

Tina Brüderlin

**The Incorporation of Children
into the Society**

Pre- and Postnatal Rituals
among the Hamar of Southern
Ethiopia

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Tina Brüderlin: The Incorporation of Children into the Society: Pre- and Postnatal Rituals among the Hamar of Southern Ethiopia

Zusammenfassung

In der vorliegenden Arbeit untersucht Tina Brüderlin die Prozesse der sozialen und rituellen Menschwerdung bei den Hamar Südäthiopiens. Die Lebenswelt der Hamar ist geprägt von kulturspezifischen Normen und Vorstellungen des Menschseins, die von verschiedenen Akteuren in rituellen, aber auch alltäglichen Handlungen bestätigt und perpetuiert werden. Der Frage der emischen Vorstellungen von „Person“ und ritueller Reinheit nachgehend, beschreibt die Arbeit die ausschlaggebenden Kriterien für die Integration oder den Ausschluss eines Lebewesens in die soziale und rituelle Ordnung und damit in die Gemeinschaft der Hamar. Der Fokus liegt hierbei auf der prä- und postnatalen, sowie der Kleinkindphase des Lebens und den damit assoziierten Ritualen. Dabei werden auch die Ausschlussmerkmale betrachtet, die ein neues Leben als rituell unrein kategorisieren und zu dessen Verbannung aus der Gemeinde führen, z.B. durch Abtreibung oder Infantizid. Das Arbeitspapier gibt Einblicke in die Komplexität der traditionellen Wertevorstellungen der Hamar; Wertevorstellungen, die insbesondere in den letzten Jahren durch externes Eingreifen von Regierungs- und Missionsvertretern, die die traditionelle Praxis der lokalen Gruppen zu unterbinden suchen, immer mehr herausgefordert werden.

Abstract

In this paper Tina Brüderlin examines the processes of social and ritual becoming among the Hamar people of Southern Ethiopia. The lifeworld of the Hamar is characterized by culturally specific norms and concepts of personhood, which are confirmed and perpetuated through ritual, as well as, day-to-day interactions of the members of the community. The paper describes and analyses the relevance of an emic understanding of “personhood” and of ritual purity for the integration or the exclusion of a living being into the ritual and social order and thus into the Hamar society itself. The focus thereby lies on the pre- and postnatal and early childhood phase of life and the therewith associated rituals. The paper also describes the criteria of exclusion of a new life from the social and ritual order, such as ritually impurity, which may lead to the elimination from the community, for example, by way of abortion or infanticide. The author provides insights into the complexity of the traditional worldview of the Hamar; a worldview, which in recent years is much challenged through external influences. Seeking to ban the concept of ritual impurity among the people of South Omo various governmental and missionary programs are being applied in the region influencing the traditional practices of the local people.

The author: Tina Brüderlin studied Social Anthropology, American Studies and Cultural Geography at the Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz and at the Dartmouth College, N.H. / USA and received her M.A. in 2005. Between 2000 and 2007 she has been in the South Omo region of Ethiopia for several research stays and worked there with the Hamar and the Tsamai people.

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JOHANNES GUTENBERG
UNIVERSITÄT MAINZ

Com profunda gratidão a meu pai a minha mãe

“How it is done
No one has seen creation
We have never seen it
‘Fate creates things’
It is said
‘*Barjo* is the creator’
‘Fate creates’
We have heard but not seen
How it is done
The way it happens
we cannot say
Fate creates a child in the womb
Unseen
When it happens
the man and the woman lie together
The man’s milk
and the woman’s rain
Her blood
They come together
and are molded
To become a person”

(Biiirinda in Lydall/Head, F, 1990)

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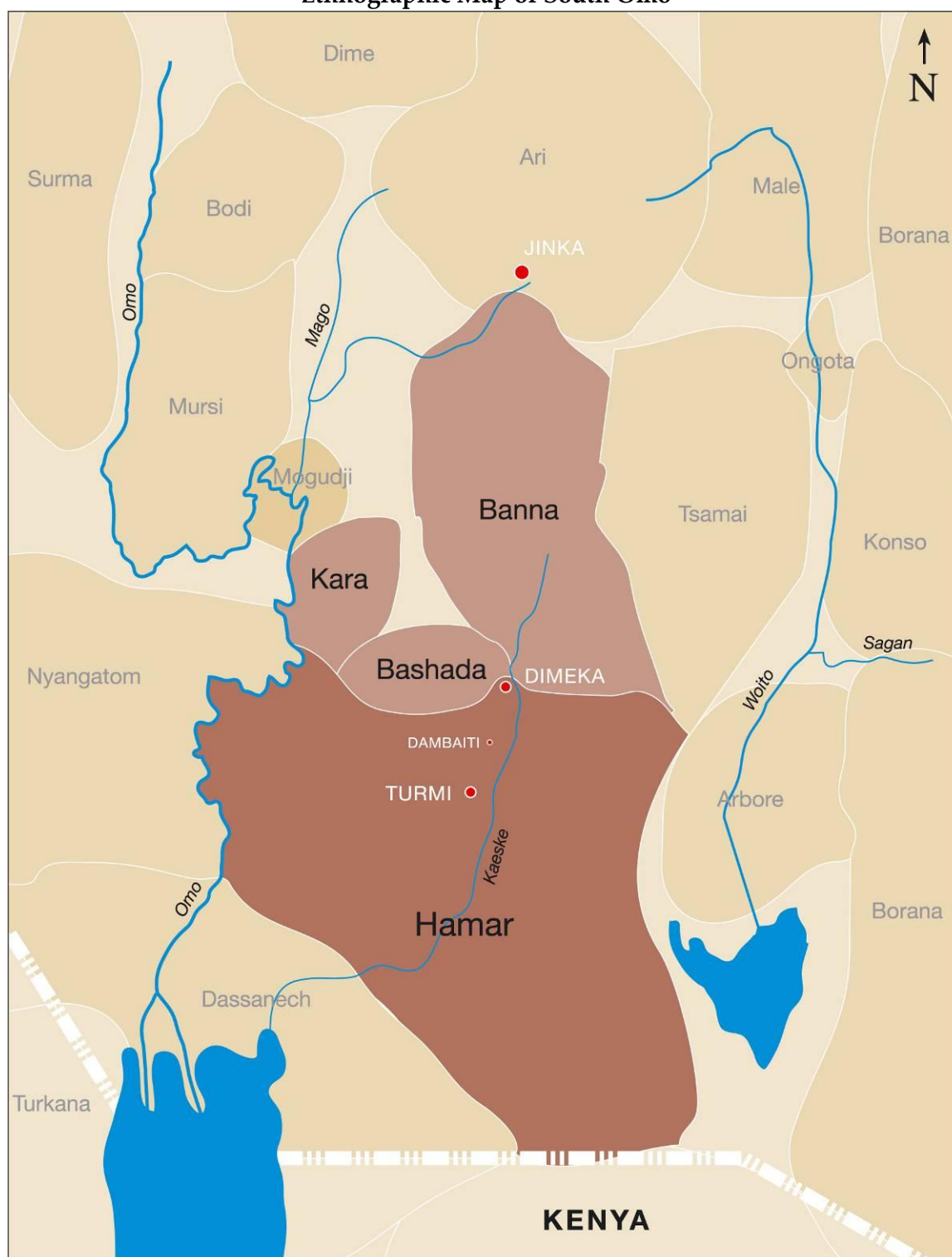
For his patience and kindness I want to specially thank Elmar Birk. Thanks also to my friends, who supported me while writing this work.

