 1974, and amended June 1979", § VI, p.8.
[40] 9/2011: Interview with Komo elder, government clerk, Asosa, 01 September 2011.
[41] 5/2014: Interview with Komo administrator, Gambella, town, 21 September 2014.

had an office there). When they took a position all the big weapons were in the hands of the Komo people. And then they said, 'there shall be no death. […] You can go and join and make your own group'. My life was saved in this way […].

The "letter" the interviewee referred to in the statement was a pamphlet or manifesto calling for the recognition of a distinct Komo identity. Though I have not seen the document I assume from oral description that it was written in similar vein, supporting the establishment of identity-based local groups in many parts of Ethiopia. The political formations built the nucleus for many ethnic parties that emerged after the end of the civil war. I asked a local administrator of the Komo about the content of the text, and he made the following astute observation:

> A: Starting from today we don't want to be under anybody. We must create our own group, a community of Komo. We must have our own party. Until now we are walking with OLF, and until when will we continue with them? We are working for the OLF, we didn't see any work done for the Komo! This is what brought the division between us. They called us *black Oromos*. We are not black Oromo we are Komo. […] I am not a black Oromo. I am Komo. Even if I am black, I am a black Komo not a black Oromo. Why should I be a parasite who is depending on others?

In the wake of these events, several Mao and Komo started their own group. This group became attached to the GLF. But not all Mao and Komo defected from the OLF. In Gambella the strategic alliance between the GLF and Komo made it possible for the Komo to be part of the peace talks after the end of the civil war. During an assembly of the former rebel cadres the question of the participation of the Komo arose. The rebel leaders agreed that the Komo were too few to get a seat in the regional government. It was eventually by the barrel of the gun and the threatening of a shootout that the Komo gained recognition in the federal arrangement of Gambella and secured the acknowledgment as an indigenous community in Gambella.[42]

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[42] 19/2011: Interview with Komo administrator, Gambella town, 17 September 2011; cp. also Dereje Feyissa, 'The Experience of Gambella Regional State', in *Ethnic Federalism. The Ethiopian Experience in a Comparative Perspective*, ed. David Turton (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), 226–27.

At the end of the civil war, both in Gambella and in Benishangul the Komo received formal recognition as an indigenous group.[43]

In Benishangul-Gumuz they were going to be awarded a special ethnic territory, the so-called Mao-Komo *special wäräda*. The history of the Tongo *wäräda* clearly exemplifies the ambiguous instrumentalization of identities in the quest for a new Ethiopian political order.

In 1974 the first targets of the emerging socialist renovation of Ethiopia were the old feudal lords. One of these *balabbats* was *Sheikh* Harun. With the advance of the Socialist cadres, the *zemech'a* (the alphabetization campaign), most Benishangul and Oromo *balabbats* were imprisoned or fled. Also, *Sheikh* Harun fled with some of his Komo soldiers to hide in the lowlands between Ethiopia and the Sudan. He and his family also lived in the Yabus refugee camp, where many Komo, Oromo and Berta were seeking refuge from the war. With a group of only five he ambushed the *Därg* military in Begi and for three days held the town. He later would make an agreement of non-interference with the OLF. Eventually, after the end of the war, with the emerging of the TPLF forces, he became one of the main negotiators of the new territorial division of the area. This happened between 1994 and 1995 in the aftermath of the boundary negotiation in the area. But local information has it that the plans for a Mao-Komo administrative entity were already laid out by Harun in the late 1980s. He managed to regain his old territory as part of the federal arrangement and thus got Mao-Komo self-administration. The irony is that this territory was actually a formal feudal fiefdom, renamed as the Mao-Komo *special wäräda*, an ethnic territory, theoretically providing basic autonomy for the minorities of the Mao and Komo, the former subjects of the landlords.

[43] Indigenous group in the Ethiopian context is a problematic term (cp. Dereje Feyissa and Meron Zeleke, 'The Contestation over the Indigenous in Africa. The Ethiopian Example', in *Ethnicity as a Political Resource: Conceptualizations across Disciplines, Regions, and Periods*, ed. University of Cologne Forum. Ethnicity as a political Resource (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015), 117–34). The cultural self-determination is embodied in the term nations, nationalities and people. As such the Mao and Komo became titular groups of the newly formed regional states. See also further below.

The Aftermath: Benishangul's Second Civil War

In the 1980s the various liberation movements operating throughout Ethiopia made further agreements to cooperate and combine their struggle. Under the auspices of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) as well as the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), the regional liberation movements - the OLF, the Berta Peoples' Liberation Front (BPLF) and the Gambella Liberation Front (GLF) - received military training in Hagere Salam in Tigray. They trained and planned a joint offensive in their respective areas of origin and to "liberate" these regions from the *Därg* military. Oral sources confirm that the groups had an agreement to support each other and not claim territory of the other groups.

> These soldiers [the various liberation movements] cooperated with the ONÄG [*Oromo näṣannät gənbar*] in Sudan then came to this area. Gambella had its own team, Benishangul and Oromo had their own team, the Amhara and the Tigray had their own team. All these soldiers were against the *Därg*, they were all trained in Tigray. They cooperated with the Sudan before they were taken to Tigray. After they had been trained in Tigray for two years, they came back through the Sudan. Those from Gambella went back to Gambella, the Oromo to Oromia and the Benishangul would come here. So all came through Benishangul. Their agreement was to pass only through Benishangul. When the Oromo came here they settled here. The BENIN [*Amharic abbreviation of the BPLF, Benishangul näṣannät nəqnaqe*] said 'this is not the agreement. We should only accompany you through the territory'. Then the Berta soldiers went back to the bush and fighting began with the ONÄG.[44]

The OLF was the most successful group towards the end of the civil war and held large parts of western Wallaga. An OLF National Congress was held in February 1988 in Begi, which belonged to the liberated area.[45] With the end of the civil war and the takeover of the EPRDF, the OLF assumed full control over most parts of western Ethiopia.

[44] 12/2014: Interview with Berta elder, Kushmangel, Asosa zone, 10 October 2014.
[45] Oromia Speaks: A Publication of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Foreign Relations Office, vol. 7, no. 2-3 (1988): 6-13.

Historical claims for territory both from the Berta and the OLF immediately led to a confrontation of the BPLF and OLF. Hence the "stage was set for Benishangul's second war".[46] The OLF's territorial ambitions and claims for an independent Oromia clearly emerged when the OLF dropped out of the transitional conference in 1991 in which the future of post-war Ethiopia was being discussed by the members of various liberation fronts. The OLF pursued its own program in western Ethiopia. The Berta, Mao and Komo call for regional self-determination was neglected, and in Wallaga and Benishangul the OLF began "replacing Amharigna with Oromiffa in the schools and punishing those who spoke the language in the streets [...]". In response, the indigenous population petitioned the EPRDF to intervene, leading to the region's third war in January 1992."[47] The BPLF which was a junior member of the EPRDF (the Ethiopians People Revolutionary Democratic Front, as the umbrella organisation of the various ethnic based liberation movements) and had established good links with the TPLF during the struggle, called for support to counter what was perceived to be an expansionist agenda of the OLF. The conflict evolved to the disadvantage of the OLF which had dropped out of the transitional assembly and the meetings over the political future of Ethiopia and had returned to open armed resistance against the transitional government. Against this background, a tiresome guerrilla war erupted which claimed the lives of many civilians before the EPRDF intervened and pushed back the OLF in early 1992. The conflict between the BENIN and the OLF was recalled by a Berta elder:

> Then the Berta soldiers went back to the bush and fighting began with the ONÄG. Even a lot of elders were ambushed by ONÄG. […] The Oromo said to BENIN 'you have no land here you are refugees'. During the first fighting the Oromo defeated the BENIN. Even the camp of BENIN around Kushmangel was taken by ONÄG. Even when the ONÄG came here they did not spare children or old people, they killed all. When the BENIN was defeated the IHADIG (Amharic abbreviation of EPRDF, *Yäityopiya həzbočč abyotawi dimokrasiyawi gənbär*) sent 150 soldiers to help them.[48]

[46] John Young, 'Along Ethiopia's Western Frontier: Gambella and Benishangul in Transition', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 37, no. 2 (1999): 327.
[47] Ibid.
[48] 12/2014: Interview with Berta elder, Kushmangel, Asosa zone, 10 October 2014.

The defeat of the OLF opened the way for the BPLF to become the major player in the demarcation of future territorial politics. The territorial allocation of political territories began and the other ethnic groups, the Gumuz, Shinasha, Mao and Komo formed corresponding parties to voice their claims in the political bargaining.[49] Benishangul-Gumuz was agreed to be formed, by a merger of the former territories of the Asosa-Benishangul *awrajja*, and parts of Mätäkel in former Gojjam province. The politically recognised groups were the Berta, Gumuz, Shinasha, Mao and Komo.

Territorial disputes nonetheless emerged and especially the Begi area continued to be contested. In 1994 the EPRDF called for a referendum. With this referendum Begi, an old heartland of many Mao and Komo, was given to Oromia. This leads to a very different development of citizenship rights within the same group. While the Mao and Komo developed (in part) language and cultural rights, the Oromia Mao and Komo live under more precarious citizenship rights among the Oromo as minorities not specifically recognized by the constitution. This pattern and the background of boundary demarcation will be the topic of the next chapter.

The civil war had far-reaching effects on the region and its people. Old feudal structures of power were uprooted and made way for new configurations of ethnic alliance. The work of the OLF and the ORA led to the gradual Oromization of the people and the region. Like their politically more vocal and experienced neighbours, the Mao and Komo demanded self-determination and the recognition of their cultural distinctiveness and historical marginalisation. The civil war created new local elites (e.g., war veterans), who together with older (feudal) elites negotiated ethnic identity, in order to gain or retain political control. The networks these elites employed tended to mostly benefit their direct kin, while the usage of blanket terms such as Mao and Komo led to an exclusion of other groups from political participation. Presently power rests largely in the hands of former nobility that used the labels Mao and Komo for political bargaining. The other Mao groups of Benishangul (Ganza, Omotic Mao, etc.) or even Oromia are being excluded from the power negotiations. Elsewhere, old forms of power distribution have re-evolved, like in the case of Oromia, where despite the combined efforts to fight the *Därg* government the constitution of Oromia today does not provide civil rights for distinct ethno-cultural minorities.

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[49] Mesfin Gebremichael, 'Federalism and Conflict Management in Ethiopia: Case Study of Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State' (PhD thesis, University of Bradford, 2011), 234.

Chapter 8

From *Deep Rurals* to Rural Citizens?

The Ethiopian constitution of 1994 proposes a rather primordial concept of citizenship, based on the idea of *nations, nationalities and people* (Amharic: *biher, behereseb, hizboch*), who are defined by language, belief and territory among other things.[1] Based on constitutionally proclaimed right of all *nations, nationalities and people* to cultural recognition, the government of Ethiopia claims to have answered the *national question*. With the fall of the military regime in 1991, Ethiopia was re-organized according to a federal structure, and the ethnolinguistic landscape has been used as a, rather sketchy, blue print for internal border demarcations. Federalism in Ethiopia like elsewhere has taken a top-down approach. "Territorial division" is used by the centre both "to improve administrative efficiency", and to respond to "pressures of territorial groups seeking self-government".[2] The federal arrangement emphasises the multi-cultural doctrine of *unity in diversity* as the answer to past social and ethnic inequalities, conflict and inter-ethnic competition. Ethiopia is re-structured into nine federal states, all of which are organised along ethno-linguistic principles. These new polities are referred to as *kəlləl* (Amharic: 'enclosure', 'boundary' 'confines'; hereafter region). These new regions are vital for the approach taken here. In these territories, the state offers an unprecedented degree of self-determination.

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[1] The somewhat blurry terms *nation, nationalities and peoples* constitutes, according to the Ethiopian constitution, the citizenry of Ethiopia; cp. Article 39 (§5): "The term "nation, nationality and people" shall mean a community having the following characteristics: People having a common culture reflecting considerable uniformity or similarity of custom, a common language, belief in a common bond and identity, and a common consciousness the majority of whom live within a common territory."

[2] Ivo D. Duchacek, 'Antagonistic Cooperation: Territorial and Ethnic Communities', *Publius* 7, no. 4 (1977): 3–29.

Regional parliaments were created with a wide array of institutional rights and responsibilities.[3]

In the following I will in particular look at the emotive patterns of citizenship, expressed in inter-ethnic relations influenced by political choice and institutions. First, based on the experiences of inter-ethnic as well as state-subject relations, I will present patterns of peripheral historicity in order to highlight how the Mao and Komo understand their place in the regional social and political sphere. In the second part I will emphasize the federal border regime in order to understand the institutional defects that affect the exercise of citizenship of the Mao and Komo.

Marginalization as Lived Experience

Marginalized groups, a term usually employed to describe specialised caste-like groups in various hierarchically structured societies in Ethiopia, are the springboards here to reflect on the question: are the Mao and Komo marginalized groups? The Mao and Komo are not a caste of a given society, but rather here portrayed in a wider regional social context as citizens of Ethiopia. Still some of the aspects about marginality that have been so eloquently elaborated by Dena Freeman and Alula Pankhurst,[4] build an important super structure for reflecting on the place of the Mao and Komo in the given social context. In their study Freeman and Pankhurst concluded, that marginalisation can be analysed in "five interrelated dimensions": spatial, economic, political, social and cultural.[5] To begin with I want to compare the findings from this thesis with the concepts elaborated in their book *Peripheral People* in order to approach the question of marginality.

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[3] For a thorough analysis of the institutional set up see van der Beken, *Unity in Diversity*. Nonetheless I argue that there is a great gap between regional autonomy provided on paper and the actual shortcoming of decentralization. Land administration, which has become salient in recent years is undergoing constant meddling of the central government. On the problems of decentralization s. Teferi Abate Adem, '"Decentralised There, Centralised Here"' as well as Alexander Meckelburg, 'Large Scale Land Investment in Gambella, Western Ethiopia – The Politics and Policies of Land', in *A Delicate Balance Land Use, Minority Rights and Social Stability in the Horn of Africa*, ed. Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe (Addis Ababa: Institute for Peace and Security Studies Addis Ababa University, 2014), 144–65.

[4] Dena Freeman and Alula Pankhurst, eds., *Peripheral People: The Excluded Minorities of Ethiopia* (London: Hurst and Company, 2003).

[5] Ibid., 2.

The spatial dimension accounts for the shared living space between and within groups. Marginalised castes sometimes live outside the settlements or on its margins. Sometimes they are and sometimes they are not allowed to enter the market places and are forced to display their products in a segregated area.[6] From an Oromo perspective, the Mao of Oromia and Benishangul with whom they live together are subaltern minority groups. In areas where the Mao and Komo live together with more related groups like the Berta, no patterns of segregation are to be discerned; rather a scattered and dispersed homestead pattern can be observed.[7] Where Mao live in majority Oromo villages it is quite obvious that they live rather segregated, at the margins of settlements; or even at a greater distance to the Oromo settlements: "[t]he limited surface and marginal space that they occupy is an eloquent metaphor of the Mao's place in the dominant order.[8] Especially ritual places, like the swal Gwama, are placed at a distance from the villages.

An interesting example is the Mao settlement of Ya'a. The site of Ya'a is a famous site of ecumenical worship, a Tijaniyya shrine dedicated to Sheikh Ahmad Umer.[9] The Mao (Gwama) of the region live separated several kilometres away from the main settlement, which is largely inhabited by the Oromo. On the eastern edges of Ya'a is a settlement of Ganza. The Ganza, speakers of an Omotic language, are also subsumed under the Komo lable in the region. Most Ganza actually live in the Sudan. A young Oromo who grew up in Ya'a near the Ganza settlement once told me that "we used to give the Mao our dead cows".[10] This derogatory remark evoked a very strong social distance, portraying the Ganza as scavengers.

Spatial distance nonetheless is also important from the reverse perspective: It is employed by the Mao themselves in the term Komo, which usually identifies those Mao who are living in a greater social and spatial distance to the mainstream society. The term is usually used with some form of admiration. The Komo were "those who were lucky" and ran away.[11]

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[6] Ibid., 2–3.

[7] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 339–40.

[8] Ibid., 340.

[9] Ishihara, 'The Life History of a Muslim Holyman: Al-Faki Ahmad Umar'.

[10] This statement was made in a casual discussion in one of the local coffee houses, which are mostly frequented by town administration staff and teachers. Rarely do Mao or Komo outside the administration frequent these places.

[11] 14/2010: Interview with Mao elders in Ya'a, Tongo *special wäräda*, 2 October 2010.

The economic dimension speaks to difficulties of the minorities to possess land, and the limited access to livestock, etc.[12] Access to cattle in the lowlands is practically absent. Only in the highlands and in cases were Mao groups are living with Oromo cattle is accessible and sometimes shared for ploughing. "Our grandfathers did not have cattle; some wise Mao men could make money from honey and could buy some cattle and goat; when the Oromo came, they trained us in animal husbandry, farming and ploughing and alike; […]."[13] There are also several animal diseases like *gendi* (= trypanosomiasis) which affect the cattle so improvement of the farming conditions and a call for government support for rental tractors is often made.

There is no recognisable differentiation today in terms of access to land. Despite this, it seems that the Mao in Benishangul follow further economic specialisations like honey production and bamboo harvesting. They also do not, like the other groups, seem to employ sharecroppers, which might indicate an economic imbalance with other groups. In western Ethiopia land remains a contested issue in the face of land distribution of settlers and re-settlers since the *Därg* Socialist era, and also in light of governmental policies of land evictions, villagisation and resettlement (s. further below).