Map 1
Ethiopia General



Source: Electronic Document: <www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/ethiopia_rel99.jpg>
[02.02.05]

Map 2
Ethnographic Map of South Omo



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Introduction¹

When I came to Hamar for the first time in 2000, I was a stranger with only limited knowledge of the Hamar language and their culture. My host family and the people from Dambaiti, the region where I conducted my fieldwork, called me a child and like a child I had to learn to speak and comprehend. They became my teachers and friends, introducing me to their customs, language and the world they live in. I slowly began to understand more and more and feel integrated as well as connected to the people of Dambaiti. When I went to the market and I met people whom I did not know my host father would introduce me by saying: “She is a *dambaiti nas*, a child of Dambaiti.” Nevertheless, I know that I will always be an outsider, a guest who is welcomed, but who will always return home.

Given to my own position I began to think about the differences of social integration and incorporation. I felt that I was integrated into Dambaiti, but could I ever be incorporated? ‘Incorporare’ the Latin origin of the word incorporation means to ‘embed’ something or someone into a ‘corpus’. It means to make something or someone an intrinsic part of a whole. The question on which I decided to focus my research is therefore, how a person is ‘incorporated’ into society. Which are the culture specific prerequisites for someone’s social ‘embeddedness’ into Hamar society? I found that the Hamar notion of *edi* might offer an illuminating approach to this matter.

The Hamar use the term *edi* to title someone as person, as human being. The term, however, is not only applied to differentiate between people and animals, but furthermore it is used to distinguish between persons and non-persons in certain occasions (this only applies within Hamar). For the Hamar the physical body of a human being is not thought to be immanently *edi*. Much rather, *edi* is a status acquired through social and ritual practice and kin and in this sense it is comparable with the anthropological concept of personhood, as defined by Conklin/Morgan, a social status granted “to those who meet (...) socially sanctioned criteria for membership” (1996: 662). As my host father told me, it undisputedly is necessary to be considered *edi* to become accepted as a member of Hamar society. If being *edi* is the prerequisite to become a member of Hamar society, the question that I want to phrase in this context is: How is this status of *edi* acquired and asserted through ritual and social practice?

Durkheim and Mauss were among the first anthropologist to pursue the question what constitutes a person and how personhood is realized through social practice (Durkheim 1981; Mauss in Carrithers 1985). Mauss’s seminal theory of the ‘category of person’ and his historical approach to the idea of ‘person’ and ‘self’ has provided an analytical base to researchers for further exploration of this matter in various cultural settings. The critique to Mauss’s theory, however, has been that it failed to grasp the whole complexity of the interconnection of personhood, individual and society. This later became the objective of works by, for example, Geertz (1973), Goodman (1967), Morris (1994), Sokefeld (1999) and others. Even though these scholars included much empirical ethnographic data into their works, they nevertheless kept their focus on the culture specific and analytical categorization of individual, person, personhood and society, engaging themselves in a more or less theoretical approach and analysis (Conklin/Morgan 1996). My own research, though, revolves around the question of ‘coming into being’ in a specific society, becoming an *edi* and bearer of personhood in Hamar. I therefore wish to approach this matter in

¹ This paper is a revised version of the M.A. thesis submitted in February 2005 at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies. The research and thesis was supervised by Prof. Dr. Ivo Strecker and Prof. Dr. Thomas Bierschenk.

a less theoretical manner, nonetheless returning to Mauss's and Durkheim's proposal that it is most important to explore the social source of person and how personhood is realized through social practice (Mauss in Carrithers 1985, Durkheim 1981).

I further decided to focus my research on one of the most transitional and ambiguous periods in life, the moment when the physical human being is created, but where – at the same time – it requires much assurance of its social position and acceptance: the prenatal and postnatal era. This 'beginning-of-life' period of gestation, birth and early childhood is of interest to me as it is the time in which personhood is imminent but not yet assured. This is the time of emergence in which the "rudimentary components" of a person, its body and life, must be supplemented with identity and personhood (Fortes 1987: 193). Unfortunately, most of the previously mentioned anthropologists have not taken this prenatal and postnatal period into account when discussing the production of personhood through social practice.

The question of children becoming fully socially accepted personas has largely remained the interest of anthropologists who work explicitly on children and infancy. Most literature and data found on this subject, however, focuses on children's social incorporation through the study of cultural specific enculturation, socialization and education processes, as, for example, the works of Mead (1928), Morton (1996), Schiefferlin (1990), Raum (1949) exemplify. These studies depict how personhood is shaped throughout infancy and how children come to be bearers of culture; hence they do not provide elaborate information on the prenatal and postnatal genesis of a child's personhood.

In this working paper I will show that it is important not to exclude children – prenatal and postnatal – from the study of person and also that children's studies should not be restricted to socialization processes, as both approaches positively supplement each other. Moreover, I suggest that the social and ritual incorporation of children depends much on the cultural specific definition and concept of person and personhood of the society they are born into and that these are complementary.