The political dimension accounts for the exclusion of the minority groups from political decision making, their rights to attend assemblies or their acceptance in courts, etc.[14] The Mao and Komo have relatively few people in key positions in the government or parliament today. Old prejudices and stereotypes, relating to their former slave status, are being reproduced in contested political campaigns. While it is often difficult for Mao children to get promoted for higher education in Oromia, the reverse is true for Oromo kids in Benishangul. There also Oromo complaining that they have to claim Mao alliance to have access to resources. This is especially so in the Mao-Komo *special wäräda*, where the Oromo are a titular minority. But since the Oromo are more strongly connected to the economic centre in Tongo the Mao and Komo mostly frequent the lower schools in the surrounding regions.

Social marginalization "is expressed in restrictions on social interaction, commensality, joint labour, membership of associations, burial practices and, most

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[12] Freeman and Pankhurst, *Peripheral People*, 5.
[13] 14/2010: Interview with Mao elders in Ya'a, Tongo *special wäräda*, 2 October 2010.
[14] Freeman and Pankhurst, *Peripheral People*, 5–6.

profoundly, intermarriage."[15] The most pervasive social taboo between peripheral people and the mainstream society is indeed the marriage taboo. Marriage relations follow a very complex pattern in the research region. They are directly related to local majority-minority relations. Intermarriages between the Mao, especially the Gwama and Komo are regular. From an Oromo perspective relations between Mao and Oromo are often not welcomed but they happen. Especially wealthy Mao men often do have second wives from the Oromo. Hence the intermarriage of Mao men (especially the descendants of the former Mao/Arab nobility) is not unusual.[16] But there are many stories according to which marriage was not allowed between Mao – Komo and Oromo, due to social distance and cultural prejudices.

The Inheritance of Inequality: History and Memory

The previous examples indicate a perpetuation of historical factors of inter-ethnic stratification. In the following I want to make more sense of the narratives of the Mao and Komo in relation to their place in the society they feel they inhabit. I understand this "place in the society" as the social sphere which "refers to a societal self-organization to create a common cultural landscape on which various forms of performance and public drama are staged, and through which a social bond among strangers is created and public life maintained."[17] In order to understand the social sphere I will first describe the cultural landscape based on memories displaying the trajectories of marginality of the Mao and Komo.[18]

Majority-minority relations are being defined by historical experience. The understanding of the present emerges in the context of history. Oral histories and oral traditions are among the most seminal tools to investigate into the cultural patterns of inter-ethnic relations. I propose to look at the memories of exploitation, loss and flight to exemplify a trajectory between the past and today. Memories are often flimsy. They

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[15] Ibid., 6.

[16] González-Ruibal, *An Archaeology of Resistance*, 284–85.

[17] Ding-Tzann Lii, 'Social Spheres and Public Life A Structural Origin', *Theory, Culture & Society* 15, no. 2 (5 January 1998): 115–35.

[18] I have developed this argument elsewhere: Alexander Meckelburg, 'Slavery, Emancipation, and Memory: Exploratory Notes on Western Ethiopia', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 48, no. 2 (2015): 345–62.

are subjective and change the object matter according to the present. Memories, as a matter of fact, cannot exist without oblivion.[19] Elites and politicians need to gain control over the imagination of the citizens they represent. Elites compete with the ordinary members of groups in defining the political discourse. Social memories become contested in the attempt to build a common historical narrative.

History is a contested field in Ethiopia. It is a project of the state, or the majorities, and the subaltern hardly have a voice in the making of their own historiography.[20] In the rearranging of history, also the former masters have to re-invent the perceptions of the historical relationship with the subaltern population; often they style themselves as benevolent masters, or re-invent historical events: When slaves were captured to work on fields, one finds people today saying that these slaves 'were brought together to be given food'. Large scale human trafficking into Addis Ababa is portrait as 'a contribution of labour to empire building', etc.

Can the subaltern speak?[21] The question asked by Spivak introduced the interrogation of representation in subaltern studies. I contend that the Mao and Komo are not mere victims of the state, and have shown remarkable cultural resilience and creativity in their social survival. Despite this, the Mao and Komo hardly play any role in the narrative of the state. They are marginal to the state making project, they are subsumed, included, carried along, when the *state narrates*, when the majority groups narrate. An Anywaa man once told me that, "the Komo are interesting. We thought they would be gone by now. But they are still here". His point was that from an Anywaa perspective the Komo were so few they could hardly play a role in the establishment of the federal state of Ethiopia in 1991. And also as a numerical minority, many deemed them unfit for cultural survival. Intermarriage would have them dissolved in the last century is the assumption here.

The imagination of a people's place in the society depends on the perceptions of history. For parts of the Oromo, the memory of subjection, marginalization and exploitation has helped frame nationalistic discourses. Nonetheless, the politicization of a cultural identity mainly based on the common language has been the single most important pretext for forging a common Oromo identity and has overshadowed

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[19] Marc Augé, *Oblivion* (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 3.

[20] Pietro Toggia, 'History Writing as a State Ideological Project in Ethiopia', *African Identities* 6, no. 4 (2008): 319–43.

[21] Gyatri C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

cultural variations among the various segments of the Oromo society. The political consciousness of the Mao and Komo, depending on which segment of the society, which class and group one talks to begins with the loss of territory and enslavement by other groups, and neighbours. The incorporation of western Ethiopia has been a gradual process and by no means a unified one. Hence also the experience of the Mao and Komo of this process has been different, depending on time, space and especially the neighbouring group and their respective experience. With all necessary care for details: the memories of enslavement most decisively inform the understanding of the relation to the state and to their neighbours.

The memories of these events are an important addition to written accounts and play an important role in the attempt to re-construct historical phenomena. Memories are both an important aspect in the reconstruction of the experience of slavery and in the subjective understanding of past atrocities. In the case of western Ethiopia, still too little is known about the experience of slavery and about its effects on the enslaved societies. Neither are we yet fully able to grasp the nature of slavery, its internal workings, relations to kinship, power, gender and ethnicity, or fully understand how slavery ended, or how it was transformed, which essentially relates to perceptions of emancipation. The problems that memories and other forms of oral testimonies or data pose for the reconstruction of slavery have been a matter of debate.[22] The memories provided here and in the earlier parts of this thesis are prone to distortion, selectivity and interpretation.[23] Nonetheless I believe that memories, "in their fundamentally ideological nature"[24] are an invaluable device to question the nature and transformation of slavery.

Memories, as collective, cultural, self-narratives, are a form of cultural practice.[25] They are based on "fixed points", crucial historical events which are maintained through "cultural formation [...] and institutional communication".[26] As historically rooted practice phenomena, memories become important factors for establishing a collective identity. Social memory helps in identifying differences and thus belongs to

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[22] Martin A. Klein, 'Studying the History of Those Who Would Rather Forget: Oral History and the Experience of Slavery', *History in Africa* 16 (1989): 209–17.

[23] Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, 186–97.

[24] Hamilton, 'Ideology and Oral Traditions'.

[25] For an overview of social memory studies, see Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125–33; Jeffrey K. Olick, '"Collective Memory": A Memoir and Prospect', *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 23–29.

[26] Assmann and Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', 129.

the manifestation of the other, which is ethnicity. In the first of his five famous propositions about ethnicity, John Comaroff [27] conceptualized "ethnicity" as (having) "its genesis in specific historical forces, forces which are simultaneously structural and cultural". Slavery, I would argue, is exactly one such force that helped forge modern conception of the self and the other in modern Ethiopia. Its medium is the social memory. Crumley (2002) summarizes social memory as

> [...] the means by which information is transmitted among individuals and groups and from one generation to another. Not necessarily aware that they are doing so, individuals pass on their behaviours and attitudes to others in various contexts but especially through emotional and practical ties and in relationships among generations [...][28]

Aware of the danger of over-emphasising the "cultural storage of the past",[29] I think that memories, subjective and distorted as they may be, can help understand the emergence of collective "we-group"-ideas. In this regard oral data can contribute to our understanding of the institution of slavery in the region and the awareness of the Mao and Komo about their place in current society. But the way memory influences the interaction of people needs further scrutiny and the methodological complexities of this approach should be discussed in more detail.[30] The data explored throughout the thesis introduce two broad tropes, both in need of more research: memories as a tool for a deeper understanding of the institution of slavery in western Ethiopia and second the subjective projections and emic conceptualizations of the present built on past experience. In the following I will briefly refer to the latter pattern:

From a Mao and Komo perspective, this current geographical position stretching over several federal borders and the international border in Sudan is often portrayed as a lamentable obstacle to political participation. In many cases, the history of

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[27] Comaroff, 'Of Totemism and Ethnicity'.

[28] Carole Crumley, 'Exploring Venues of Social Memory', in *Social Memory and History: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Maria Cattell and Jacob Climo (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), 39–52.

[29] David C. Berliner, 'The Abuses of Memory: Reflections on the Memory Boom in Anthropology', *Anthropological Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (2005): 201.

[30] Klein, 'Studying the History of Those Who Would Rather Forget'; Marie Rodet, 'Listening to the History of Those Who Don't Forget', *History in Africa* 40, no. 1 (2013): 27–29.

displacement, due to flight from slavery or enslavement, is seen as the historic reason for this current and displaced agency. As one of my elder Komo informants said:

> At that time (the beginning of the Komo movement) the problem was the slave trade. They fled the slave raids. But for all of these people the original place is Garra Gemi. Today I give my son, tomorrow I have to give a daughter; that is what made us angry and thus we ran away...we do have one daughter in Pokung and one son in Tongo. We are sharing the information through Aterfa.[31]

I had visited Bambasi in 2009; my initial informants were from the local Berta (Fadasi) community. In the visit that followed a year later I visited for the first time the Bambasi Mao (Omotic) in Mutsa, approximately 10 km. from Bambasi town. During a group interview[32] in the homestead of a blacksmith, the participants attested the following:

> During the time of the *abba mooti*[33] we lived in large villages. Then came *the abba mooi* (nuje kanni- he came to disturb them), he stole our kids, sold the Mao and we fled. This is the reason why we live in scattered villages.

From this observation, the informants drew a couple of conclusions: They related the scattered situation of their homesteads as the main reason for a present lack of political participation.[34] Today, they said, all positions were taken by the Berta and Oromo and especially to the Mao-Komo *special wäräda* they do not feel they have any link. A story that was presented with much concern was this: three years back a child of their

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[31] 2/2011: Interview with Komo elder, Gambella town, 13 August 2011. Aterfa Mustafa is the political leader of the Komo section in Gambella and the chairperson of the Gambella Peoples Unity Party. The interesting point here is how the scattered living situation is connected to the resource person, Aterfa, who connects the different Komo section today.

[32] 3/2010: Group interview with Bambasi-Mao, Mutsa, Bambasi *wäräda*, 17 September 2010.

[33] *Abba mooti* was the horse name of Muhammad al-Hasan the last independent ruler of Fadasi. The mountain-chain that is the background for the Bambasi town today is still locally referred to as *abba mooti*.

[34] Although at the same time the informants acknowledged that during the time of Hailie Selassie and the *Därg*, they had forms of political representation (I guess the reference here is the system of *abba qoro* and then the *kebele* and PA administration).

community got lost and was nowhere to be found. The group tried to get assistance from the government and the police. But the search was soon to be abandoned, without any success. The group members organised a rally in Bambäsi and demanded the *wäräda* administration to open the search again. Nothing happened though, and the boy is still missing. The grief this story was presented with ran deep. It is about lack of voice, participation and belonging. At the same time (I noted in my travel diary) I wondered whether the disappearance of a child might be opening older memories of the past practice of children taken as a tribute.

Also, the Komo in Gambella largely share similar memories: All groups, the Mao both Omotic and Nilo-Saharan, as well as the Komo remember slavery and the tax in humans (*lij gibbir*) as one main humiliation and reason for their migration.[35] Being localized as a result of displacement is a remark that runs through many of the interviews I conducted.

> Q: Can he tell us about Shogele [*sheikh* Khojali]?
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> A: He is a Berta. He brought the people here. He is the reason for the people to come here. When we were living there, Ugel [Khojali in *taa komo*, A/M] was a soldier. The Komo did not have their own soldiers. He came to Gemi mountain and took the kids. He exchanged the kids with *amole* salt. And most of them were taken to Kongo and Sudan. The Komo were fleeing and hiding. Even the Komo people were exchanging the children for salt. They sold the children to Ugel and Ugel would sell to *gaale*.

At this point the interpreter started asking his own questions:

> Q: If the Komo were selling themselves, so what made them to come here?
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> A: He forced you to sell our kids to him.

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[35] Michael Ahland gives a brief background to this for the Bambasi Mao (northern Mao): The migration from Bambasi to the Didessa, "was an attempt to escape a 'land tax' which had been imposed on the Bambassi area. According to the Diddesa account, those who had no money to satisfy the tax were told they they had to 'give a child' for the land they occupied. It is said that some fled to Diddesa to keep from giving up their children while others fled out of fear because they had no money nor children" (Ahland, 'A Grammar of Northern Mao (Màwés Aas'è)', 21.

Q: Why did you not refuse?

A: How can you refuse?

There was an utter silence that resonated in the room after this answer.[36] While the interpreter was clearly upset about the reaction of the elder, the statement also shows how deeply internalized the marginalization and exploitation were. This episode speaks of powerlessness but also about a deep tradition of commodification of the marginalized. This statement refers back to the episode we have looked at earlier. Wad Bilal, Schuver's companion said that the first traders in the Komo/Gwama areas used to trade orphaned children. From the statements now, we can clearly understand that this inter-cultural practice had been dramatically accelerated and turned into a traumatic event that led to the retreat of the Komo. The next episode shows the extent of the slave trade as perceived by the Komo. It concludes with the feeling of powerlessness and humiliation:

A: They [the slave dealers] gave *amole* to the black people and bought the children.

Q: Was it individually or in mass?

A: One person was exchanged with one *amole*.

Q: Did they take one by one, or many people.

A: Oh please a lot of people! Shogelle used to put salt on the peoples' head and brought the ox to eat their hair, their hands and legs were tied, to show his power.

Q: Why did he do that?

[36] 8/2013: Interview with Komo elder, Gambella town, 11 November 2013.

A: To show his power. The people were afraid of him. He was *akui* [administrator in *ttaa komo*].[37]

During group discussions with Gwama speakers in Ya'a the general theme of the "backwardness" of the Mao and Komo often came up. Backwardness was usually explained via the lack of oxen for ploughing, the distance to schools, and the lack of political participation:

> The problem was, we are very backward; only a few wise people are breeding cattle, since we have been ignorant for long; we are still ignorant; The landlords themselves used the black people as an ox; I [the discussant himself] was taken to somebody's house to herd the goats; my mother worked and grained in the house, while my father was working as a carrier; that work was forced and not paid; The Komo are now deep in the bush, because they ran away from slavery; those who are lucky ran away; this also led to a scattered village system; the villages are scattered because the people were hiding in the bush [...].[38]

But there is a certain admiration among the Komo for those who ran away and lived in the wilderness, free, untamed. The circle of marginalization was powerfully captured in the testimony of one Mao elder:

> We were farming for the landlord. Even if we work for him, he also used our children to work for him. Only his sons will go to school. This is why we didn't change ourselves until now. [...] when his kids finished school they came to administer us.

From this brief excursion into oral history, we can assume that the Mao and Komo lived in a continuum of subjection, enslavement and flight. With its decline, regional power relations were, again, expressed through servitude, e.g., by impose tribute and tax collection and political incapacity.

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[37] 5/2011: Interview with Komo elder, Gambella town, 17 August 2011.
[38] 14/2010: Interview with Mao elders in Ya'a, Tongo *special wäräda*, 2 October 2010.

Lived Experience and Constitutional Arrangements

The memories that I have presented in the previous section, are powerful reminders of the legacies of slavery, and, to a certain degree, of how certain sections of the Mao and Komo understand historical injustices and recent feelings of marginalisation. In the following sections I want to place these narratives in a wider context of ethnographic observations on the workings of the current political system.

Many of the shortcomings the Mao and Komo seem to put their finger on are actually in part problems of their continued marginalization, perpetrated through the current political system that can hardly accommodate the minorities its claims to empower. In the following section I will focus on several problems regarding the setting of ethno-linguistic politics of present-day Ethiopia:

- The constitutional enshrinement of primordial group criteria
- The fragmentation of the Mao and Komo within the federal arrangement
- The persistent narrative of the periphery as a place in need of political development

I propose to look at these problems with reference to: a) the constitutional arrangement, b) scrutiny of federal boundary regimes, c) an assessment of language policy, and d) the problem of on-going "large-scale land investment" in the study area.

Federalism in Ethiopia is based on a system in which territorial entities created on the basis of ethno-linguistic criteria turned into quasi-decentralized entities, the 'regional-national states' with their own constitution, rights and responsibilities. There are certain responsibilities like education and language policy that federal states are supposed to manage themselves, while the core domains like monetary policies and national defence clearly belong to the national government. Nonetheless the Ethiopian state operates "…very much like a centralized, unitary state, with most power residing at the political centre".[39]

My focus is the ethnic component and its effects on the inter-ethnic relations, language policy and to some degree the current land policies. I do not intend to review the *federal argument* in full.

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[39] Edmond J. Keller and Lahra Smith, 'Obstacles to Implementing Territorial Decentralization: The First Decade of Ethiopian Federalism', in *Sustainable Peace: Power and Democracy after Civil Wars*, ed. Philip G. Roeder and Donald Rothchild (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 267.

a. Federalism and Minorities

The constitution proposes a rather primordial concept of *nations, nationalities and people*, which are defined by language and the belief in common descent, among other things. Territory and identity according to this reading are necessarily interlocked. But not all groups in Ethiopia fit this characterisation. Scattered minorities, settler communities, cross-border communities, urban populations, as well as marginalised sub-clans (castes) within ethnic groups are often not being captured by the provisions made by the constitution.

The "ethnicity" label often fails to acknowledge the finer points of group alliances, as if "every ethnic group is homogenous and unified and speaks with one voice".[40] Ethnic boundaries are permeable; nonetheless "cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence".[41] This problem can hardly be captured by the provision made in the constitution that assumes ethnic groups are natural units living side-by side in multi-ethnic states.[42] Through the emphasis on identity, Ethiopian politics has artificially inflated the meaning of ethnicity and made it a political perquisite. Further aspects of group formation, like (social) class, gender, age, religious affiliation, etc., have been excluded from the political processes.

We have seen in the course of the previous chapters that the genesis of the Ethiopian state was largely based on the spatial control of territory and the expansion of the central-highland kingdom of Shewa into newly conquered territories to its east, west, north and south. The inhabitants of these newly incorporated territories were subjected to the permeation of state culture. The varying degrees and patterns of this permeation have eventually determined the relation between people and the state. Territorial control was a salient feature of the state-making project in Ethiopia. Consistently, in various ideologies of emancipation of the *rural masses* from central overrule (both in the 1970s and in the 1990s), territory has played an important role. The formal return of ownership of territories previously conquered by the imperial state, to the descendants of the conquered peoples consequently became an important premise of the ethno-federal re-arrangement of Ethiopia in 1991. The most acclaimed

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[40] Lovise Aalen, *The Politics of Ethnicity in Ethiopia: Actors, Power and Mobilisation Under Ethnic Federalism* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2011), 127.

[41] Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 3.

[42] Abbink, 'Ethnicity and Constitutionalism in Contemporary Ethiopia', 160.

and most widely discussed result of this territorial arrangement is Article 39(§4) of the Ethiopian constitution, which grants the *nations, nationalities and peoples* of Ethiopia the "right to self-determination up to secession".[43]

Federalism (since 1994) was meant to redraw the map of Ethiopia along ethno-linguistic lines creating a quasi- (ethnic) federation. This was seen as the final answer to the *national question*, the emancipation of the peoples of Ethiopia from former feudal-imperial overrule (ca. 1896-1974), as well as more immediate forms of *national oppression* during the Socialist *Därg* period (1974-91).

The territorial re-organization of Ethiopia led to the demarcation of federal boundaries framing citizenship along ethno-linguistic criteria. Civil rights in Ethiopia are tied to group rights. The belonging to a specific group is emphasised in the constitution. The preamble of the federal constitution opens with the following remark:

> "We, the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia: strongly committed, in full and free exercise of our right to self-determination, to building a political community founded on the rule of law and capable of ensuring a lasting peace, guaranteeing a democratic order, and advancing our economic and social development."

Article 39 is the main article concerned with group rights:

Rights of Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples

1) Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession.

2) 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.

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[43] *Federal Negarit Gazeta of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, Proclamation 1/1995, Proclamation of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Addis Ababa, 21st August, 1995), 14; cp. also Alem Habtu, 'Multiethnic Federalism in Ethiopia: A Study of the Secession Clause in the Constitution', *Publius* 35, no. 2 (2005): 313–35.

3) Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to a full measure of self-government which includes the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and to equitable representation in state and Federal governments.[44]

The emphasis in defining groups is on language and territory. Hence a specific Ethiopian form of *regional citizenship* seems to be highlighted in the political framework. Membership in the political territory is further defined by the regional constitutions. They define both who belongs to the indigenous political community of the federal state and define the constitutional capacity to accommodate minorities. Theoretically, in the federal regions (i.e. *killil*), like in national territories (states), the connection between territory and citizenship also applies. "Citizenship" according to its spatial understanding, "is territorial and bound to the dimensions of a particular geographical unit".[45] But there are complex challenges to territorial autonomy,[46] and the successful convergence of the "territorial matrix of the federation into separate ethnically defined territorial units […] creating ethnically pure sub-national units" is a difficult, if not an impractical undertaking.[47] In Ethiopia as elsewhere, the congruent overlap of territory and (ethnic) identity, in a federal arrangement, is always an abstraction of multi-cultural realities. Accordingly, conflicts over ownership of territory have become a noticeable feature of the negotiations of political power in the new regions. The federal boundaries became contested spaces between regional states.

As we have seen in the case of the Berta Oromo confrontation over Begi, federal boundaries are the product of majority groups' claims over territory. The dispersed minorities on the other hand have to negotiate their political agency across these boundaries, which, in fact limits their effective representation in the current federal framework.

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[44] Paragraph four provides for the right to self-determination up to secession. This is yet another pattern of the interplay of ethnicity and development in Ethiopia and has to be omitted here.

[45] Richard Yarwood, *Citizenship*, Key Ideas in Geography (London – New York: Routledge, 2013), 18.

[46] For an interesting critique of the concept of territorial autonomy and ethnic conflicts, see Shaheen Mozaffar and James R. Scarrit, 'Why Territorial Autonomy Is Not a Viable Option for Managing Ethnic Conflict in African Plural Societies', in *Identity and Territorial Autonomy in Plural Societies*, ed. Ramón Máiz and Safran William (New York: Routledge, 2000), 230–53.

[47] Yonatan Tesfaye Fessha and van der Beken, 'Ethnic Federalism and Internal Minorities'.

The federal approach has compartmentalized political agency, which has brought out enormous competition among groups, leading to further sub-division of territory. This approach creates the illusion of mono-ethnic territories and it sparked continuous demands for separate administrations, which – in some case - led to the splitting of territories into ethnically defined *zones*, *wärädas* (districts) and *liyyu wärädas* (special districts).[48] Regional integration is presented as the key to national unity. Federalism has undoubtedly changed the integration of groups into the Ethiopian state, opening ways for notoriously marginalised groups to claim and gain citizenship rights. Regional structures of self-rule have, in some cases, led to more inclusive policies. Federal borders formalise decentralisation and are expected to foster regional autonomy. These borders are a creation of the central and regional political elites, in order to organise, systematise and administer; constructed by the political planners, they are enforced by police and town staff or, at times, displayed in border control, checkpoints and sometimes in violent clashes between groups of various actors over territory, and their maintenance requires administrative posts. The exercise of border control is diametrically opposed to the frontier process. The idea of unsettled space, so central to the frontier, is always a construction which inevitably leads to the dichotomy of "first comers" and "late comers" and the polarization of autochthony.[49] The territorialisation of group and kin, the demarcation of territory and the making of borders and boundaries, contradicts the internal frontier. Boundaries, international or federal, of course challenge movement, migration and cross-border settlement; hence challenge citizenship and territorial belonging. "First comers" and "late comers" become constitutionally enshrined, encircled by the regional borders. Their demarcation via the federal states has put a halt to an ongoing process of ethnic encounters and changing relations and instead institutionalizes a majority-minority situation at a given time, creating competition among groups for institutional resources often based on autochthony claims or demographic numbers.

The Mao and Komo are scattered minorities who had little political power in the negotiations over the new federal boundaries but instead got further divided by the new boundary regime.

How is the demographic and ethnic situation for the Mao and Komo, who live across several federal and inter-regional boundaries?

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[48] Abbink, 'Ethnic-Based Federalism and Ethnicity in Ethiopia', 604.
[49] Donham, 'On Being First'; Kopytoff, *The African Frontier*.

The population numbers as given in the "Summary and Statistical Report of 1994 / 2007 Population and Housing Census" (Addis Ababa, 1996, 2008) are as follows:

Ethnic groups	Year	Federal States		
		Benishangul-Gumuz	Oromia	Gambella
Komo	1994	1,109 (as Koma)	272 (as Koma)	0
	2007	6, 464	356	224
Mao	1994	2,732	13, 397	0
	2007	12, 744	24, 272	64
Gwama	1994	2 (Kewama)	34 (Kewama)	0
	2007	1 (Qewama)	72 (Qewama)	0

These numbers are intriguing. The quasi omission of the Gwama in the census might be explained by the social labels 'Mao' or 'Komo' under which the Gwama are subjected. The actual number of Gwama speakers might reach the thousands and in fact the Mao (12, 744 in Benishangul-Gumuz, and 24, 272 in Oromia) constitute the actual Gwama population. The small numbers of Omotic Mao represent the endangered languages in the area. Gwama on the contrary is not an endangered language and its use is rather vital.[50] This is not to say that the language vitality of Gwama does not suffer from the use of the *Afaan Oromo* (the Oromo language). The Gwama speakers (otherwise omitted from the ethnic landscape of western Ethiopia) are currently found in three groups – the Mao (among which we find the 'Oromized' *sit shwala*/Gwama), the Komo and the lowland Gwama. This illustrates quite well how complex and difficult the territorial ascription of identity in the federal

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[50] Dirk Kievit and Erika Robertson, 'Notes on Gwama Grammar', *Studies in African Linguistics* 41, no. 1 (6 April 2013), 3635.html.

arrangement can get. It also illustrates quite well the *illusion of tribe in Africa*[51] and how labels are often chosen in order to enhance 'administrablity' disregarding self-perceptions and self-designation in ethnically complex territories.

b. Federal boundaries: Territorial Citizenship and Conflicts

Federal boundaries help the political elites to have clear territorial jurisdictions and to have their legal and political sovereignty confirmed. Such boundaries can become *contested* between administrations and transform regionally entrenched ethnic animosities or traditional conflict systems into political border conflicts. [52]

> If there is one thing that has been central to all borders, it has been the contest about these rules of inclusion and exclusion and the efforts of people to use, manipulate, or avoid the resulting border restrictions.[53]

Discourses on boundaries have shifted from focusing on the fixed, arbitrary nature to a more permeable understanding, with a focus on the social *construction* of borders and boundaries. At the bare minimum, the border is the place where two administrations meet, where one thing ends and another begins.[54] The border is a project of delimiting state control. Where they are made visible through administrative practice, they establish the boundary between people signified by questions of belonging as well as the differentiation between "us" and the "other".

Territorial control over the new federal states has become vital for the elites administering these territories. Simply put, the more territory these regions encompass, the more administrative positions they materialise. Asnake analysed the federal conflict scenarios based on territorial arguments.[55] He claims that the federal border regime leads to conflicts over *administrative structures and ethnic territories*,

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[51] Southall, 'The Illusion of Tribe'.

[52] Asnake Kefale, 'Federal Restructuring in Ethiopia: Renegotiating Identity and Borders along the Oromo–Somali Ethnic Frontiers', *Development and Change* 41, no. 4 (2010): 615–35.

[53] Michiel Baud and Willem Van Schendel, 'Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands', *Journal of World History* 8, no. 2 (1997): 214–15.

[54] Joel S. Migdal, 'Mental Maps and Virtual Checkpoints. Struggles to Construct and Maintain State and Social Boundaries', in *Boundaries and Belonging. States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practice*, ed. Joel S. Migdal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3–26.

[55] Asnake Kefale, 'Federalism: Some Trends of Ethnic Conflict and Their Management in Ethiopia'.

border conflicts as well as to *settler conflicts*. Abbink also argued, that "majority of conflicts now dubbed 'ethnic' in Ethiopia are about boundaries between territorialized ethnic groups. Fights about identity are being waged in order to establish the borders of districts and zones, and the 'identity' professed by local people is the deciding element."[56]

The federal borders create new borderlands between the neighbouring regions. These new domestic borderlands have become vital venues of conflicting identity discourses. Conflicts occur in the shadow of population movements, seasonal migration as well as pastoral mobility.[57] While boundary conflicts are arguably a salient feature of the new federal arrangement, in some cases, due to provisions of tenure security, the boundaries have also helped to tone down some conflicts.[58] Whether boundaries are used to stir political conflict or ease tension is a matter of political manipulation by political elites and the exploitation of the territorial demands of the population.

While a higher political level - the state – is certainly needed to decentralize power, the reality of the federal border is an exercise of the local/regional administrative power. A border is best visualized by border checkpoints. In Ethiopia, these domestic border controls look more or less the same: military and federal police check the passengers of public transport, who commute between towns across borders. Another way to ascertain the border is by administrative action: in areas of mobility for important places, like wells, or the blocking of roads, the expelling of settler groups, etc., is carried out by local authorities, police and militia. Such incidences, too, are a display of boundary control.[59]

Two types of new minorities have resulted from demarcating the regional states. The first category would comprise recent groups of settlers and re-settled people (e.g., from the *Därg* time) now encircled by new boundaries. Also labour migrants, who moved to other areas than their region of origin. There might also be spontaneous

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[56] Abbink, 'Ethnicity and Conflict Generation in Ethiopia', 397.

[57] Ibid., 408–11. The appendix of this paper lists numerous conflict cases (up to 2006) to substantiate this argument.

[58] Lutgart Lenaerts et al., '"This Pasture Is Ours since Ancient Times": An Ethnographic Analysis of the Reduction in Conflicts along the Post-1991 Afar-Tigray Regional Boundary', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 52, no. 1 (2014): 25–44.

[59] Fekadu Adugna, 'Overlapping Nationalist Projects and Contested Spaces: The Oromo – Somali Borderlands in Southern Ethiopia', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5, no. 4 (2011): 773–87.

settlers, or share croppers, etc.[60] The second category would have a considerably longer history of settlement in the respective areas. With the creation of the new boundaries they fell under the legislation of either one or various constituencies. Often they are the 'indigenous' settlers, who at the time of the federal adjustment were already a minority due to earlier migration and an established hierarchy of inter-ethnic relations. This is the experience of the Mao and Komo.

Based on the settlement pattern of their respective citizens, the administration of both Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz claimed several territories from the neighbouring regional administration. For instance, in August 2001, the administration of Benishangul complained to the Ethiopian Mapping Authority in Addis Ababa:

> Benishangul Gumuz National Region and Oromia National Region have extensive common boundaries. As the effort made to launch the work of the joint border demarcation, the task of the border demarcation has been accomplished in some specific areas.
>
> In accordance of this, the *kebeles* Bädisa Šarama, Usame, Komo Gara Gemi and Ana Kamba Amoba, had previously been included to Gidami *wäräda* [Oromia] through a public referendum, and were administered under it; [since they are] home places of the Komo people and based on the consensus of the two regions and the decision adopted by the honoured Prime Minister's Office, […] it was decided that they come to be administered under the authority of our regional administration.
>
> Although, […] in these *kebeles* remarkable development activities were carried out, the maps prepared and distributed by your office as well as by other [relevant government offices] indicate that the four *kebeles* are included

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[60] There have been several conflicts around new settler minorities, which have experienced political problems and entered into violent conflicts, in western Ethiopia Gambella, Wollaga, Benishangul, In such conflicts sentiments over autochthony are activated by the regional elites. (cp. Abbink, 'Ethnic-Based Federalism and Ethnicity in Ethiopia', 604; also Dereje Feyissa, 'The Experience of Gambella Regional State'.

under the authority of the Oromia National Regional State administration. This situation is not tolerable.[61]

Based on the settlement pattern of the Komo, the authorities in Benishangul made a claim to administer the mentioned localities. The administration of Oromia ignored the claim and as a result the Mapping Authority issued maps showing the concerned *kebeles* as belonging to Oromia. Locally this case is often cited as an example for side lining the territorial claims of the Komo as a minority group.

Boundary making in the region has been a long process and it is far from being finalised. This is directly related to the problem of movement and *territorializatio*n in Ethiopia. The letter translated above shows vividly how difficult this process is. The antagonistic administrations use the settlement patterns of people to claim territory, but at the same time, real-time migration as well as shifting identification, makes it almost impossible to claim a specific territory at a given time.

We have already seen how the region of Benishangul was drawn into consecutive territorial conflicts after the end of the civil war in 1991. Especially the area of Begi became a fighting ground for Berta and Oromo over territory. Based on their respective historical relocation both Berta and Oromo claimed the territory of Begi as part of the newly established federal states. The territorial conflict and the consecutive referendum over the status of Begi show the inherent problems of the quest for territorial expansion in the federal system. The EPRDF intervened and contained the OLF in favour of the claims of the BPLF. After the OLF was defeated and replaced by the Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO), the conflict over Begi continued. A letter of complaint that was sent by the regional administrator of Benishangul (at that time Abderrahim Hassen, a Berta from Bambäsi) shows the level of discontent on the side of Benishangul and also condemns the OPDO push for the integration of Begi into the territory of Oromia.

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[61] The president of Benishangul Gumuz to the Mapping Authority (4/2/1999) ጉዳዩ ፦ ቤኒሻንጉል ጉሙዝ ብሔራዊ ክልል ዉስጥ የሚገኙት 4 *ዎረዳዎች* በካርታ ሥራ ያለአግባብ ወደ ኦሮሚያ ብሔራዊ ክልል ስለመጠቃለላቸው በተመለከተ (Subject: Concerning the wrong delamination of the 4 districts of Benishangul Gumuz National Regional State into Oromia Region National Regional State); translated from the Amharic original.