To be able to gain an understanding on the Hamar concept of *edi* and its social negotiation it further appears to be most useful to draw the focus on the prenatal and postnatal rituals, as rituals provide "a key to the understanding of the processes of integration within a social system" (Durkheim 1912, Radcliff-Brown 1922 in Strecker 1988b: 14). The study of rituals enables the anthropologist to gain insight on the social structure and norm that stands behind the ritual practice of a society (Radcliff-Brown 1922). The aim of this paper therefore is to chronologically accompany the emergence of life and personhood through the study of prenatal and postnatal rituals and their social embedding.

As my research is based on my own fieldwork and the interviews I conducted while being in Hamar I will give a short introduction to the circumstances and content of my research and work in Southern Ethiopia in Hamar but also at the SORC (South Omo Research Center) in Jinka. I will further introduce Dambaiti and my informants and the empirical methods I applied during my fieldwork in chapter I.

Chapter II. is an introduction into the world of Hamar providing an overview over the geographical location, economy and history of the Hamar country. I will also describe some of the central social and political organization and transcendental concepts, as they are most vital for the broader understanding of Hamar culture and tradition.

As a child's social status in Hamar essentially depends on its genitors' own ritual preparation and the legitimization of their union I dedicate chapter III. to the parental preconception rituals, which serve to ensure the legitimacy of offspring and thereby the child's incorporation into its kin and into the community.

Chapter IV. is concerned with the time of gestation and birth, but also with the culture specific dealings regarding miscarriages, stillbirth and 'unusual births'.

In chapter V. I will focus on the postpartum rituals of the mother and newborn and the child's first introduction to its kin and community. Further, I will describe the *dotin gilo*, a ritual, which is performed after the birth of the first child (or during gestation), and exemplifies the importance of offspring for the social status of its parents.

Next I will speak about what I call 'children's confirmation rites': rituals that are performed by the child's family and the local elders in the first years of an infant's life. The focus lies here on the *gali gilo*, the child's naming ritual. The rituals described in this chapter are of great significance for the child, as the rites bless its future life and confirm and constitute its social acceptance as *edi* by society. As I will show, however, these rituals also have another important implication, as they serve to protect the child's succeeding siblings from becoming ritually impure and therefore are crucial for their social integration as well.

In the last chapter of this paper I will explore the consequences of disrespecting the social and ritual norm in the context of prenatal and postnatal rituals. The focus here is laid upon the concept of ritual impurity and its implication for the children, parents and the Hamar society as a whole. This chapter shows the importance and influence of the previously described rituals, but also examines in how far the concept of ritual impurity is used as a means of social control.

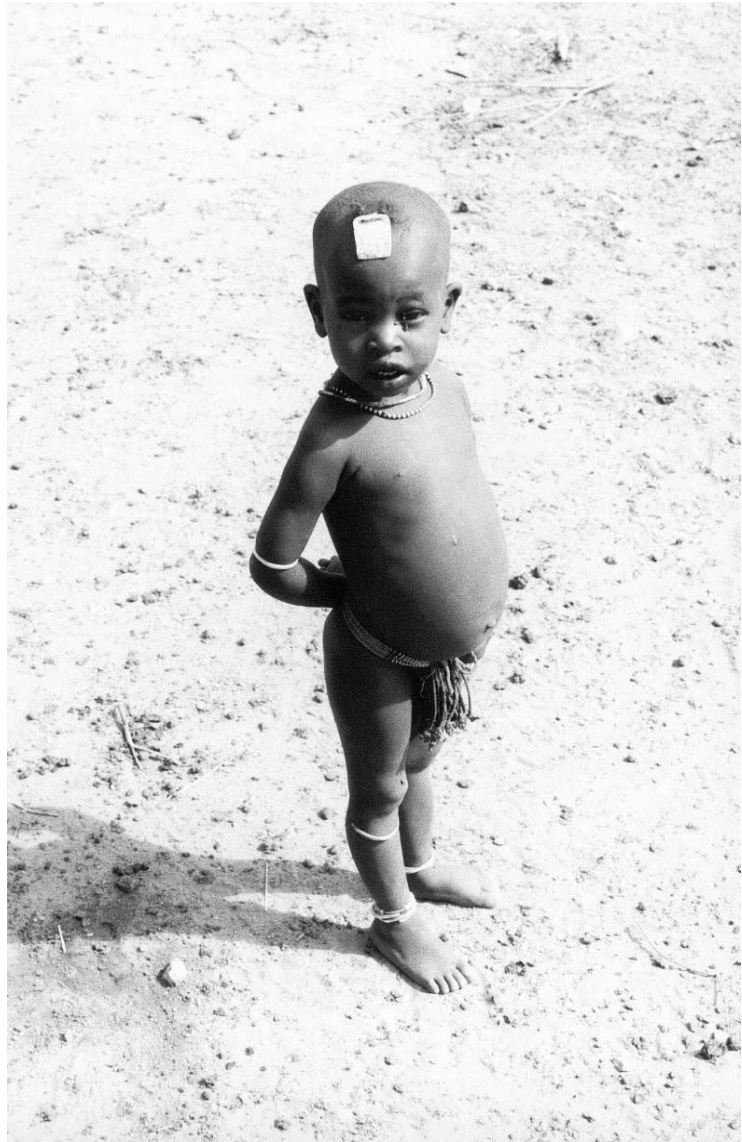


fig.1 Waki, daughter of Almada

The evening has come to be my friend.
The homestead is full of life.
The cattle returns and
the sound of the cow bells fills the air.
The goat kids eagerly call after their mothers.
The children excitingly run around.
Slowly the night comes in.
The girls sit in front of the hut,
chatting, giggling and singing.
This is when being in Hamar is most beautiful.