To solve the issue of border demarcation, democratically and peacefully, between the two neighbouring regions (Region 6 and Region 4), the local elders and representatives from the two regions have made repeated efforts to come together for a common discussion. It however was unsuccessful to reach in agreement due to the pressure that was exerted by Region 4.

Region 4 has taken steps and decisions of integrating districts of Begi, Manasibu, Gidami, Anfillo and Bäle and also deny the identity of nations and nationalities (of these regions) and claim they do not inhabit the aforementioned districts (…) Among those undemocratic acts, which are taken against our people, (…) are the denial of their democratic rights by the armed OPDO governing organs, restricting the movement of the people, without the identity card of Oromia, in the region , restricting our cadres in Begi *wäräda* to carryout successfully activities, as well as efforts to ban the organization of Mao-Komo. (…).

Eventually a referendum was called in which the people were asked to vote for the Benishangul (the voters' symbol was the ostrich) or for Oromia (the symbol for it was the odaa the sycamore tree, a mythical symbol for the Oromo identity). Involved administrators told me that they are very sure they were cheated out of the referendum and that the 'ostrich would have won'.[62] But that eventually the office of the prime minister sent a decision which stated that Begi would become part of Oromia. Hence a border was established, cutting through a common cultural territory of the Mao and Komo. Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz undertook opposing measures to accommodate the Mao and Komo minorities in this area. Thus, the border became a decisive factor in the evolving majority-minority relations.

Citizenship and group rights are expressed along ethnic lines. Multi-culturalism is uttered by emphasizing the cultural differences of groups to idealize "unity in diversity" and portray federalism as a "safeguard to stability". Despite this, citizenship rights are largely defined by territorial arrangements. The Mao and Komo as a result of these constitutional facts were awarded an ethnic territory, the Mao-Komo *special wäräda*. This ethnic territory is also known as Tongo *special wäräda*, after its capital.

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[62] Interviews in Begi and Tongo *wärädas*, 2010-14.

When I visited Tongo town for the first time in 2009 in was a largely rural village with only one hotel, providing three bedrooms for government and administrative workers if they came from Asosa or elsewhere. Only a few tea houses existed which provided local pastry and tea and coffee. Here mostly local administrative staff and teachers met. The village had a mosque which is very central right at the market centre of Tongo, and an orthodox church at the western edge of the town. Both the Mekane Yesus and the Qale Hiwot church were also present. Tongo is under the congregation of the Begi synod of the Mekane Yesus church. The vast majority of the population of the Mao Komo *liyyu wäräda* are Muslim though.

In recent years the village has grown further. Since 2010 a refugee camp was established in order to host ca. 13,000 Sudanese refugees from the Blue Nile Province, where the civil war had flared up again and expelled people, migrating into upland Ethiopia. The area of Benishangul-Gumuz hosted refugees in Tongo, Bambäsi refugee camp, and the already existing camp of Sherkole.

Ethnic groups registered by the UNHCR were Maban, Dinka, Fur, Funju (the Berta of Ethiopia), Nuba, Nuer, Anywaa, Zaghawa, Uduk and other minorities (among which I assume are subsumed the Komo I met in the camp).[63] The location of upland Tongo was difficult for the refugees, who were used to the arid lowlands of the Sudan. Rain and cold affected the refugees severely in the rainy season, and the hilly site didn't seem suitable for setting up tents.

Both the capital and the whole *special wäräda* are peripheral and marginalized. Infrastructure is still relatively poor and much of the rural economy is based on traditional subsistence and a web of local markets throughout the *wäräda*. The economy of the population is largely based on traditional rain-fed agriculture, via hoe and shifting cultivation. Oromo and Amhara use ox plough agriculture in some areas, and the subletting of cattle for agriculture seems to become more and more common. Furthermore, coffee-growing, bamboo-harvesting and to a lesser degree hunting and fishing, mostly carried out by the Mao and Komo as well as honey production, are important additions to the economy. The main market is in Tongo. The population of

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[63] Though it should be said that I was not able to do any interviews in the camp. Access had been denied to me in the first instance and only after several institutional hurdles I was able to convince the authorities that I needed to trespass into the camp in order to reach my research area west of Tongo, places like Mimi Akobo, Penshuba, Kesser and alike. I was granted permission to move through the camp, but I was told to make no contact with the refugees or do any interviews. I acceded to this request from the local authorities.

the *wäräda* in 2008 was said to be 26,586.[64] The road system was an important issue and the government was questioned by the local population on the ability to deliver infrastructure. From total of 299 km. of roads, only 35 are all-weather roads. Kebeles remain largely inaccessible during the rainy season.[65]

Major road construction carried out during the research period in 2012-14 was on the road connecting Tongo and Begi and on a road in the direction of Yangu.

Administrators often invented the existence of "Mao-Komo", or even "Maokomo" population. The *wäräda* has 18 primary schools (below grade eight) and six from grade 1 to 8, and thirteen only from 1-4, but there is only one secondary school (grades 9 to 10). There is a very high coverage of primary schooling, but only 5% of the approx. 2300 children at high school age can attend high schools. There are also 10 *Alternative Basic Education Centres* (ABE), with 740 students. Most schools are relatively basic wood/mud structures with no adequate furniture or water supply.[66]

Created under the auspices of the Mao-Komo Unity Party, led by the son of *abba* Harun, the territory became an administrative entity, directly linked to the regional government in Asosa. Effectively this means it operates like a zone, but is a *wäräda* due to the small number of people it represents. This procedure is coherent with other such territorial arrangements in which minorities were incorporated in the territorial administrative setup. Territory in Ethiopia has become a spatial pattern of administrative self-determination. Hence most *killils* are further sub-divided in zones, *wärädas*, and *kebeles*. Usually the zones are ethnically defined and build an "autonomous tier of local government with constitutionally mandated elected councils and executive administration".[67] The official rationale behind such a territorial arrangement is the special recognition that minorities need in order to be politically meaningful. Hence the constitution of Benishangul-Gumuz stipulates that the Mao and Komo shall be given special recognition. Van der Beken noted on the political representation of the Mao and Komo in Benishangul-Gumuz, that "irrespective of

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[64] Information provided by the *wäräda* council, 'The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Roads Authority: Mao Komo Woreda WIDP (Woreda Integrated Development Program) Study Report', Addis Ababa 2006.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Yonatan Tesfaye Fessha and van der Beken, 'Ethnic Federalism and Internal Minorities', 38.

their [Mao and Komo's] extremely small number", they have a "fair representation" with "each have two representatives in the 99-member [Regional] parliament".[68]

From what we have seen, Tongo poses a couple of interesting questions as to the accommodation of minorities by means of an "ethnic" territory. Historical developments challenge the tribal-model-perspective that the government has on ethnicity. They also challenge the government's approach to decentralise and advocate for self-rule of ethnic minorities.

Demographically the population of the Mao-Komo *special wäräda* is made up of Gwama and Komo. Thus, the *indigenous* population represented under the term "Mao" are basically Gwama. This is regardless of the fact that the speakers of *twa gwama* of the Begi area as well as the Omotic "Mao" of Benishangul are basically cut off from the political representation.

Socially, the Mao and Komo are, according to their history, an extremely adaptive and not a very territorially organized group. Thus, their declared territorialisation stands in steep contrast to their history of movement and migration, if not of flight and hide. The territorial entity does not reflect their historical experience. Additionally, the history of the region is generally based on migration and movement, thus the "ethnic territory" is inhabited by many non-Mao or Komo as well. Both aspects are a challenge to the territorialisation of ethnicity.

c. Language Planning in Three Regional States Compared

One way of assessing the effects of borders and boundaries is by looking at the changing administration across the border. This can be seen in the linguistic landscape, changing patterns of street signs etc. Language policies and the decisions thereupon are among the most vital rights of the regional-federal administrations.

These regional administrations can decide on the use of language and enforce it in 'mother tongue education' on the lower educational levels. For the boundaries between regional states this means that by crossing their border, the administrative language of the region changes. Language thus becomes one salient marker of the boundary between regions. Language policies are one way for the state to include or exclude.[69]

[68] van der Beken, *Unity in Diversity*, 253.
[69] Smith, *Making Citizens in Africa*, 94–95.

The official governmental fixation on primordial markers of identity has dramatically altered language policies in Ethiopia since 1991. The history of Amharic and its connection to the nation-state project, ethnic over-rule and cultural suppression were the background for a progressive and multilingual policy choice.[70] For a long time Ethiopian identity was largely bound to the ability to speak the national language Amharic.

Since the introduction of federalism the cultural and language policies provided the background for the expansion of identity politics in Ethiopia. The regime sought to delegate educational policies and the question of the language of instruction to the regional level. Not only did the regional states decide on their choice of the working language (in Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz Amharic was chosen in order to avoid conflicts; but in Oromia *afaan Oromo* became the working language). Also, the language of instruction was being decided on and worked out by regional educational bureaus.[71] Today, ethnic groups have the right to mother tongue education or the language of their choice. Mother tongue education hence depends on the capacity of the regions. Furthermore, English and Amharic are being taught from grade 1 and 3 respectively, as subjects.

Regional disparities in education were at the heart of the grief informing regional resistance that eventually toppled the *Därg* government.[72] In any society, and especially in multi-cultural states, language policies are a parameter to evaluate the citizen–state relationship, since language policies not only demand high political costs, but are also an important factor for 'identity planning' and citizenship expansion. Issues around the politicization of languages "emerge as vital and contested in the context of national and sub-national appeals for meaningful citizenship".[73] We have seen in the context of ethnized language conflicts denial to speak once language has led to the fiercest nationalistic resentments of the political centre, like in the case of the Oromo.[74] "Denial of the right to speak one's mother tongue, the language of home

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[70] Bahru Zewde, 'The Changing Fortunes of the Amharic Language: Lingua Franca or Instrument of Domination?', in *Studia Aethiopica: In Honour of Siegbert Uhlig on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Verena Böll et al. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), 303–18.

[71] Keller and Smith, 'Obstacles to Implementing Territorial Decentralization: The First Decade of Ethiopian Federalism', 279.

[72] Abbink, 'Ethnicity and Constitutionalism in Contemporary Ethiopia', 164.

[73] Smith, *Making Citizens in Africa*, 94.

[74] Mekuria Bulcha, 'The Politics of Linguistic Homogenization in Ethiopia and the Conflict Over the Status of Afaan Oromoo', *African Affairs* 96, no. 384 (1997): 340.

(…) is often experienced as the most undemocratic and autocratic of all measures passed by the state".[75] Furthermore local language as a marker of identity is vital for the cultural self-esteem of a people and local language vitality even in the face of linguistic hegemony cannot be overestimated.[76]

The current "National Cultural Policy" emphasizes in this regard the importance of language for culture, and language development for the conceptualization of "cultural policies":

> (…) Ensuring that the languages, heritage, history, fine arts, handicrafts, oral literature, customs, beliefs and other cultural elements of the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia receive equal recognition, respect and chance to development;" (…) The peoples of the country shall be provided with professional assistance in deciding the languages of instruction, mass communication and for official use at the federal, regional, zonal and when necessary, at district levels.[77]

The educational policy is implemented by the Regional Bureaus of Education, and as a country strategy the policy is overseen by the Federal Ministry of Education. The administrative cost of this policy is relatively high and involved the preparation and/or translation of textbooks, language descriptions and standardization. The zealous policy has led to substantial economic cost, "and has contributed to the overall regional disparities, without necessarily lessening the political conflict over ethnicity".[78] One argument that is surprising only at first sight is that the policy will further marginalize nationalities and hinder the students in connecting to the economic development of the country as a whole.[79] In often highly complex linguistic situations like in the *Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region* (SNNPR) the zones with the most linguistic diversity have opted for Amharic as the medium for instruction, while other zones have introduced the majority languages as the medium for instruction.[80] In Gambella and Benishangul-Gumuz similar overlapping policies

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[75] Smith, *Making Citizens in Africa*, 95.

[76] Lawrie Barnes and Kobus van Aswegen, 'An Investigation into the Maintenance of the Maale Language in Ethiopia', *African Identities* 6, no. 4 (2008): 431–44.

[77] National Cultural Policy

[78] Smith, *Making Citizens in Africa*, 108.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Cohen, 'Language and Ethnic Boundaries', 190.

are being employed. In Gambella for instance English is given additional emphasis while otherwise Anywaa and Nuer is used for primary education and Amharic is used in later stages.[81] In Benishangul-Gumuz the Ministry of Education and the Summer Institute of Linguistics are working closely to develop the regional languages for primary education. Since 2007 several pilot schools exist in which Berta, Shinasha and Gumuz were implemented for mother tongue education from grade one to four. 80 more schools were selected for pilot programs but due to financial and logistical constraints as well as a lack of trained teachers and insufficient teacher training, these developments go quite slow.[82]

In comparing some observations on the development of the Mao and Komo languages, I hope to shed some light on the complex ambiguities of the policy of accommodating these minorities. I am particularly interested in two aspects of the language policy:

- First, the politics of language are an important aspect of identity politics and enable the minority elites to politicise and capitalise minority status.
- The second issue is more complex and reveals quite a bit about the working of federalism as it visualizes ethnic-territorial incongruence through the linguistic landscape.

From the perspective of dispersed minorities like Mao and Komo this may give some interesting insights on the ability of minority groups to actually access equal possibilities of citizenship expansion. This is essentially so because groups are never homogenous.

In all interviews, and in all related publications both from the research area and elsewhere, the respondents clearly sympathised with the idea that their language should potentially be developed, or become a tool for education. This argument speaks about cultural recognition. If the language is being studied and eventually used for school it will help preserve group identity, or refresh it at least. People want to see their language being promoted and their children to speak it.

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[81] Carol Benson, Kathleen Heugh, and Berhanu Bogale, 'Multilingual Education in Ethiopian Primary Schools', in *Multilingual Education and Sustainable Diversity Work: From Periphery to Center*, ed. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Kathleen Heugh (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 41.

[82] Sophie Küspert-Rakotondrainy, 'Language Policy and Social Identity in the Light of Socio-Political Changes in Ethiopia. A Comparative Case Study among the Gumuz and Shinasha', *Ethiopian Renaissance Journal of Social Sciences and the Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2014): 53.

Where there is group agency, sustained by politicians and supported by an ethnic territory, the political elite are very interested in the development of the local language. Based on the cultural argument, they can then claim progress in terms of identity politics. The formation of a political elite is important. Elites within the minorities use language to support their argument of differentiation. In such a reading, "linguistic minorities stand a better chance of survival if they codify their language in an alphabet [...] only then can they as a group present their case convincingly in national and international politics".[83] From the perspective of the Gwama and Komo two developments are worth mentioning. Apart from the work invested in the development of Gwama and Komo both by the SIL and the Norwegian Mission Society, two local politicians have been involved in their own projects of putting their respective language in the picture. In Gambella a politician and community leader has issued a school book for primary school teaching basic vocabulary of the Komo language. In Asosa, a local Mao politician and community leader has issued a book on the cultural history of the Mao and Komo (although the focus is clearly on the Gwama culture) and attached to it, in the second part of the book, are a dictionary and a list of proverbs.

The subtext of this development, the placing of the respective community in the realm of multicultural politics is quite obvious. The second example reveals this aspect quite well, as Gwama cultural reader/dictionary, opens with the statement, that "behind every nation there is unique history". Especially the latter example is an interesting reminder of the fact how identity and ethnicity became politicized in contemporary Ethiopia. It is also a reminder of the progress the political discourse has made where ethnic groups are being "assumed to be a reflection of a primordial group character, of a group as a "natural" unit in which people of a multi-ethnic state have to live."[84]

More than twenty years since the introduction of "ethnic federalism", the question whether the political system actually captures the realities of identity or whether it rather creates new identities is still valid.[85] In the next section I want to elaborate on this point in the context of *twaa Gwama*, the language of the Gwama. Gwama is

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[83] Thomas Hylland Eriksen, 'Linguistic Hegemony and Minority Resistance', *Journal of Peace Research* 29, no. 3 (1992): 329.

[84] Abbink, 'Ethnicity and Constitutionalism in Contemporary Ethiopia', 160.

[85] Ibid.

highly important in the research area, as it constitutes the largest of the Mao languages. As we have seen in the introductory part of this thesis, Gwama is the mother tongue for people referred to as Mao (both in Benishangul and Oromia), as well as of people who refer to themselves as *sit shwala* (in Oromia) and for people who are referred to as Komo (the lowland Gwama) and for people who refer to themselves as Gwama. This complex and ambiguous situation is, when looked at from a political perspective, highly revealing for the understanding of the ambiguities of the federal system.

All Gwama-speakers are bi-or multilingual. Generally speaking, *ttwa gwama* is a matter of the house and of culture and tradition. The lingua franca for most Ethiopian Gwama is *Afaan Oromo* (the Oromo language), followed by Arabic rather than Amharic, and a general mutual understanding in *taa komo* (the Komo language); in Gambella most Gwama speak Komo and Anywaa. The patterns of multilingualism are a matter of geography, language distribution as well as power.

Both Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella Regions employ the idea of "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples" and both regional constitutions provide in Article 6 the right of all these "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples" to use their own language. In Article 39 the regional constitutions also elaborate the right to self-administration. In Gambella *ttwa gwama* is spoken, but not recognized as one of the regional languages. The Gwama speakers I met live "hidden" within the Komo population. Illustrative is the case of one civil servant at the Gambella Bureau of Education, who serves as one of the spokesmen of the Komo as a whole. He is from a Gwama clan but was drawn into the civil war with the OLF. Hence in the course of the civil war more and more Gwama came to Gambella as fighters.