(from my field notes, 15.03.01)

I. About the Fieldwork

1. How I Came to Work in South Omo and the SORC

Throughout my studies at the Mainz University I attended several seminars and lectures held by Professor Dr. Ivo Strecker on the South Omo region of Ethiopia. My interest in the region and especially on Hamar² was enhanced by a student excursion in spring 2000.³ The excursion was planned in continuation to a seminar held by Prof. Strecker and his friend Choke Bajje, a Hamar elder, who came as a guest lecturer to Mainz University in the summer of 1999. Through Choke Bajje's personal presence, his accounts and his interaction with us students, the idea arose for a student excursion. The aim of this two months excursion was to give students the chance to gather first fieldwork experience and deepen their knowledge about the Hamar people, their culture and language outside the seminar room and to follow Choke's personal invitation to come and get to know his country and his people.

The initial plan for the excursion in February 2000 was that three students, Sven Müller, Judith Melzer and myself, first go to Dambaiti,⁴ where Prof. Strecker and Jean Lydall have been conducting research for the past three decades⁵. We then were to hike to Gumaza to the south of Dambaiti, where Choke Bajje lives. Each of us students was to stay with a separate host family within the region of Gumaza for three weeks.

After being in Dambaiti for two days Choke came to pick us up to bring us to Gumaza. Unfortunately, we became very sick during our first days in Gumaza and therefore decided that it would be best to return to Dambaiti and to spend the next weeks there. This decision was based on the fact that Dambaiti is more easily accessed by car than Gumaza and therefore appeared to be the better choice in location given to our health situation.

Strecker's and Lydall's yearlong friendship with the people of Dambaiti made it possible that we were warmly welcomed back in Dambaiti. Lydall who had come to pick us up in Gumaza was also the one who organized my stay at Shada Alma's⁶ homestead whom she has known since his early youth. Shada's family became my guest family, which also hosted me during my succeeding stays in Hamar. They not only introduced me into their family and Dambaiti and but also into the Hamar world of thought. In Dambaiti I began to learn more and more about the Hamar language and their culture.

The fact that the people in Dambaiti have been in contact with anthropologists for the past decades has surely influenced the way the people approached my fellow students and myself. From the first day on I was shown around and urged to participate in the daily chores such as fetching water, herding the goats and preparing food and to write down everything I observed. As Shada said, "Your writing is your grinding!"⁷ Most of the day I

²The name Hamar refers to a specific region as well as to a culturally distinct group situated between the Lower Omo River and Lake Stefanie of South-Western Ethiopia and also to the language spoken among this group (see map 2 and ch. 2.). Throughout this paper I will use this term in all of its three senses. Its specific meaning will either be contextually clarified or I will give an additional explanation. Otherwise I will simply use the term Hamar. Words which are not translated from Hamar into English are marked in italics.

³For further information on the excursions see <www.uni-mainz.de/Organisationen/SORC> [02.02.05].

⁴Dambaiti is a small settlement located between the villages of Dimeka and Turmi (see map 2).

⁵Strecker's and Lydall's accounts on their first fieldwork experiences in Hamar in the years 1970-1974 were published in 1979 as "The Hamar of Southern Ethiopia Vol. I – Work Journal".

⁶Shada Alma is the son of Hailanda and Alma. He himself and his parents are well known through films and books by Strecker and Lydall (for example: Lydall/Head, F, 1990 "The Women Who Smile" and Lydall/Head, F, 1994 "Our Way of Loving").

⁷Shada referred to the fact that Hamar girls spend most of their time grinding sorghum for the family meals whereas I was supposed to do my ethnographical work.

accompanied the women and the girls, but I was also allowed to sit with the boys and the men and to accompany them, for example, to collect honey. My host family called me a child, someone who still had a lot to learn, especially concerning the Hamar language. But Shada, and his wife Eilanda in particular, showed a lot of patience with me and became my primary contact persons.

I came to Dambaiti for the second time in September of 2001. This time I was only accompanied by one more student, Judith Melzer, who also returned to South Omo for further studies. Unlike the first trip in 2000, my stay in 2001 and the following stay in 2002, were both divided into several weeks of fieldwork in Dambaiti/Hamar and several weeks of internship at the South Omo Research Center (SORC)⁸ in Jinka.⁹ In the fall of 2001 I spent two weeks in Dambaiti once more partaking in the everyday life of Shada's family and learning some more Hamar language. After being in the field for a couple of weeks, Judith Melzer and I came to the SORC to assist Susanne Epple and Christina Gabbert (both PhD student of Mainz University) in organizing and carrying out an intercultural workshop on *Convergence and Divergence: The Diversity of Material Culture in South Omo*¹⁰ which was held from the 16th to the 18th of September.¹¹ This workshop was organized in the context of the Special Research Program (SFB 295) "Kulturelle und sprachliche Kontakte: Prozesse des Wandels in historischen Spannungsfeldern Nordostafrikas/Westasiens" of Mainz University within the Project E. 2. "Culture Contact in Southern Ethiopia: Contact Dyades and Cultural Self-Esteem".

The workshop's idea was to give twenty-four male representatives of various different ethnic groups of the South Omo region the opportunity to come together and debate on cultural contact and material culture in the region. Each participant was asked to come to the SORC and to bring one object that he regarded as characteristic of his own respective culture. As Shada Alma, my host father, and his friend Tsasi Aike, the son of Baldambe,¹² were invited to join the workshop, I had an additional opportunity to spend one more week in their company in Jinka and to profit of their and other participants' knowledge throughout the discussion rounds.

During my first two stays in the field in 2000 and 2001 I was able to grasp a first inside view on the Hamar life and some of its specific cultural aspects. Thus I became particularly interested in the question of social incorporation into the Hamar society and the processes and rituals that serve this purpose. As my own social role was that of a young unmarried girl and I hence spent most of my time with the women and their children, I decided to focus my research on the question of children's incorporation rituals. To be able to deepen my knowledge on this topic I decided to return to Dambaiti to conduct further fieldwork in September 2002. As I had a specific research topic in mind and had planned to conduct interviews, I this time chose to work with the help of a translator, Weyneshet Hunegnaw.¹³ Weyneshet speaks Hamar fluently and also has good knowledge of both English and German. She was big help with some of the more complex issues and questions throughout my research. We stayed in Dambaiti for two weeks conducting

⁸ For further information on the SORC see Strecker 1992 and <www.uni-mainz.de/Organisationen/SORC> [02.02.05]

⁹ Jinka is the administrative capital of the South Omo region (see map 2).