In cooperation with the Summer Institute of Linguistics the Regional Bureau of Education of Benishangul-Gumuz is now developing language materials. In Benishangul-Gumuz the constitution gives special emphasis to the Mao and Komo.[86] This special consideration is reflected in the existence of the Mao Komo *special wäräda*. With regard to the questions of language and identity this political territory is again relatively problematic. Also, here the Gwama are a "hidden" group in the area. Although Gwama is summoned under the label Mao together with several other (mostly Omotic) speaking groups, the regional government has issued a contract with the Summer Institute of Linguistics to develop the regional language for mother

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[86] van der Beken, *Unity in Diversity*, 126.

tongue education in Gwama. Berta and Gumuz are currently used in school. Works on Gwama (Mao) and Komo have been pending due to the lack of ability to send people into the field and gather the necessary data. Also, collaboration with the Gwama and Komo has been difficult since both groups hardly have enough trained youth available for teacher trainings. At the same time the other Mao languages like Bambasi Mao, which is also territorially confined to Benishangul-Gumuz, does not receive special consideration.

Oromia has a much more ambiguous stand towards minorities. The preamble makes it very clear that the regional constitution is defined for the *yäOromo hizb*, for the Nation of the Oromo. Similarly, Article 6 and 39 define the right to exercise the Oromo language for the Oromo people and the right to self-administration for the Oromo people. Despite the fact, that the constitution acknowledges that Oromia is inhabited by Oromo and other people (Article 2/2). Art 39 (6) of the Oromia Constitution stipulates that the people of the Oromo nation shall be construed as meaning "those people who speak the Oromo language, who believe in their common Oromo identity, who share a large measure of a common culture as Oromo and who predominantly inhabit a contiguous territory of the region." Herewith the Oromia Constitution recognizes both subjective and objective markers of the concept of 'Oromo people'. "As objective markers language, culture and identifiable predominantly contiguous territory are required, whereas believing in a common identity of Oromo is provided as subjective marker".[87] This also leaves little space for the inclusion of Oromo speaking minorities.

Hence it becomes very difficult for "indigenous" minorities to claim minority recognition, which is in practice being denied, as they are seen as an extension of the Oromo ('non-pure Oromo') and as they are speaking Oromo are assumed to become members of the wider Oromo society.

The language of instruction in schools is *afaan Oromo* and there is little political will to incorporate measures to support minority languages. We might think here of national minorities like the Mao (in the sense of an "indigenous population" but also immigrant groups from other regional states who live in Oromia).

The following case illustrates the problem for the maintenance of twaa gwama in Oromia: During interviews in Qama I met a young woman. She was able to speak

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[87] Tokuma Daba, 'The Legal and Practical Protection of the Rights of Minorities in Self Administering Nations of Ethiopia: The Case of Oromia' (M.A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2010), 79.

twaa gwama (the family referred to themselves as Mao/*sit shwala*). In school, I was told, she was exceptionally good, but she would not get the promotion to college, which was explained by an unfair distribution of promotions between Oromo and Mao kids. I made sure at the school that her marks were as good as told. In the process of identifying members for a group of teachers for mother tongue education for the work of SIL, she was offered a position. But SIL was working in Benishangul and it was seen as too difficult a political manoeuvre to employ someone from Oromia through the Benishangul Bureau of Education. It was equally problematic to employ her, since in Benishangul the working language is Amharic, which she was trained in only for a relatively short time. Later on, when she had been invited to join a group of language informants, again by SIL, it dawned on the organizers that her native language skills were not sufficient and she was sent home.

The maintenance of federal borders is a matter of administrative choice as well as of the will of political actors. The study of (domestic) border cultures and people can help reveal the state of minority integration in Ethiopia as a whole. In the case of the Gwama, the border perspective reveals aspects about their place in local society, and in particular, in the different regional states. This can help to make sense of the historical experience of 'region-making' from a minority perspective. The idea of language death is not a matter of biological superiority but of social power. As much as the question of minorities is a matter of historical perception and political construction, so is the planning of educational languages and their politicization. As S. May said:

> Situating languages and language loss within the wider context of social and political power leads to a further recognition: that biological metaphors understate or simply ignore, the historical, social and political *constructedness* (emphasis in the original) of language (supra note).[88]

The argument here is that administrative choice, in this case, the choice of language, is expressed by the boundary, which in return substantiates the language policy. Benishangul-Gumuz opted for a different language policy than Oromia, and so did Gambella. In Oromia, the language of instruction is *Afaan Oromo* and there is little

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[88] Stephen May, *Language and Minority Rights: Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Language* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 4.

inclination to support any minority languages. Whether this happens or not, is a matter of complex decisions and depends on the political will of the policy makers. While in Benishangul-Gumuz minority languages are being promoted (Berta, Gumuz, Shinasha and Gwama are currently being made available for primary education use), Oromia has not made similar political provisions, thus flouting the Ethiopian federal constitution.

In general, borders signify variations of cultural and socio-cultural identification among the border population. I once asked a young politician from Tongo (a Gwama) about the Gwama of Begi. He said they were "other people". A term usually applied in this regard is "Kuro" (self-designation for the Begi (Koman) Mao), but also used from the other side of the border as a designation for the allegedly Omotic Mao. I showed the same person a video of a divination process I had recorded in Begi, which he admitted was Gwama performance. The hypothesis here is that the 18 years since the border between Begi and Oromia has been created have produced a commonly accepted difference, despite the same language and culture. In both cases the border poses questions as to representation and agency. The Kuro-Gwama are represented under/by the Oromia administration and the Mao-Gwama are represented by the Mao in the Mao-Komo *special wäräda*.

I argue here that this veering away of the Gwama into Gwama and Kuro is based on the political agency in Benishangul and the lack of it in Oromia. It is based on how the administrators understand agency and which meaning they give to the question of citizenship and autochthony. Hence, I would also argue that a domestic regional border, which came into existence by a referendum in 1995, had a measurable impact on the political culture as well as on the meaning people attach to language and identity. In this sense, the border between Oromia and Benishangul would be not only a marker of administration but also a separator of a formerly "united" group.

I do not want to draw too many conclusions here yet. Nonetheless, it might be safe to assume that the Gwama language will now increasingly be studied and promoted, but this will divide the Benishangul Mao and Oromo Mao further. It will probably lead to recognition of the actual status and distribution of Komo compared to Gwama, hence it might lead to political changes in Tongo in regard to the use and understanding of the terms "Mao" and "Komo" in favour of "Gwama". Local

politicians are already anticipating a "Komo-Gwama zone" in Benishangul Gumuz.[89] This, in turn, will affect the relation of the Gwama and Komo in Gambella. Both Gwama and Komo negotiate their political demands through Komo identity. If there will be a Gwama identity publicized in Tongo that would raise demands for a similar recognition in Gambella.

The socio-political realities of the frontier are quite different from the idea of borders. But borders, an ideological-political construct in the minds of administrators and politicians, are not necessarily an obstacle for frontier people. Problems do not necessarily arise in the sphere of economic or cultural exchange across borders; problems arise in the light of politics.

d. The Economic Frontier: Land Grabbing

Further shortcomings of the federal arrangement emerge in light of the current politicization of land conflicts in the region.[90] Especially Gambella has received much attention in relation to the problem of land alienation in Ethiopia. In the following section I want to briefly discuss the problems of land lease agreements as part of a global phenomenon of agricultural land acquisition (Large Scale Land Investment, LSLI). "Land policies express, implicitly or explicitly, the political choices made about the distribution of power among the state, its citizens and local systems of authority".[91] Thus land conflicts are intimately tied to the politics of belonging and the institutionalisation of property. Observers have noted the dynamic relationship between property and citizenship rights as well as authority in relation to African state formations.[92] With the ongoing enclosure of land, especially in peripheral areas, through land investment, the government gives up spaces for citizenship expansion and offers it to economic development. Ethiopia has become a vital partner in the

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[89] 14/2011: Interview with Mao (Gwama) administrator, Tongo town, 6 September 2011.

[90] This passage draws chiefly on a paper on Gambella; s. Meckelburg, 'Large Scale Land Investment in Gambella, Western Ethiopia – The Politics and Policies of Land'.

[91] Christian Lund, 'Land Rights and Citizenship in Africa', Discussion Paper (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2011), 7.

[92] Christian Lund and Catherine Boone, 'Introduction: Land Politics in Africa – Constituting Authority Over Territory, Property and Persons', *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute* 83, no. 1 (2013): 1–13.

global rush for land.[93] Popularly termed "land grabbing", the phenomenon under review is the large scale agricultural investment in Ethiopia for food and other agricultural products now in great demand on the global market. The negative connotation of the terms comes from the fears that peasant and indigenous communities are being evicted from their land. The problem of land grabbing speaks to Ethiopian citizenship in three distinct ways: land investment is directly related to tenure policies and hence gives insights into governmental territoriality. Secondly, it is a powerful reminder of the age-old quest of the Ethiopian state centre to extend its power over agricultural resources.[94] Thirdly, looking at the policies of land grabbing in Ethiopia reminds us of the constant renegotiation of civil and political rights in an autocratic developmental state.

Before looking at the wider political implications for citizenship expansion in relation to land policies, I here briefly want to look at the current experience of the Komo of Pokung and capture the locals' perception concerning large scale land investment.

Pokung, the primary Komo settlement in Gambella, is a villagised complex with a clinic and a school and only a few hundred households. The *kebele* belongs to the Itang *wäräda* and the settlement is about two hours' walk away from Itang itself. Additionally, a relatively large number of agricultural extension workers and clinic staff lives and works in the settlement. It was recently made accessible for cars during the dry season. Even the three-wheeled Bajaj[95] can now move along a dry-weather road that connects Itang with Pokung. I visited Pokung several times in the past years. The most decisive changes were the school building at the entrance of the village, which turned from a grass-thatched wooden construction into a stone building, the sudden appearance of a small bar (a local was buying caskets of beer in Itang and serving them to the local community in his house), and the increasing appearance of agricultural workers, on the cleared countryside, where signs of ownership marked the boundaries between different leased lands, opened for commercial agriculture. There seems to be no large-scale investment by foreign companies around Pokung, but the land is leased

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[93] Jon Abbink, '"Land to the Foreigners": Economic, Legal, and Socio-Cultural Aspects of New Land Acquisition Schemes in Ethiopia', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29, no. 4 (2011): 513–35.

[94] Markakis, *The Last Two Frontiers*.

[95] Bajaj are Indian-produced motorized rickshaws that have become very popular in Ethiopia.

by domestic investors from northern Ethiopia. The local population finds short-term employment on the commercial farms on a day-to-day basis.

> We are living together. And even I get something from them. Also, sometime we get some money for some work, to buy a coffee. We are working and get some payment, so we are happy.[96]

Pokung is a villagised site. The government has brought people together in the settlement to support them with a health centre and a school. The government also provides food aid to the community and at the same time around the settlement the forests are being destroyed leaving the Komo with approximately one hectare for their household production. Destruction of the forest has severe effects on traditional economic activities of the Komo, like honey collecting.

> A: The difference is, a long time ago, we used to go hunting but today it is so difficult. Since the investor came, we cannot farm honey. Because they have destroyed all the trees. The place for honey is now so far from here. They cut down all the trees. This is our problem.
>
> Q: How is the balance between payment (day labour on the farms), honey collecting and hunting?
>
> A: This is not the same. Hunting has a lot of money. If you work one week with the investor, you get small one you can finish it with buying soap. One container of honey is five hundred birr. You can buy what you want.[97]

Disregarding the cultural changes, the government is employing agriculture extension workers in order to enhance farming and foster economic self-sustainability. These people, usually very young graduated from agricultural colleges live with the local

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[96] Interview, Gwama elder, Pokung, 24.09.2014
[97] Interview, Gwama elder, Pokung, 24.09.2014

community and are supposed to teach the community how to enhance the productivity on the land.[98]

The deplorable situation is captured by the fact that many Komo in Pokung, instead of going long ways to go honey hunting now wait till they get hired for day labour (for approximately 30 *birr* per day), and the extension workers seem largely unable to help and enhance the cultivation of the small (0,5 hectare) fields that the community members each have available.

This situation is a reminder of the age-old relationship between the peripheral citizens of Ethiopia and the state. The lowlands have always been an area open for economic exploitation and the people on the land played no significant role in the state perspective.

> Land transfers in the GPNRS [*Gambella Peoples National Regional State*] are expressions of the coming of the Ethiopian developmental state to its lowlands. The political economy of LSLAs depicts the aggressive role the Ethiopian state plays in facilitating LSLAs and enabling accumulation from the lowlands. The Ethiopian government is getting closer to what the imperial and Derg regimes only dreamt of: mastering the lowland territory and controlling the "last frontiers," […].[99]

A brief look back into the historical acquisition of land will be helpful to make this point: As the highland-Ethiopian empire expanded towards the end of the 19th century, Gambella was among the regions where British and Ethiopian claims for territory met. In 1902, when the border between the Sudan and Ethiopia was demarcated, Gambella took its recent shape on international maps and fell on the Ethiopian side of the border. Notwithstanding the fact that Gambella had always been a commercial hub for trade between the Sudan and Ethiopia, it was the British who expressed their economic interest in the region and leased from Menilek II a plot of land to establish a trading post at Itang.[100] Despite the fact that Ethiopia was spared

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[98] Kassahun Berhanu, 'The Political Economy of Agricultural Extension in Ethiopia: Economic Growth and Political Control', Working Papers (Brighton: Future Agricultures, 2012).

[99] Fana Gebresenbet, 'Land Acquisitions, the Politics of Dispossession, and State-Remaking in Gambella, Western Ethiopia', *Africa Spectrum* 51, no. 1 (7 April 2016): 21.

[100] Bahru Zewde, 'Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935', 227.

active colonialism, concessions marked some of the "semi-colonial relationships" with the surrounding colonial powers.[101] Gambella hosted one of the earliest large-scale land concessions in Ethiopian history: one of the "concession-hunters" was Hasib Ydlibi, a Syrian who came to Ethiopia in ca. 1905 with the *Kordofan Trading Company*. He secured a concession for a rubber monopoly. In 1907 he held a greater concession, known as the Baro Concession, and King Menilek II encouraged him to establish what became known as the 'Baro Syndicate.' It produced coffee, cotton, and rubber and was even given quasi-administrative control over the inhabitants of the region.[102] The Ethiopian administration remained weak, with the governor residing in the Ethiopian highland town of Gore. The time of Haile Selassie was marked by constant conflict between the Anywaa and the Ethiopian administration for taxation and control.[103]

> For the ordinary people, the arrival of the modern state meant not only economic marginalization, but also the experience of slavery, which left a lasting impression on their mode of incorporation into the wider Ethiopian society. […] The people of Gambella region, therefore, first experienced 'integration' into the Ethiopian state as the loss of political autonomy, economic marginalization and the assumption of stigmatized identity.[104]

Politically, Gambella was seen as a national territory, secured against British colonial aspirations, and, at the same time, a useful tool in negotiations for power and resources in the form of concessions.[105] The population of Gambella was largely seen as "in need of civilization" which the highland culture in the long run would bring.[106]

We have seen in the previous chapter that the Socialist period (1974-1991) ruthlessly brought the state closer to the peripheral societies. In Benshangul and Gambella

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[101] Bahru Zewde, 'Concessions and Concession Hunters in Post-Adwa Ethiopia: The Case of Arnold Holz', in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies* (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 1988), 63.

[102] Bahru Zewde, 'Concessions and Concession Hunters in Post-Adwa Ethiopia: The Case of Arnold Holz'.

[103] Dereje Feyissa, 'Power and Its Discontents: Anywaa's Reactions to the Expansion of the Ethiopian State, 1950-1991', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 48, no. 1 (2015): 31.

[104] Dereje Feyissa, 'The Experience of Gambella Regional State', 210.

[105] Cp. also the bargaining between Ethiopia and the colonial powers concerning the Ilemi Triangle in return for Gambella.

[106] Markakis, *The Last Two Frontiers*, 157.

especially the incoming settler communities disrupted the demographic equilibrium. The Anywaa community is very outspoken about the territorial disturbances of that period, which strongly focus on the loss of territory and national conflict. The feeling of becoming a minority in one's own land was fostered by the arrival (to refugee camps in the region) of large numbers of Nuer from the Sudan during the Sudanese civil war. Furthermore, Cuba and Russia supported large scale agricultural projects and irrigation schemes. A regional villagisation-programme alienated large parts of the local society. The imposition of a resettlement project had yet more far-reaching effects on the population. Of utmost importance for the understanding of land conflicts in the region is the perception that the indigenous population was being evicted by the rising numbers of migrant and resettles during the *Därg*. The land reform of 1975 had made all of Ethiopia's land national property. In so far as land was used in the political project of socialist 'hypermodernity' - socialist-oriented modelling of the social landscape - land in Gambella became a resource used to achieve social control. This land reform stood in severe contrast to the local understanding of land.

After the end of the military regime, Gambella became a *killil* in its own right within the federal system. The social contract between the groups living in Gambella has been weak and violent confrontations have occurred between the Anywaa and the Nuer, the Anywaa and the highlanders, and also among different Nuer groups. These conflicts centred on power sharing arrangements, land, and questions of economic and political ownership. It doesn't come as a surprise that in a rather fragile environment, conflicts over land and resources can be easily triggered by LSLI and its associated socio-economic changes- Gambella seems favourable for agricultural investment: Water from the highlands is abundant and it is especially along the water ways that the agro-industries are growing. The region is remote and in need of development and income creation. Hence based on the development strategy the Ministry of Agriculture called for investment in agricultural land and started leasing land in Gambella as well in other parts of Ethiopia

> The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development [MoARD] encourages committed and motivated investors to engage in the agricultural sector. For this purpose MoARD has established a new Agricultural Investment Support

Directorate which is responsible for organizing [,] coordinating and providing comprehensive technical and administrative support to investors.[107]

The contracts show that lesser and lessees are the Ethiopian government and private companies; the contracts are not run between countries. An agreement[108] between the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture and the Indian BHO Bio Products PLC for about 27,000 hectares of land in the Itang Special District, Wanke *kebele*, shows, according to Article 2 of the contract, a price of 111 *Birr* (ca. 4.80 Euro; the contract was enacted on May 11, 2010) per year per hectare, which means, at the scope of the current contract, a yearly payment of 2,997,000 *Birr* (ca. 119, 880 Euro).

Next to the international agro-investors there are probably up to 300 Ethiopian investors active in Gambella.[109]

Apart from the fact that large tracts of land are currently leased out and still others are being prepared for future investments, the government is also carrying out a villagisation programme. This programme, according to the government, aims at resettling up to 45,000 households and re-grouping them on approximately 180,000 hectares in order for them to "access socio-economic infrastructure." The target population are "those people who are settled scattered and along the riverside which are prone to flood hazards and those who practice cut & burn shifting cultivation and ultimately to enable them food secured and to bring socio-economic and cultural transformation".[110] In the view of many NGOs and parts of the local population, the current programme is related to LSLI and the land is being "cleared" for investors. Nonetheless local concerns about the "clearance programme" are being ignored by the government in favour of its modernization project.[111]

There are two interlinked developments emerging in relation to the current situation on land issues. One development is a mostly diaspora-led coalition of different opposition groups, linking international NGOs, such as Human Rights Watch, Survival International and the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia

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[107] http://www.moa.gov.et/node/149 (last access 20.04.2013)

[108] http://farmlandgrab.org/uploads/attachment/10Bho-Agreement.pdf (last access 20.04.2013)

[109] Gilles van Kote, "Scramble for Ethiopia's Land", *Le Monde*, 05.01.2012

[110] Gambella People's National Regional State; Villagization Action Plan (2003 EFY).

[111] Dessalegn Rahmato, 'Land to Investors: Large-Scale Land Transfers in Ethiopia' (Forum for Social Studies, 2011), 29.

(SMNE) that criticize this land appropriation.[112] The other development is the emergence and re-vitalization of armed opposition in the region, which put forward a more drastic tone like that of the Gambella Nilotes Unity Movement/Army.[113] In his concluding thoughts about, "how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed," Scott has rightly pointed out:

> What is perhaps most striking about high-modernist schemes, despite their genuine egalitarian and often socialist impulses is how little confidence they repose in the skills, intelligence, and experience of ordinary people.[114]

In light of the history of the failure of commercial farming in Gambella and Ethiopia in general, considering the implications of land investment on the fragile social contract between the people and the state, and in view of the devastating effects of resettlement and villagization, it is even more surprising that despite all these experiences from the past, the current government seems to largely neglect the development of new strategies and holds onto former strategies.

Many of the problems relating to land can be traced back to the way Gambella was incorporated into Ethiopian state territory since the end of the 19th century. This process had, and still has, an imprint on the local population. The rhetoric of 'exploitation' and 'alienation' has its roots in the experience of the national incorporation of Gambella itself. Today, resistance against LSLIs and villagisation - local and globally - is framed by the fear of loss of autonomy and the infringement on minority rights. On the side of the government the desire for a strong state in the periphery remains a policy guide: a new villagisation project is being run, despite the fact that the last villagisation project was abandoned by the previous government after

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[112] See: http://www.solidaritymovement.org/index.php. The spokesperson of the SMNE is Mr. Obang Metho, who has ever since 2003 been actively involved in human rights issues in Gambella and managed to keep the incidents of 2003 and its aftermath in both the media and the public consciousness.

[113] http://www.gambellanum.org/ (last accessed 20.04.2013); the movement was created in August 2011 as a self-proclaimed reaction to the LSLI. The extent and public acceptance of the movement is hard to measure. The contestation on land policy and land appropriation is also fought out in the virtual spaces of the Internet; here the issue is by various opposition groups turned into one on the general political future of Ethiopia.

[114] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 346.

poor planning and mismanagement and due to local resistance. In 1981 the socialist government of Ethiopia had already announced a similar project:

> [To increase]…the agricultural production by introducing improved husbandry methods and techniques. [To reduce]… the population ['s] dependence on subsistence agriculture by broadening their economic base. [To integrate]… the different isolated tribal groups into a mutually coexisting society.[115]

The experiences with the Socialist project's "fear and anger", has strongly inspired the return of the rhetoric of powerlessness among the different groups.[116] At the same time it is exactly this fear of exploitation that has inspired the rhetoric of "liberation" and "suppression" in which the land-grabbing debate is now placed.

Land has been one of the most important features in Ethiopian history. Securing and administrating it has been the aim of all consecutive Ethiopian governments since the empire expanded under King Menelik II. The federal structure has emphasized decentralization as a means of integrating Ethiopia's different ethnic groups into the national territory. This decentralization, the devolution of political and economic powers to the regional states, has naturally raised high hopes in rural populations concerning the ownership of land. But the land remains in the hands of the government. To make sure that centralization and the distribution of land through the land bank does not mean a break with the federal experiment, open, fair and sound redistribution processes of land, including public consultation have to be observed.

Citizenship in diverse societies is an issue of great and enduring salience. James Holsten pointed out that, "the worldwide insurgence of democratic citizenships in recent decades has disrupted established formulas of rule and privilege in the most diverse societies."[117] As we saw, struggles over citizenship have gained importance in

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[115] The Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia: *Relief and Rehabilitation Commission: The Gambella Settlement Project: A WFP Assisted Settlement Site*, Addis Ababa, July 1981; I am not engaging here in the discussion of forced or voluntary resettlement. Nonetheless it is important to note that the issue of LSLI has brought back the rural population's old fears concerning the results of the villagisation project, despite a similar plan to increase the well-being of the local population.

[116] Eisei Kurimoto, 'Fear and Anger. Female versus Male Narratives among the Anywaa', in *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism & after*, ed. Wendy James et al. (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 219–38.

[117] James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 3.

Ethiopia since the 1960s. The socio-political processes of the 1990s, especially the interlocking of identity, agency and territory, have made negotiations about "who is Ethiopian" even more relevant. As elsewhere in Africa, in Ethiopia "land is a resource to which access is ensured not merely by membership of a national community – local citizenship and status are often as or more important."[118] Thus land becomes a main feature of 'negotiation' between local and national citizenship. As state formation in Ethiopia is an ongoing process in Ethiopia, so too these 'negotiations' are ongoing. Nonetheless, the state is the major player in making and deciding on territorial claims.[119] Addressing land issues helps to understand the relation between the subjects of land policies and the state that constitutes citizenship.

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[118] Lund, 'Land Rights and Citizenship', 10.

[119] Davide Chinigò, 'The Politics of Land Registration in Ethiopia: Territorialising State Power in the Rural Milieu', *Review of African Political Economy* 42, no. 144 (2015): 176; Markakis, *The Last Two Frontiers*, 356.

Conclusion

Dilemmas of citizenship - Fragile societies and the modern nation state

"In politics man still remains basically a territorial animal".[1]

During his travels in the 1880s south of Fadasi, the Dutch traveller Juan Maria Schuver described groups of people in the Ethio-Sudan border area who lived beyond the control and influence of their neighbouring principalities and states. These groups were the Amam and the Koma.

These observations today call attention to an historical political space that, as a frontier region between Sudan and Ethiopia, was dominated by highly dynamic processes of inter-ethnic relations, migration and cultural change. Migrants from Sudan, merchants and *fakis* integrated into the indigenous societies from which grew Arabized indigenous communities. To the south, the Oromo kingdoms, soon to be important regional competitors, had developed hierarchical political structures, based on territorial control and subsuming various indigenous communities. This process led to an 'Oromization' of the indigenous communities.

This frontier region formed the space into which the Ethiopian empire expanded after the 1880s. Since the conquest of the Ethiopian army in 1898, the region was annexed and seen as an economic reservoir to the emerging Ethiopian state. Local rulers became middlemen between the periphery and the centre. The peripheral peoples forcibly supplied the centre with all kinds of goods, from gold to slaves. In the course of these economic demands, local authorities, such as *Sheikh* Khojali al-Hassan,

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[1] Duchacek, 'Antagonistic Cooperation', 3.

rose to power and, as autonomous rulers, administered their lands, delivering the tributes in exchange for relative political independence. In the western-most Oromo provinces Jote Tullu had risen to become such a local leader. Thus, driven by the economic and political pressure of the centre, the gradual integration of the periphery unfolded. This in part was the beginning of the penetration and construction of central control into previously remote and autonomous regions. Increasingly, the indigenous communities were subjected to economic demands. Also, lesser principalities and chieftaincies were forcefully integrated. The leaders of such groups became collaborators in the local power structure and enabled the expansion of the sphere of influence of the Ethiopian imperial central government. We have looked at the life and aftermath of the political career of Kutu Golja as exemplary for such processes.

With the gradual integration of the region, blanket designations like 'Amam' and 'Goma' were gradually replaced by other blanket terms. This in fact reflects the changing patterns of the influence of majority groups. From the perspective of the Ethiopian centre the non-Arab, non-Oromo ethnic groups living in the region of Western Ethiopia were *shanqila*. Locally the term 'Mao' spread and came to include all those groups who became tributary peasants in feudal Western Ethiopia. Further away of this area continued to live the 'Koma', mostly ethnic and linguistically Komo and Gwama groups, who had largely escaped the state's influence.

The modernization of the bureaucracy under the last emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, which began after the World War II, had mixed effects on the peripheral ethnic groups. Traditional forms of economic exploitation and marginalization by the local political elites and forced labour regimes continued and left their imprint on the social memory of the small ethnic groups until today.

The Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 and the subsequent civil war led to continued displacement and migration, with on the one hand parts of the small ethnic groups joining the larger neighbours (e.g. the Oromo and their OLF) and fighting together against the Ethiopian *Därg* government. On the other hand, the war led to further fragmentation of the groups. At the end of the war in 1991, an alliance of regional liberation movements prevailed against the Ethiopian military. In post-1991 Ethiopia, the Mao and Komo were incorporated into both the federal states of Benishangul-Gumuz and of Gambella, thereby (constitutionally) made citizens of Ethiopia. Due to the long period of marginalization and expulsion and the resulting migratory drift, many members of these groups also came to live in other regions, such as Oromia, but

without any corresponding political visibility. In addition, other Omotic-speaking groups, also known as Mao, live both in Benishangul-Gumuz and in Oromia. They bear the name of ethnic Mao, however, but except for a common history of marginalization, they have almost no contact with Mao and Komo elsewhere.

Against this historical background the thesis has empirically answered the foregoing guiding research questions about the antecedents of group formation in the Ethiopian-Sudanese border area, the historical factors which affected group distinction, how the inter-ethnic as well as the intra-ethnic relations between majority and minority groups evolved seen in relation to the historical emergence and encroachment of the Ethiopian state; and eventually how the historical experiences of marginalization among the Mao and Komo conflate with current approaches of power sharing and political integration.

On a theoretical level, the present work has questioned the scope and formation of citizenship and political integration in the Ethiopian multi-ethnic state. The experience of citizenship expansion is difficult to understand in as much as politics are influenced by diverse local structures as well as local conditions. Accordingly, conflicts and contradictions within and between groups, enhanced by ethnic federalism, are the result of the up-rooting of pre-existing social relations. Thus, different groups in the same area may both experience political choice and structure differently. These variances make the experience of citizenship expansion essentially difficult to understand, since citizenship promises political equality on a national level. A key to understanding these variances may lie in the specific socio-historical process of inter-ethnic relations in plural societies. Hence, we are now in the position to draw conclusions on the changes, problems and shortcomings of minority citizenship in Ethiopia today.

Three hypotheses of minority citizenship

In the attempt to reconstruct the past of the Mao and Komo and to place their historical experience in modern politics and current inter-ethnic relations, I have presented examples and episodes of regional histories of trans-ethnic and inter-ethnic encounters and individual experiences, building both on the practice of memory of informants as well as the day-to-day experience of minority citizenship. From the

chronological presentation of exemplary events, I draw three interlocking hypotheses about minority citizenship in Ethiopia that I hereafter want to briefly discuss in conclusion of the foregoing discussion:

- Cultural citizenship in Ethiopia is a 'place-making' project.
- As a project of place, citizenship - despite being initially a legal construction and status, as constitutionally outlined - is 'negotiated' on the regional level and depends largely on the cultural neighbours and the historically built majority-minority relations.
- Through its primarily *territorial* approach to ethnicity, the political system fails to integrate fragile minorities.

To begin with, citizenship is more than the "legal statues of members of a national political community".[2] The focus on the margins of the society enabled an ethnographic approach to federalism and multi-culturalism. The ethnography of citizenship practice brought out the processes behind membership of a given political community. Being observant to this process is as important "as the end result itself."[3] At the same time it illuminated the obstacles of citizenship expansion in the given case.

a. Citizenship in Ethiopia is a place-making project

Minorities in Ethiopia have to be territorial to be politically meaningful. This is expressed in the ethnic designation of territories, on all administrative levels from *killil* to the *special wäräda*. It is also expressed in the many interlocking competitions and conflicts over boundaries and territories in Ethiopia today.

The Mao and Komo have been localized in various overlapping space-making projects, processes I have referred to as the competition for territorial control.[4] The history of the Mao and Komo is deeply interwoven with the western Ethiopian frontier, as well as consecutive territorial claims by various groups and entities.

[2] Sian Lazar and Monique Nuijten, 'Citizenship, the Self, and Political Agency', *Critique of Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (2013): 3..
[3] Ibid.
[4] David Turton, 'The Meaning of Place in a World of Movement: Lessons from Long-Term Field Research in Southern Ethiopia', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 18, no. 3 (2005): 258–80.

Appadurai emphasized the fact that space making is "hard and regular work".[5] Work that includes spatial practice, the building of houses, maintenance of borders, or symbolic practices of all sorts.[6] The Komo and Gwama made place where they moved, until the next force drove them somewhere, displaced, as we have seen, by the intertwined civil wars, settlement schemes, etc.

Today the Mao and Komo are *being localized* in the ethnic landscape of Ethiopia. They are granted territories but only as long as the land is not needed by the government for other territorial or national endeavours, like land investment, etc. The Mao and Komo are being localized in village complexes, as we have seen in the last chapter. On the other hand, the relation between territory and identiy has provided certain ethno-elite groups within the complex Mao and Komo population to push for administrative positions and political recognition within the confines of an ethnic territory. In the quest to define the uniqueness of the people, such ethno-elites emphasize cultural traditions.

Through their territory the Gwama have entered the realm of modern-day identity politics in Ethiopia. A singer by the name *Kush Kush* very recently produced a typical cultural pop song similar to much regional-specific music. It is mainly in modern pop music-style and parts of the chorus' lyrics say, *Turana tongo, usiti tongo* - "Tongo our homeland, the people of Tongo". The video shows the singer in Tongo town. It opens with a scene of a Gwama divination process, and is accompanied by Gwama dancing and traditional areophone instruments (which are not part of the music, though). I see this as an example of the importance of expressing group identity and reference so as to place to be part of the mainstream cultural landscape of Ethiopia today. In the ethnic territory, the Mao and Komo (mainly Gwama) are able to perform this form of cultural citizenship.[7]

In such a way, the construction of identity and ethnicity become strategies to be politically meaningful. This also reflects in the attempt to push for their own cultural and learning materials in the major settlements.

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[5] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 180.

[6] Ibid.

[7] The video can be streamed online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=autQM8et1BE (accessed 13-7-2016).

The paradox that this situation entails lies in the opposing place-making processes. While the Mao and Komo have been split apart over various territories, and both international and regional frontiers, the ethno-territory is confined to serve only those groups that inhabit it and that are able to claim autochthony in it. This situation *weakens* their political relevance in an already politically and economically marginal environment.

b. Citizenship is negotiated on the regional level

The issues of why some groups stand in the shadow of others are complex and cannot be easily described. Minority groups, numerically inferior and politically insubstantial in the multi-cultural competition for political power and recognition, naturally find it more difficult to present alternative political solutions opposed to the political mainstream, simply because they are less vocal in the political bargaining.