¹⁰ See Epple/Brüderlin 2002.

¹¹ For a detailed account on the workshops and the transcriptions of the discussion sessions see <www.uni-mainz.de/Organisation/SORC> [02.02.05]

¹² On Baldambe see ch. 1.1.

¹³ Weyneshet Hunegnaw was born in South Omo. She grew up in Dimeka and Turmi and is very well acquainted with Hamar and speaks their language fluently.

qualitative interviews and many informal conversations with people from Dambaiti mainly within the close environment of Shada's family (see ch. 1.2.).

After two weeks in the field I returned to the SORC where I met with six other students of Mainz University who had been partaking in the 2002 student excursion to different regions of the South Omo.¹⁴ This excursion was also organized by S. Eppele, following up on a preparatory seminar held in the summer of 2002 at Mainz University. Together with Susanne Eppele and Christina Gabbert, we, the students, further organized an exhibition on the results and the donated objects of the preceding workshop.¹⁵ We also involved ourselves in the preparation of the workshop¹⁶ to come, titled *The Pride and Social Worthiness of Women in South Omo*¹⁷, which was to be held at the SORC in the coming week.¹⁸

From October 6th to the 9th women from eight different regions of South Omo came to participate in the workshop and to discuss about women related topics such as girlhood, bridehood, marriage, childbirth and life after menopause. For four days the women debated with each other and with us students. This workshop offered me the opportunity to ask further questions related to my research topic during the sessions and to conduct some further interviews with women from Banna and Bashada, which gave me the enriching possibility to learn more about cultural similarities and variations between Hamar, Banna and Bashada.¹⁹ The transcriptions of the discussion sessions held during both workshops in 2001 and 2002 were very useful sources for this paper.

1.1. Dambaiti, Friends and Informants

As previously mentioned, Dambaiti is where Prof. Strecker and Jean Lydall have been conducting most of their fieldwork since 1970. Strecker and Lydall had come to stay in Dambaiti following the invitation of Baldambe (Father of the Brown Cow), also known as Balambaras Aike Berinas²⁰ who became their host, teacher and friend. "The greatest satisfactions of ethnographic work here in Hamar have mostly centered around Baldambe (...) amidst our confusion, we talk to Baldambe and suddenly things fall into place" (Strecker/Lydall 1979a: 62). Strecker and Lydall recorded the accounts of Baldambe, his "long profound narrative" on the "Hamar life and customs", that became "an indigenous model of Hamar society" (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: vii) which was published as "The Hamar of Southern Ethiopia I: Baldambe Explains" in 1979 and became one of the main literary sources on Hamar. As both Strecker and Lydall, have continuously been working in Hamar they are both well-known and respected and it certainly was of great help for me that people knew that I was affiliated with them.²¹

Dambaiti is a small settlement area with approximately 50 households located close to a dirt road leading from Dimeka to Turmi (see map 2). The surroundings are hilly and

¹⁴ For further information on the student excursion see <www.uni-mainz.de/Organisation/SORC> [02.02.05]

¹⁵ An online version of this exhibition can be viewed at <www.uni-mainz.de/Organisation/SORC> [02.02.05]

¹⁶ This workshop was also organized in the context of the Special Research Program (SFB 295) "Kulturelle und sprachliche Kontakte: Prozesse des Wandels in historischen Spannungsfeldern Nordostafrikas/ Westasiens" of the Mainz University within the Project E.2 "Culture contact in Southern Ethiopia: Contact Dyades and Cultural Self-Esteem".

¹⁷ See also Eppele/Brüderlin 2004.

¹⁸ For further details on the workshop see <www.uni-mainz.de/Organisationen/SORC> [02.02.05]

¹⁹ Banna, Bashada, Hamar and Kara form a cultural unit (see ch. 2.).

²⁰ Baldambe Aike died in the spring of 1995 in the hospital of Arba Minch (Strecker 1998).

²¹ I often was referred to as 'Theoimba nana', which can be translated as the child of *Theoimba*, father of Theo, which is the Hamar name of Strecker, as he is called after his first born son Theo.

one can see the Hamar Mountains arising to the east. When I first arrived at Dambaiti in February 2000 it had not rained for a couple of months, the harvest had failed and the vegetation and the livestock showed the effects of drought. I was therefore amazed at the greenness of the land, the bushes, the fields and the trees when I returned to Hamar in the small rainy season in September 2001.

There are basically two different kinds of settlement forms in Hamar: Either the houses are scattered over some distance, or they are built closely together in a cluster. Dambaiti belongs to the latter kind and therefore has a unique character. People live close by and yet privacy is often kept through thorny fences, which surround the family's homesteads and kraals. It is possible to observe who is going where and talking to whom, but at the same time one can stay aloof if one wishes.

Water for daily use and for watering livestock is fetched in the nearby riverbeds by digging waterholes, as the rivers do not carry water except for a few hours after a strong rainfall.

The nearest weekly market where one can buy sorghum, coffee, some seasonal vegetables and other daily and material goods such as clothes, beads and pots can be reached by a four-hour walk either to Turmi to the south or to Dimeka to the north. There is also some basic infrastructure in Turmi and Dimeka such as schools, missionary stations and a small medical station where basic medical treatment can be obtained.

When I first came to Dambaiti I mainly spent my time within the close circle of Shada's relatives, especially his teenage sister Haito, his wife Eilanda and his sister-in-law Almanda. As I am an unmarried woman I was classified as a girl like Haito and her cousin Ali who became my friends. But I also became especially close to Almanda, the widow of Shada's older brother Alma who now lives with Shada's younger brother Shar-dumbe. She became my *muna-bel*,²² my playful bond friend as she always prepared some sorghum roles for me to eat.

With each stay in Dambaiti my relationship to the people grew closer. Whereas I had been very shy in going to different places during my first stay, I started to move more freely and to go to different houses to drink coffee and chat or to accompany other women to go fetch water during the following stays. I believe that the fact that I was the only student to return twice to Dambaiti improved the confidence with which I approached people and with which they approached me. I was accepted even more and Shada became less protective over me as he realized that I always came back to stay at his house. I also became a kind of messenger for the other students who did not return to Dambaiti. I therefore started to develop a special relationship with Biiirinda, Judith's host mother, and Sarinda, Sven's host mother. They often invited me and always loved to hear stories and news from 'their children'.²³ I enjoyed spending time with them as I always felt that they warmly welcomed me into their homes.

When I arrived in Dambaiti in 2002 it was my host father Shada whom I first told about my intentions and plans and the topic I wanted to work on. I explained that I was interested in rituals that are done for children, before and after they are born, rituals that concern the mother, the child, or the father. It was Shada who explained to his family what I was planning to do and who told them to support and help me and to answer my questions seriously, as, again, I am 'a child of *Theoimba*' and as I was here to learn. Shada himself was very excited about my research topic, as Almanda, my *muna-bel*, had just given birth to her second son whose name-giving-ceremony, the *gali gilo*, which I will discuss in

²² *Muna* are small steamed sorghum or maize roles. "*Bel* can be translated as 'bond friend'. The *bel* relationship is established by gifts and counter gifts" (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 174).

²³ Sven and Judith.

ch VI., was going to be performed soon. For the ritual to take place, however, it was necessary that Shada's father, Alma, returned to Dambaiti. Therefore Shada was eager to arrange his release from the Dimeka police station, where he was held under surveillance, so that the ritual could be performed while I was there.²⁴ Throughout my research I conducted all of my interviews with people within Shada's family and my close circle of friends, for example, with Almada and Tsasi's wife Aikenda, and Duka,²⁵ Baldambe's daughter, who now lives in Banna (see map 2) and whom I knew from my first stay in South Omo.

1.2. Method

As mentioned above, my first stays in 2000 and 2001 in South Omo not only focused on the study of Hamar language and on an 'outside of the seminar room' approach to Hamar, but moreover on getting a first emic view of Hamar culture. Through participant observation I was able to learn, to study and to partake in situations, conversations, actions and rituals in different contexts, compositions and settings. I therefore had the opportunity to gather diverse impressions and perspectives on various aspects of Hamar life. To participate in the everyday life in Dambaiti, however, also meant building up close personal relationships to the people and specifically to my host family. Through my own given social role, being young, female and unmarried, it was most natural that I spent most of my time with girls and women and therefore also with the children. I not only accompanied them in their day-to-day life, but I also had the opportunity to experience situations that were highly ritualized; for example, an initiation of a young man or the name-giving ceremony of a child.

It has to be said however, that an approach to my specific research topic without interviews would have been insufficient, as not everything that I am going to deal with in this thesis is publicly displayed, practiced or observable. Some more delicate matters such as child death, ritual impureness of children or infanticide are matters about which I was able to talk to people in theory but never was actually confronted with during my stays. In order to learn more about these matters I decided to conduct qualitative interviews during my last fieldwork in fall of 2002. I furthermore chose to work with a translator, Weyneshet Hunegaw, who assisted me in translating from Hamar into English or German.²⁶ As I wanted to leave room for spontaneity throughout the interviews, without me leading the interviewed individual into a specific direction, I decided not to conduct 'fo-

²⁴ Unfortunately this never came about, as Alma had to stay in Dimeka and was not allowed to return to Dambaiti for two weeks. There had been problems with the police as some youngsters had taken cattle into the Mago National Park to graze, which they were not allowed to do. So all the elders, one of them being Alma, were called to the police station in Dimeka to put a stop on the youngster's actions.

²⁵ Duka is also the protagonist of Lydall's latest film "Duka's Dilemma", which serves as one of the main audiovisual sources for this paper (Lydall/Strecker, F, 2001).

²⁶ Working with a translator proved itself to be fruitful in many ways as I would not have been able to ask such profound and detailed questions without Weyneshet's help. Most of the interviews were very informative and positive. But at the same time it also led to some difficulties, as some interviews were cut short in content and preciseness and the rhetoric quality of speech is sometimes sacrificed through translation. The Hamar way to talk and to explain is very elaborate and it can only lose by trying to put it into another language's words. The interview situation is furthermore influenced by the presence of a third person, which affects the relationship between the interviewed person and the interviewer, leading to some hesitation and reservation to talk about certain topics. I experienced all of the positive and negative effects of working through a translator while conducting my research in Dambaiti. There is no doubt that every research only gains when one is able to talk and to work with the people without having to depend on somebody else's 'mouth', as my host family would jokingly refer to Weyneshet. Unfortunately however, did my knowledge on Hamar language and the relatively short time span that I had to conduct my research, not allow me to conduct my interviews by myself.

cused interviews' or to work with questionnaires. The interviews that I made were either 'narrative' ones or 'half-standardized interviews' (Beer 2003, Flick 2000, Friedrichs 1980). I mostly began with an opening question, either to motivate my interview partner to tell me his/her thoughts about the matter, or to actually pursue a specific subject I had in mind.

In order to receive a polyphonic account on my research topic I conducted interviews with people of both sexes and from various age groups. If possible the interviews were held with one person in a setting where we could be alone. All my interview partners were people who I had come to know well during my time in South Omo and who felt at ease talking to me. As the daily chores do require much of the people's time and as there are not many moments in which one actually is alone, one of the greatest tasks was to find some time to actually sit down with my interview partner and talk without interruption or interference from others, especially to the women. The length of the interviews ranged from thirty minutes up to one and a half hours.

Even though I knew my interview partners well, their descriptions and accounts must mainly be understood as idealized descriptions of Hamar rituals and customs, rather than personal reports. My interview partners wanted to tell me how things – to their knowledge – are expected to be done and dealt with according to the Hamar traditions. However, through my own personal observations and supplementary accounts of researchers such as Lydall and Epple, I was able to see that the ideal and the reality may vary. I therefore do combine my own observations and my interview results with the supplementary details by both above-mentioned researchers.

In this paper I further do use literature and audiovisual material specified on this region (mainly provided by Strecker, Lydall and their former students) to be able to give an accurate account of the rituals and social processes that serve to incorporate a child into Hamar society. I further include broader ethnographic sources from various parts of the world to complement and assess my results and to clarify some of the topics dealt with in this paper.



fig. 2 On the way to Dambaiti



fig. 3 View onto some houses of Dambaiti

“Hamar country is dry,
its people are rooks,
they are tough.
Living between the rocks,
And drying up,
They dig fields
And make beehives.
That’s Hamar.”