For the timeframe of this thesis, the first frontier movement that the Mao (Gwama) were exposed to was the migration of the Berta in the 17th century. Another frontier, the Oromo frontier, pushed northward from the Anfillo and other Omotic Mao regions. The local history continued to be one of constant displacement, as the recollections and interviews have shown. All Mao, Gwama and Komo felt the pressure of invading groups. They fled or were drawn into new emerging polities, and eventually into the Ethiopian state. All groups, the Mao - both Omotic and Nilo-Saharan - as well as the Komo remember slavery and the tax in humans (*lij gibbir*) as a major humiliation. In this thesis I have shown that patterns of historical marginalization are being *transmitted* from generation to generation. These feelings are memorized and internalized by the Mao and Komo, but similarly they live on in the memories of the former masters who are still the dominant group. Memories about the "other" and the "self" define the way people perceive each other today; and this extends to the practices of citizenship, inter-regional and political cooperation and conflict. Sometimes, perceptions about 'the other' are strongly expressed:

> What do you want from the Mao, they were our slaves: they don't have a history. If you want to know about them talk to us.[8]

Often such recollections are concealed or hidden, while at other times people try to re-define the history of their forefathers. During a group interview with Fadashi, a sub-group of the Berta and descendants of the *watawit*, we discussed the relation of the ruler of Fadasi, Muhammad-al-Hasan, with the Mao. After a brief internal discussion the elders tuned to me and told me that Muhammad-al-Hasan "brought the Mao together to take care of them, gave them clothes, salt and taught them Islam."[9] This is the exact reversion of the story remembered by the Mao: in their version, the Mao were resettled to work on farms and their children were stolen in exchange for salt. This is an example of the reinterpretation of history in light of current inter-ethnic relations. Memories of slavery are problematic not only because they are subjective. Memories of marginalization are often covered in silence: a silence that former slave owners and slaves need in order to maintain a social contract.[10]

The Mao and Komo have lived in a continuum of subjection and migration for a long time. The history of slavery has become an underlying factor in the relations between people and affects the possibilities to exercise citizenship claims, precisely because the old power structures are being recreated in the day-to-day relations as part of the practices of social memory.[11]

c. The territorial approach to ethnicity overlooks fragile minorities

The lack of political agency of the Mao and Komo runs contrary to the provisions made by the Ethiopian constitution today. The Mao and Komo nominally have a political territory, the Mao-Komo *special wäräda* in Benishangul-Gumuz, but to which other Mao groups have little connection. The promotion of minority languages has been one way to support citizenship in federal Ethiopia. In Gambella and Tongo,

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[8] I kept this statement from my first field trip in 2009. It was the reaction of a young clan member from a *watawit* line, when he learned about the reason of my coming (Bambasi, 8 September 2009).

[9] 2/2010: Group interview, Fadshi elders, Bambasi town, 11 September 2010.

[10] On a similar point, Alice Bellagamba, Sandra E. Greene, and Martin A. Klein, *The Bitter Legacy: African Slavery Past and Present* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2013), 15.

[11] Cp. Éric Komlavi Hahonou, 'The Quest for Honor and Citizenship in Post-Slavery Borgu (Benin)', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 48, no. 2 (2015): 325–44.

the first primary schoolbooks in *taa komo* and *twaa gwama* are being produced. The situation for the Mao of Bambasi or those in Oromia is quite different, however. Here, the Mao language is usually only used at home, people are embarrassed to speak it in public, and it is laughed at and despised if used in market transactions. Similarly, forms of skin ornamentation and material culture, and above all skin colour, elicit constant public mockery. This "otherness" is enshrined in the self-descriptive term of *sit shwala* ('black men') among the Mao in Oromia, recalling racial stereotypes based on historical marginalization.

Ethiopia is experimenting with a form of cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship in Western liberal thinking is employed as a concept to measure the integrative capacity of states towards culturally distinctive groups. Cultural rights, freedom of religion, or the freedom to use a minority language are basically dealt with as part of the general human rights repertoire in Western liberal discourse. These freedoms are non-specific to certain ethnic groups but are meant to apply across the board.[12] Somehow similarly, the Ethiopian constitution does not provide any cultural recognition beyond the recognition that is offered within the framework *nations, nationalities and peoples*. The Mao and Komo are recognized by the constitution of Ethiopia under these labels. From a merely constitutional perspective they are awarded special recognition by the provision of a *special wäräda*. This however negates the further complexities of the different groups subsumed under the label Mao. There are other Omotic-speaking groups of Mao that *cannot* claim cultural recognition, e.g. in Oromia. There are Gwama speakers in Gambella who are subjected to the Komo label. Historical frontier processes and migration, as we have seen throughout the thesis, have fostered such complexities. The political framework of a territorial identity is diametrically opposed to the historical frontier processes, and as such dramatically alters the historically grown inter-ethnic relations. It illuminates the small extent to which the focus on ethnicity and territory in Ethiopia is able to capture the finer points of cultural complexities.

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[12] Rainer Bauböck, 'Cultural Citizenship, Minority Rights and Self-Government', in *Citizenship Today: Global Perspectives and Practices*, ed. T. Alexander Aleinikoff and Douglas Klusmeyer (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2001), 322.

The spectre of oblivion

I was surprised to learn from one young, educated Komo (probably aged twenty-three) in Gambella that he had never before heard stories about slavery. He was not the only one. Hence, my description of slavery based on the memories of elders is insufficient. Not only am I unable to capture the finer points of its legacies, but I am also unable to capture the silence concerning the inter-ethnic relations today. Similarly the memories of elders do not capture the nascence of the younger generation. People born after the civil war in the past twenty years may have more demanding questions regarding socio-political developments, culture, and identity, which they can hardly explain with reference to the history of marginalization alone. They nonetheless may experience racism and marginalization in the schools and universities both on the regional as well on the national level in the interaction with youngsters from other ethnic backgrounds.

Regardless of the historical injustices and possibilities, the practice of cultural citizenship in Ethiopia today does not offer any special rights for historically marginalized groups, and neither does Ethiopia see any need for special consideration of indigenous or autochthonous groups. Ethnic politics in Ethiopia today are based on a strict post-modern paradigm: given the provision made by the constitution under the umbrella of *'nations, nationalities and peoples'* is deemed sufficient for cultural development. This paradigm states that the current government, after overthrowing the Amhara-centric, socialist, military regime (as a successor of the earlier imperial-feudal regime) and reorganizing the state into decentralized federal sub-entities which all have the right of "self-determination up to succession,"[13] has liberated the ethnic groups of Ethiopia, giving them their dignity and right to cultural expression. But history has always been a state-centered project in Ethiopia. The political and administrative reorganization of Ethiopia along ethno-linguistic lines and the current politics of diversity, being promoted on all political levels, have led to an official neglect of marginalization as part of the historical interethnic relations in the name of peace and stability through a proclaimed *unity in diversity*.

Minority citizenship can, to a certain degree, be realized on the regional level but cannot be sufficiently claimed on the national level. Furthermore, only groups that fit

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[13] "The Constitution of Ethiopia", Art. 39.4., 14

the criteria of cultural citizenship of *nations, nationalities and people* may also be able to exercise political citizenship. Thus, repeating a familiar historical process, fragile groups may wither away into any of their more stable neighbouring groups or recede into oblivion.

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3/2006: Group interviews with Opuo elders, Wankey, Itang *wäräda*, Gambella, 24 November – 05 December 2006

2009:

2/2009: Interview with Fadashi youngster, Bambasi town, 15 September 2009.

5/2009: Interview with Fadashi elder, Bambasi town, 17 November 2009.

2010:

2/2010: Group interview, Fadshi elders, Bambasi town, 11 September 2010.

3/2010: Group interview with Bambasi-Mao, Mutsa, Bambasi *wäräda*, 17 September 2010.

6/2010: Fadashi elder, 2010, Bambasi town, 20 September 2010.

13/2010: Interview with Tongo elder, 29 September 2010.

14/2010: Interview with Mao elders in Ya'a, Tongo *special wäräda*, 2 October 2010.

18/2010: Interview with Mao elder, Qama, Begi *wäräda*, 14 October 2010.

21/2010: Interview with Mao elder (Hozo), Shonge *kebele*, Begi *wäräda*, 15 October 2010

24/2010: Interview with Oromo elder, Begi town, 16 October 2010

26/2010: Group interviews, Komo, Gwama, Pokung, Gambella, 23-26 October 2010.

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[1] This list represents only the formal interviews from which passages have been used in the text. Informal information, observations and parts from the field dairy have been indicated throughout the text. Many informants have asked not to be named. Either because they exposed harmful memories that were seen as embarrassing, or we talked about thorny issues such as ethnicity, identity and other aspects of politics. I have thus made it a habit to conceal all informants. The numbers indicate an internal order, e.g. from all formal interviews I have made in 2009, I have used interview 2 and 5, etc.

2011:

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2/2011: Interview with Komo elder, Gambella town, 13 August 2011.

5/2011: Interview with Komo elder, Gambella town, 17 August 2011.

6/2011: Interview with elderly Komo woman, Gambella town, 18 August 2011

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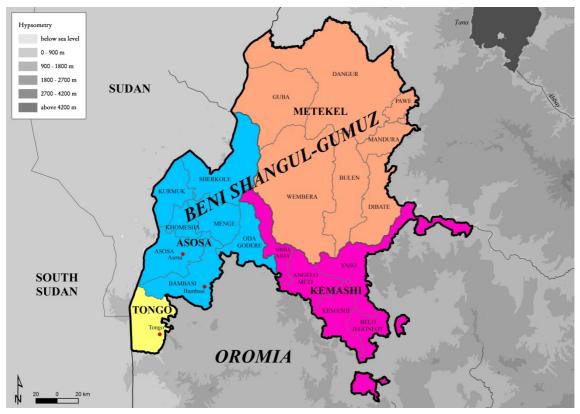
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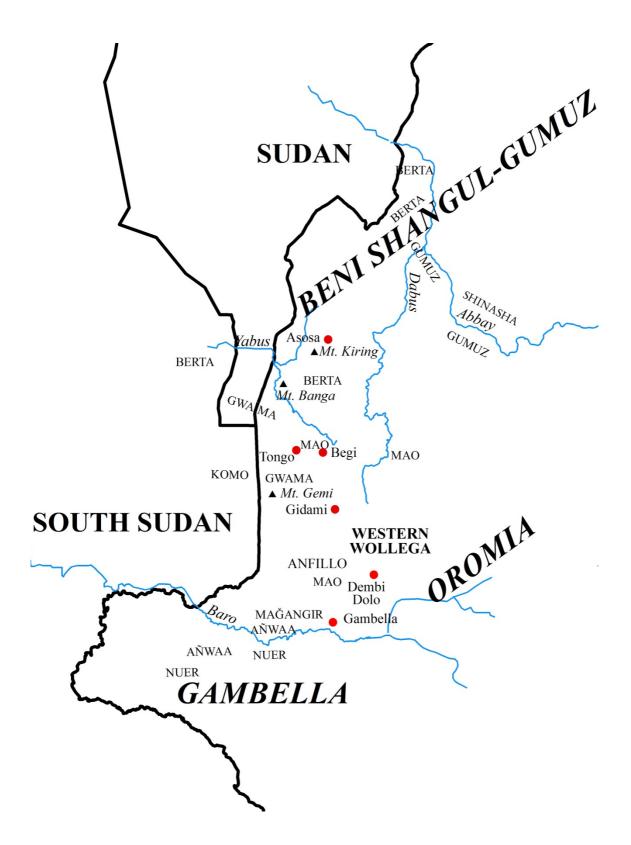
Tables

|	Koman		Omotic	
Gwama	**Sit shwala**	**Komo**	**Hozo**	**Sezo**
Arab Gwama	Ba(m)basho	Galli	Alfah	Ba(m)basho
Bosho	Bosho	Galli gubbi tash	Dägätso	Kosasi
Bwashal	Isgulu	Galli Twanta	Gebso	Maburro
Bwashal Kring	Kuguul	Kwala	Gagacco	Madego
Bwashal Sharqos	Mabako	Nash	Gurrumoh	Mahento
Bwashal Shiqwal	Madego	Pogo	Kosacco	Makepo
Hizgulu	Makambo	Pogo Tsina	Kurroh	Mawaap
Issa	Makasho	Sugulluu	Makambo	Mayaalo
Kring	Makiisi		Makiisi	
Kuguul	Makorr		Mashobo	
Maganza	Mashaw		Mayaalo	
Mahogo	Mawaap			
Manasasa	Yala			
Mashawo				
Sättä				
Sit Bege				
Yaalo				

Maps
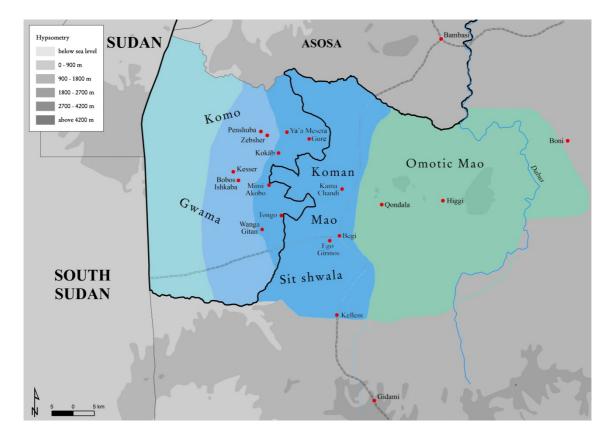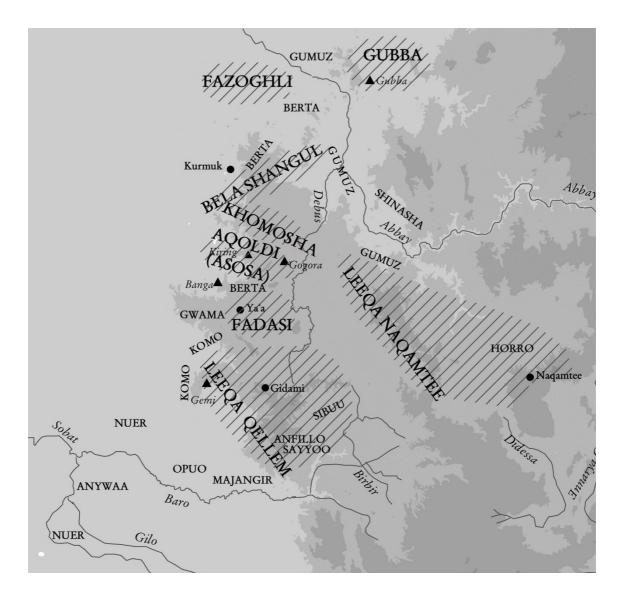
Map 1. Benishangul-Gumuz, adminstrative division (after 1991) [prepared by Luisa Sernicola]

Map 2. Ethnic groups in western Ethiopia [prepared by Luisa Sernicola]

Map 3. Distribution of Omotic and Koman languages; based on materials by Klaus-Christian Küspert; after Küspert, Klaus-Christian. 'The Mao and Komo Languages in the Begi-Tongo Area in Western Ethiopia: Classification, Designations, and Distribution'. *Linguistic Discovery* 13, no. 1 (2015) [prepared by Thomas Rave]

Map 4. Ethno-political entities in western Ethiopia (map prepared by Luisa Sernicola; after EAE V)
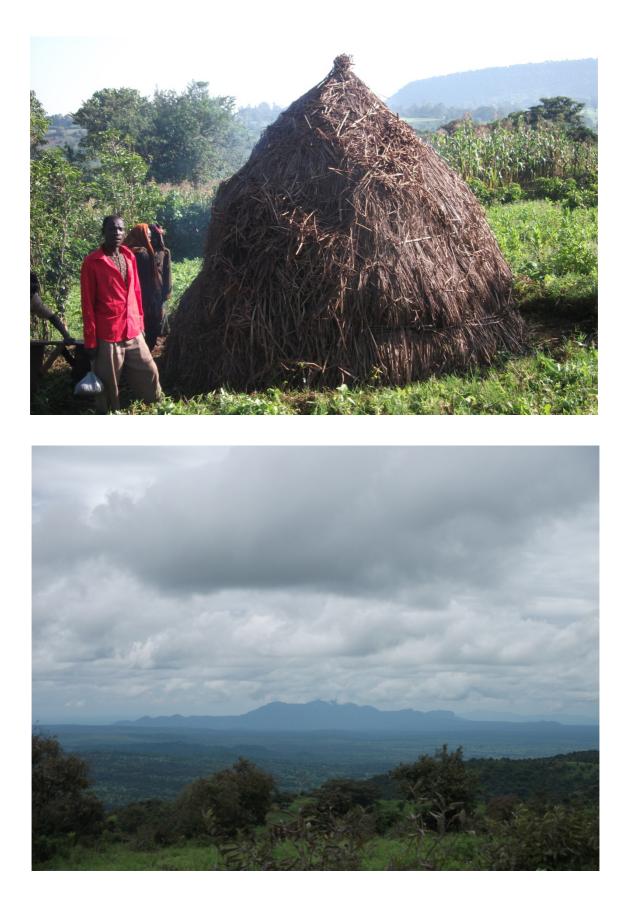
Photos

Appendix

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

In den 1880er Jahren bereiste der niederländische Reisende Juan Maria Schuver die Region Bela Shangul im Westen des äthiopischen Hochlandes, südlich des Blauen Nils in Richtung Fadasi. Dieses kleine unabhängige Scheichtum stand unter der Herrschaft Muhammad al-Hassans, Sohn von al-Hassan, der aus einer Ja'alin-Familie aus Dongola im Sudan stammte. Fadasi bildete zudem den kulturellen Übergang zwischen den sudanisch geprägten Regionen Bela Schanguls, und den Oromoländern von Wallaga. Die Region Bela Shangul war in mehrere solcher Scheichtümer, unter den sogenannten *watawit*, arabisch-sudanesischer Einwanderer, aufgeteilt. Die *watawit* kontrollierten den Handel, erhoben Steuern und unterhielten selbst Handelsbeziehungen in den Sudan. Zwischen den Einflussgebieten der *watawit*, zeitweilig in enger Beziehung mit ihnen, teilweise in Konflikt liegend, siedelten unterschiedliche indigene Gruppen. Eine dieser Gruppen, die Amam waren für Überfälle auf die Handelskarawanen, etwa derOromo, bekannt. Der *mek* von Yala war mit einer Oromofrau verheiratet. *Mek* war ein politischer Titel der die Anbindung an das ausgehende Funj Sultanat suggeriert und daher auf die politische Zugehörigkeit der Region zum sudanischen Sultanat hinweist. Die Heiratsbeziehungen zu den Oromo zeigen allerdings auch die kulturelle Nachbarschaft zu den südlichen Nachbarn.