(Baldambe in Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 157)

II. Introduction to the World of the Hamar

Chapter II. shall provide the reader with an introduction into the world of Hamar, its history, environment, as well as its social and political structure. Some concepts discussed in this chapter, however, are not only significant for the understanding of day-to-day life in Hamar, but – as I will show as this paper proceeds – are of specific importance for rituals which concern reproduction, childbirth and the way children are defined in their social status and being within the Hamar society.

2. Ethnographic Setting: Geography, Economy and History – An Overview

The Hamar of today²⁷ form an ethnical group of approximately 15,000 to 20,000 people living in southwestern Ethiopia close to the Kenyan and Sudanese border. Their area of settlement, *hamar pe*,²⁸ expands between the Lower Omo River and the Woito River north of Lake Rudolf and Lake Stefanie.²⁹ The languages spoken in this region belong to four different language groups: Cushitic, Nilo-Saharan and Omotic. This region “has the highest diversity of ethnically different groups in the whole of Ethiopia and possibly even in Africa. Linguistically this is most readily visible (...) in an area of less than 15,000 square kilometers more than ten different languages are spoken (excluding dialects!)” (Strecker 1976b: 1). The Hamar language and the very similar Bashada, Banna and Kara languages belong to the South Omotic group (Lydall 1988a: 77). The Bashada, the Banna and the Kara are the closest neighbors of the Hamar, not only geographically, but they also share most cultural, social, socio-political characteristics.³⁰ They “form a single cultural unit in which one language is spoken, intermarriage is free, war is prohibited, and most rituals and institutions are the same...” (Lydall 1976: 393). People, especially men, move between these groups, relatives are visited, close individual relationships, such as bond-friendships are common and the people from the different groups meet and interact at the weekly markets, for example, in Dimeka. During my stay in Hamar I met many Banna and Bashada, but no one from Kara. The Kara³¹ country is further away but nevertheless they are considered to be close to the Hamar, Banna and Bashada.

The Hamar adapted to the harsh character of the climate in their country, where rainfall is scarce and unreliable, by developing an economy of divers subsistence consisting of pastoralism, apiculture, slash- and burn cultivation, hunting and gathering. Depending on the grazing conditions, cattle and small stock – such as sheep and goats – are kept close to the settlement areas and/or cattle may additionally be brought to outlying grazing areas, for example, along the Omo River. On a shifting slash- and burn basis cultivation of sorghum, maize and some other types of grain is practiced. Women gather leafs, wild fruits and roots as additional source of food. The Hamar country is well known

²⁷ For further historical information see Strecker 1999.

²⁸ Lit. meaning ‘the country of the Hamar’.

²⁹ See map 2.

³⁰ For profound accounts on Bashada culture and customs see Eppe 1995 and Mohaupt 1995.

³¹ In former times the Kara also used to be predominantly cattle herders, but tsetse fly and sleeping sickness diminished their stock immensely. Agriculture and apiculture became their basic means of subsistence. However, cattle are still needed for ritual purposes and I was told by Shada that they keep some livestock, herded by bond friends, for example in Hamar. Even though they are considered to be *edi kalla*, one, with Hamar, Banna, Bashada, many of their rituals do vary and I therefore will not include them in this paper. Furthermore, literary sources on Kara are scarce, as not much research has been conducted in their region. For an ethnographic description of the Kara see Gezagh 1994, “The Kara of the Lower Omo Valley: Subsistence, Social Organisation and Relations with Neighbouring Groups”.

throughout the region for its honey, which is collected by young men in beehives. Hunting is not practiced as much as it used to be, the scarcity of game and the prohibition of hunting by the government has reduced its significance as source of nutrition in the recent years.

I will only briefly touch upon the history of the Hamar in this context, but I still want to point out some historical aspects, which especially will help to understand some ritual features³² which I will discuss later on in this paper.

As in most pre-literate societies the history of the Hamar lies in the mist of the past and is passed on only orally. Baldambe tells it as follows:

“Long ago, in the time of the ancestors, the Hamar had two *bittas*.³³ One was Banki Maro, one was Elto. The first ancestor of Banki Maro came from Ari and settled in Hamar in the mountains. He the *bitta*, made fire, and seeing this fire people came, many from Ari, others from Male, others from Tsamai, others from Konso, others from Kara, others from Bume and others from Ale...” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 2).

The Hamar therefore seem to consist of members from various different groups, who all listened to the word of the ritual leader, the *bitta*, who told them to “...leave the custom of your fathers and listen to my word” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 22). There might not be any factual evidence for this mythological tradition, but it is known that the languages spoken belong to the same language family. How long it took for present-day Hamar culture to develop is unclear though. Strecker recounts that the Hamar used to live in the mountains along the Rift Valley in the nineteenth century where their existence was more stable and less perilous, as the climate was more favorable for agriculture, less conflicts with neighboring groups occurred and people were threatened less by sickness (Strecker 1976a: 585). This relatively stable life ended when the Hamar were forced to seek refuge from King Menelik’s troops coming from the north capturing the country up to the Omo River at the end of the 19th century. The Hamar attempted to flee southwards to the land of the Arbore, the Kara and the Dassanetch, but many of them were enslaved and killed. In the 1920s some Hamar slowly started to return from their exile to their original settlement areas. This return was not a collective one, but an individual. Some families decided to move back and reestablish themselves in the old region. Their expulsion and exile, however, left a mark on their social and economic structure³⁴, which is still of relevance today.

“...it is this reoccupation of their territory which has become the basis of modern individualistic Hamar social structure (...) Hamar, then is a relatively new society (...) one which in response to strong external pressures, reshaped and is reshaping itself, building on the old matrix of its indigenous culture.” (Strecker 1976a: 585-586)

³² The concept of a mutual background is of particular interest when looking, for example, at ritual utensils, such as the Ari coffee pot, which is essential for the *gali* ritual [name giving ritual] of a child of which I will talk of in ch. VI.

³³ On *bitta* see ch. 2.1.