Je weiter sich Schuver in das Grenzgebiet zwischen Fadasi und den Oromoländern vorwagte, desto sporadischer wurden Treffen mit den *watawit* oder Oromo. Weiter südlich der Amam gereist, beschreibt Schuver ein Treffen mit den Koma oder Goma (zum ersten Mal in europäischen Reisebeobachtungen dieser Zeit), und hinterlässt eine Wortliste des heutigen Gwama. Als Koma bezeichnet Schuver jene Gruppen die in relativer Abgeschiedenheit von den Manifestationen der politischen Einflussnahme, wie etwa der Sklaverei oder Tributpflicht, lebten. In wenigen Fällen kamen arabische Händler um mit den Koma, Waisen und Honig gegen Salz zu tauschen.

Es sind diese Beobachtungen, die einen politischen Bereich beschreiben, der als Grenzraum zwischen dem Sudan und Äthiopien, geprägt war von höchst dynamischen Prozessen interethnischer Beziehungen, Migration und kulturellem Wandel. Migranten aus dem Sudan, Händler und Islamgelehrte, integrierten sich in die

indigenen Gesellschaften, woraus neue Gesellschaften arabisierter Berta oder Amam entstanden. Südlich davon lagen die Oromokönigtümer, die bald wichtige regionale Konkurrenten werden sollten. Sie hatten sich nach der Oromomigration durch Sesshaftwerdung und der Ausformung hierarchischer Gesellschaften, entwickelt.

Dieser Grenzraum, dem ich mich mit der *Frontier*-Theorie von Igor Kopytoff widme, bildet den Raum den das äthiopische Reich bei seiner Expansion mit den Jahren unter seinen Einfluss und unter seine Herrschaft brachte. Nach den Eroberungen durch die äthiopische Armee 1898 wurde die Region als wirtschaftliches Reservoir an den sich entwickelnden äthiopischen Staat angegliedert. Lokale Herrscher wurden zu Mittelsmännern zwischen der Peripherie und dem Zentrum. Die Peripherie versorgte das Zentrum mit allerlei Gütern. Jährliche Abgaben an Gold, dazu Sklaven, Honig und vieles mehr wurden nach Addis Ababa geliefert. Im Zuge dieser wirtschaftlichen Zwänge etablierten sich lokale Machthaber, wie *Scheich* Khojali al-Hassan, die im Gegenzug zu relativer politischer Unabhängigkeit die Tributzahlungen leisteten. In der westlichsten Oromoprovinz war Jote Tullu zu einem solchen lokalen Fürsten aufgestiegen. So bewirkte der wirtschaftliche und politische Druck den das Zentrum auf die Peripherie ausübte, die politische Durchdringung der Region bis in ihrer letzten Winkel. Auch kleinere Gruppen wurden sukzessive den wirtschaftlichen Zwängen unterworfen. So wurden auch oft kleine Herrschaftsbereiche, in denen weniger wehrhaften Gruppen um lokale Autonomie rangen, integriert. Die Führer solcher Gruppen, wurden mit der Zeit zu Kollaborateuren im lokalen Machtgefüge und führten zur Erweiterung des Einflussbereiches der äthiopischen Zentralregierung. Diesen Prozess beschreibt die Arbeit anhand der politischen Entwicklungen in der Peripherie und vor dem Hintergrund der Geschichte des *Mao*-Königs Kutu Golja.

Durch die sukzessive Eingliederung der Region an das äthiopische Reich gingen die Bezeichnungen Amam, Burun, Goma, etc. verloren und wurden durch andere Mantelnamen ersetzt. Aus Sicht des äthiopischen Zentrums handelte es sich bei den Ethnien die in der Region West-Äthiopien lebten um *shankilla*, eine rassistisch intendierte Bezeichnung für die Tiefland-Bevölkerung, an deren Identität kein Interesse bestand. Lokal breitete sich der Begriff Mao aus und schloss all diejenigen Gruppen ein, die sich den zunehmenden Machtverhältnissen unterwarfen und zu tributpflichtigen Bauern im feudalen Westäthiopien wurden. Außerhalb des direkten Einzugsgebietes lebten weiterhin die Komo, auch Koma genannt, welche v.a. Komo- und Gwama-Gruppen waren, die sich dem Staat weitestgehend entzogen.

Die Modernisierung der Bürokratie unter Haile Selassie, dem letzten Kaiser Äthiopiens, die nach dem 2. Weltkrieg begann, kam den peripheren Ethnien, den Nachfahren der Amam, Burun und Koma kaum zu Gute. Im Gegenteil, traditionelle Formen wirtschaftlicher Ausbeutung und Marginalisierung durch die lokalen politischen Eliten hielten an und so ist Zwangsarbeit in den Goldminen Gambellas bis in die 1960er Jahre im Geschichtsbewusstsein der kleinen Ethnien verankert. Die vorliegende Arbeit schenkt diesem Aspekt der Beziehungen zwischen Staat und Minorität ein besonderes Augenmerk.

Die äthiopische Revolution 1974 und der anschließende Bürgerkrieg (bis 1991) führten zur fortgesetzten Vertreibung und Migration der Minoritäten wobei einerseits Teile der kleinen Ethnien mit den größeren Nachbarn zusammen gegen den äthiopischen Staat kämpften, sich u.a. der Oromo-Befreiungsbewegung anschlossen. Der Krieg hatte die weitere Fragmentierung der Gruppen zur Folge. Am Ende des Krieges hatte sich ein Bündnis regionaler Befreiungsbewegungen gegen das äthiopische Militär durchgesetzt und es folgte eine quasi-demokratische Konsolidierung entlang einer ethno-föderalen Neuordnung Äthiopiens nach 1991. In diesem föderalen System wurden etnno-liguistische Territorien abgesteckt, die als neue Bundesstaaten dienen sollten. Die über 80 ethnischen Gruppen Äthiopiens wurden auf Grund einer möglichst schematischen Unterteilung anhand primordialer Aspekte, wie Sprache, Abstammungsgedanken, etc. ihren Territorien zugeordnet. Wo kleine Gruppen integriert werden sollten, wurden Subterritorien gegründet um den ethno-föderalen Prinzipien Folge zu leisten. Die Mao und Komo wurden sowohl in den föderalen Bundestaaten in Benishangul-Gumuz als auch in Gambella in die regionale Verfassung als „Nation, Nationalität oder Volk" der Regionen und damit Äthiopiens integriert. Infolge der langen Phasen der Marginalisierung und Vertreibung leben auch in andren Regionen, z.B. in Oromia, Mao und Komo, allerdings ohne die entsprechenden politischen Rechte und Pflichten. Darüber hinaus leben weitere omotische Gruppen sowohl in Benishangul-Gumuz also auch in Oromia, die den ethnischen Namen Mao tragen, die allerdings, bis auf die gemeinsame Geschichte der Marginalisierung, kaum Berührungspunkte mit den Mao und Komo haben.

Vor diesem ethno-politischen Hintergrund fragt die vorliegende Arbeit nach der Reichweite kultureller Staatsbürgerschaft und politischer Integration im Vielvölkerstaat. Im Rahmen der Staatsbürgerschaft von Minderheiten wird in dieser Arbeit die interethnische sowie staatspolitische Geschichte der Mao und Komo

untersucht. Die Politik des Vielvölkerstaats Äthiopiens wird dabei aus der Sicht der Minoritäten hinterfragt. Das Geschichtsbewusstsein, die Erfahrung der Marginalisierung und die Erfahrungen mit dem Staat stehen im Zentrum der historischen Betrachtung der Arbeit. Als Chronologie der Begegnung zwischen Staat und Minorität angelegt, widmet sich der Text in synchronischer und diachronischer Perspektive den Erfahrungen der Mao und Komo mit den wandelnden kulturellen interethnischen Beziehungen, die durch staatliche Interventionen direkt oder indirekt beeinflusst werden. Der Text fußt dabei auf oralen Quellen aus der Region, primären Quellen und der Bearbeitung der Sekundärliteratur.

Im letzten Kapitel beschreibt der Text basierend auf Beobachtungen und Gesprächen, die während mehrmaliger Feldforschungen erhoben wurden, wie die Mao und Komo die Geschichte der Marginalisierung erinnern, und vor allem wie die Geschichte der Sklaverei ihr Bewusstsein in der heutigen Gesellschaft beeinflusst. Darüber wird das politische System analysiert, sowie die Möglichkeiten und Schwierigkeiten die sich für ethnische Gruppen ergeben, die deterritorial leben und auf regionaler Ebene nach wie vor marginalisiert sind: wie beeinflusst die Politik Äthiopiens das Verhältnis der Mao und Komo gegenüber dem Staat? Welchen Einfluss haben die föderalen Grenzen auf die politische Handlungsfähigkeit von Minoritäten?

Die Arbeit kommt zu dem Schluss, dass der von westlich-demokratischen Denkmustern besetze Begriff der Bürgerschaft, der die Zugehörigkeit von Gruppen zu einem nationalen Ganzen beschreibt, tatsächlich als Analysemodel geeignet ist, um die Interaktion zwischen dem Staat und den Gesellschaften zu beschreiben. Gerade die Lücken der Integration können durch diese Betrachtung bestimmt werden. Allerdings, und damit schließt die Arbeit, macht die territorial ausgerichtete ethnozentrierte Vielvölkerpolitik in Äthiopien die Teilhabe jener Gruppen die dem Ethnizitäts-Ideal im ethnischen Modell Äthiopiens, Identität-Gruppe-Territorium, nicht entsprechen, politische Teilhabe unzureichend möglich.

English Summary

In the 1880s, Dutch traveller Juan Maria Schuver visited the Bela Shangul region west of the Ethiopian highland escarpment and south of the Blue Nile. He travelled towards Fadasi, a small independent *sheikhdom* under the rule of Muhammad al-Hassan, son of al-Hassan, a descendant of a Ja'alin family from Dongola in Sudan. Fadasi was the gateway between the Arab-Sudanese country to the west and the Oromo countries to the south. Bela Shangul was divided among several such sheikhdoms, under the so-called *watawit*, Arabic-Sudanese immigrants, who controlled the trade, taxed both the trade and the local population, and who had themselves extensive trade relations with the Sudan. Between the areas of influence of the *watawit*, both in close relationships with them and partly in severe conflict, settled different indigenous groups. One of these groups, the Amam, were known for their attacks on the trade caravans. The *mek* (a political title that suggests a connection to the outgoing Funj Sultanate and therefore the political affiliation of the region to the Sultanate), of Begi was married to an Oromo woman. She was the only non-Amam in the settlement, according to the Dutch traveller. South of the Amam Schuver mentions meeting the Koma or Goma (for the first time in the European travel observations) where he collected a wordlist of what today is known as *twaa gwama*, the Gwama language. Schuver uses the term Koma for groups living in relative isolation from the surrounding hierarchically political structures. In a few cases Arab traders visited to swap with the Koma orphaned children, honey and salt.

These observations open up a political space that, as a frontier region between Sudan and Ethiopia, was dominated by highly dynamic processes of inter-ethnic relations, migration and cultural changes. Migrants from Sudan, merchants and *faqis* (teachers of Islam) integrated into the indigenous societies from which grew Arabized indigenous communities, as well as a local elite, the *watawit*.

To the south the Oromo kingdoms, soon to be important regional competitors, had developed hierarchical political structures, based on territorial control. This frontier zone, which I describe by means of the *frontier theory* by Igor Kopytoff, forms the space, into which the Ethiopian empire expended. Since the conquest of the Ethiopian army in 1898, the region was annexed as an economic reservoir to the developing Ethiopian state. Local rulers became middlemen between the periphery and the centre. The peripherals forcibly supplied the centre with all kinds of goods. Annually, the

periphery delivered gold, and in addition slaves, honey and other items, to Addis Ababa. In the course of these economic demands, local authorities, such as *Sheikh Khojali al-Hassan*, rose to power and, as an autonomous ruler, delivered the tributes in exchange for relative political independence. In the western-most Oromo province, Jote Tullu had risen to become such a local leader. Thus unfolded, driven by the economic and political pressure of the centre, the gradual integration of the periphery. This in part was the beginning of the penetration of central control into previously remote regions. The small groups were subjected successively to the same economic demands. Also, more fragile groups and smaller chieftaincies were integrated. The leaders of such groups became collaborators in the local power structure and helped the expansion of the sphere of influence of the Ethiopian central government. Exemplary for this process I portray the political developments in the periphery against the background of the history of the *Mao king* Kutu Golja.

With the gradual integration of the region, blanket designations like Amam and Goma, etc. gradually got lost and were replaced by other blanket terms. From the perspective of the Ethiopian centre the ethnic groups (non-Arab or non-Oromo) living in the region of Western Ethiopia were *shankilla*, a racist term for the enslavable or tribute paying lowland population that paid no attention to the identity of such groups. Locally the term Mao spread and came to include all those groups that submitted to the encroaching Ethiopian political culture and who became tributary peasants in feudal Western Ethiopia. Further away of the catchment area, continued to live the Komo, also called Koma, mostly ethnic and linguist Komo and Gwama groups who had largely escaped the state.

The modernization of the bureaucracy under Haile Selassie, the last emperor of Ethiopia, which began after the 2nd World War, had mixed effects on the peripheral ethnic groups, the descendants of the Amam, Burun and Koma. Traditional forms of economic exploitation and marginalization by the local political elites and forced labour until the 1960s are still present in the social memory of the minority ethnic groups.

The Ethiopian Revolution of 1974 and the subsequent civil war (until 1991) led to continued displacement and migration while on the one hand parts of the small ethnic groups joined with the larger neighbours (e.g. the Oromo Liberation Front) and fought together against the Ethiopian government. The war led to further fragmentation of the groups. At the end of the war, an alliance of regional liberation

movements had prevailed against the Ethiopian military. This was followed by the consolidation of post-war Ethiopia based on an ethno-federal arrangement after 1991. In this federal system ethno-linguistic territories were created which served the political deconcentration of national politics. The more than eighty ethnic groups of Ethiopia were, based largely on primordial aspects, such as language, or kinship, etc., divided in respective ethno-territories. Where small groups should be integrated, further sub- territories were established in order to follow this ethno-federal principle. The Mao and Komo were incorporated into both the federal states of Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella. Mentioned in the regional constitution as *nations, nationalities and peoples*, people of these regions they were thereby (constitutionally) made citizens of Ethiopia. Due to the long period of marginalization and expulsion, members of these groups also live in other regions, notably Oromia, without the corresponding political manifestations. In addition, other Omotic groups, also known as Mao, live both in Benishangul-Gumuz and in Oromia. They bear the name of ethnic Mao; however, except to the common history of marginalization they have almost no contact with the Mao and Komo in Benishangul-Gumuz.

Against this ethno-political background, the present work discusses the scope of cultural citizenship and political integration in a multi-ethnic state. *Minority citizenship* is the vehicle to illuminate both the historical manifestation of state encroachment as well as the inter-ethnic history of the Mao and Komo. The multi-ethnic state of Ethiopia and its multicultural policy is thereby questioned from the perspective of the minorities. Their sense of history, their experience of marginalization, and their experiences with the state on the margins, are at the centre of the historical perspective of this thesis. Conceived as a chronology of the encounters between state and minority, this text is dedicated to a synchronic and diachronic perspective of the experiences of the Mao and Komo in the context of state intervention, which directly or indirectly influenced the regional inter-ethnic relations.

The final chapter of the text describes, based on observations and interviews collected during repeated field research, how the Mao and Komo remember the history of marginalization and especially how the history of slavery affects their sense for today's society. Moreover, the analysis of the political system looks at the possibilities and difficulties that arise for such scattered minorities who are still marginalized on the regional level. Examples discussed hereafter concern the effects of

the land policy, and how the federal system limits the political rights of scattered minorities.

This thesis concludes that the concept of citizenship, framed by Western democratic thought, as the membership of groups in a national whole, is very suitable as an analytical tool to describe the interaction between the state and minorities. It especially is able to highlight the limits of such interaction. However, as this thesis shows, political participation is not met by the ethnicity-identity-territory approach to citizenship proposed by the Ethiopian political system. Hence approaching ethno-politics through the perspective of minority citizenship shows a significant divide between regional and national belonging.

Eidesstattliche Erklärung

Ich erkläre hiermit an Eides statt, dass ich die vorliegende Abeit selbständig und ohne unerlaubte fremde Hilfe angefertigt, andere als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel nicht benutzt habe. Die aus fremden Quellen direkt oder indirekt übernommenen Stellen sind als solche kenntlich gemacht. Die Arbeit wurde bisher in gleicher oder ähnlicher Form keinem anderen Prüfungsamt vorgelegt und auch nicht veröffentlicht.

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