³⁴ “In the nineteenth century, when the Hamar undisturbedly cultivated their mountains, the economy may well have been 80 per cent based on agriculture; by around 1920, when they had returned from exile, the pattern was reversed, i. e. 80 per cent pastoralism and 20 per cent agriculture” (Strecker 1976a: 586).

During my stay in Hamar I have met a few old men who still remember the time of the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941) and its impact on the southern region. Not only did the Italians take their cattle and subject many Hamar to forced labor, but their invasion also left a strong mark on the interethnic relationships between the groups in South Omo. After the British and the Ethiopian troops pushed the Italians out, the animosity between local groups, facilitated by the fact that many weapons had been brought into the country, arose with force and led to many interethnic conflicts (Strecker 1999: 2).³⁵

2.1. Political Organization

Ad. E. Jensen³⁶ was one of the early anthropologists to come to southern Ethiopia in the years 1950-52 and 1954-56. He and his colleagues gathered much data, which – even today – is of significant ethnographical value. However, some of their information gathered is misleading or even incorrect such as his information on the political system of the Banna, Bashada and Hamar. In his early accounts on the South Omo region Jensen³⁷ states that the ‘chiefs’ of these group are addressed as *bitta*: “Der Häuptling heißt bei den Banna – ebenso wie bei den Hammar and Baschada – *bitta*” (Jensen 1959: 316). Unfortunately he was misinformed when told that the *bitta* was the chief of these groups. The Hamar, Banna and Bashada have an uncentralized political system: they belong to the acephalic societies with no chief or king. As Strecker describes it, “the Hamar belong to those ‘tribes without rulers’ (Middleton/Tait 1958) which have uncentralized political systems and live without formal laws or punishment, without great distinctions of wealth, without social class, without nobility, chiefs or kings” (Strecker 1990: 39).³⁸ There is no political hierarchy in Hamar. Like the Banna and the Bashada, the Hamar traditionally have two *bittas*, who are ritually responsible for the well being of the country and its people, but they are not chiefs in any political sense.

The *bitta* is an inherited status, which is of interest in situations in which the peace within the group itself or between groups might be in danger. A *bitta*’s homestead might for example serve as a refuge for someone who has committed a severe crime. This person may then seek asylum at the *bitta*’s homestead and the conflict will then be solved through mediation by the *bitta* between the two parties involved. Jensen correctly observed that the *bitta*’s influence seems to be limited, but he attributed this to the fact that the Banna, of which he talks of in this context, do not believe in authority.³⁹ This might be correct in the sense that these groups do not have an instituted authority system to which they must obey, but the *bitta*’s influence has never been one of authority, rather one of mystical power. While being in exile the Hamar learned to live without the *bitta*’s ritual support, though. Their estrangement from the *bitta* was endorsed by the fact that a new spokesman towards the Ethiopian government was chosen. This new worldly office, the

³⁵ For historical information and details on interethnic conflicts see Strecker 1992, “Berimba’s Resistance: The Life and Times of a Great Hamar Spokesman as Told by His Son Aike (Baldambe)”.

³⁶ Jensen led an expedition supported by the Frobenius Institute in Frankfurt/Germany together with his colleagues E. Haberland, E. Pauli and W. Schulz-Weidner to south Ethiopia in the years 1950-52 and 1954-56 to gather ethnographic, linguistic, historical, geographic and botanical information on the region. They traveled from north to south passing through Banna, Bashada, Maale, Shangama, Ubamer, Dime and more. They worked with translators and only stayed for short periods of time, which might explain some of their misleading data. Their research results were published in 1959 as “Altvölker Süd-Äthiopiens”.

³⁷ “‘Bitta’ literally means ‘the first’, the first ancestor of the Hamar who came to settle the area. It also means ‘the first’ in authority and ‘the first’ in transcendental and ritual power” (Strecker 1976b: 65).

³⁸ On political and social mechanism in Hamar see also Strecker 1996.

³⁹ “Trotzdem ist – wie bereits erwähnt – seine Macht unter den wenig autoritätsgläubigen Banna nur sehr bedingt anerkannt” (Jensen 1959: 316).

balabat,⁴⁰ had never existed before and it appears that it decreased the *bitta*'s influence. In theory, however, the *bitta* is still highly respected.

In the egalitarian Hamar society the married men, the *donzana* (plural of *donza*), build the backbone of the politics.⁴¹ A *donza* is a man who has been initiated, who has married, begotten children and proved himself to be a responsible man. He is the head of the house, homestead, the nuclear and extended family; furthermore, he is an active part of the society. A *donza* has the right to partake in all political and decision-making processes that are of public concern. Among the *donzana* the principle of seniority is followed. To become a *donza* is not only of political interest for a man but also of great importance for his social status (Strecker 1988a: 72-73). The aspect and the consequences of becoming a full male member of the Hamar society by becoming a *donza* will be discussed further in ch. 4. and ch. 10.

The *zarsi* are called for when a political decision needs to be taken or any other kind of problem that is of public concern requires to be settled within the group. The term *zarsi* applies for both the individual *donza*, who acts together with other *donza* in the interest of the community, and also for the actual group of *donza*, who are called for and who seek to find a mutual solution.⁴² Both are called *zarsi*. Acting as *zarsi* the *donza* gains the authority to speak, to discuss and to influence public decisions.

Among the *zarsi* an *ayo*,⁴³ a spokesman, is chosen. He is the one who leads the decision making process during the public meeting, the *osh*, at which the to be discussed issue is articulated and conferred about. As Strecker points out, "Their [the *ayo*'s] political standing is always shifting, and their never ending struggle for influence lies at the very heart of Hamar politics" (Strecker 1976b: 60).

2.2. Social Organization

The Hamar social organization is based on two moieties, *Binna* and *Galabu*, which again are divided into twenty-four different clans:⁴⁴ *Ba*, *Worla*, *Gata*, *Waran*, *Dila*, *Dadaso*, *Berda*, *Karla* and *Garshima* belong to the *Binnas* moiety, *Duma*, *Lawan*, *Misha*, *Mais*, *Wolmuk*, *Kursi*, *Bucha*, *Ziran*, *Babate*, *Arka*, *Olasha*, *Gulet*, *Gasi* and *Adasa* belong to the *Galabu* moiety, the *Rach* clan belongs to both. The moiety affiliation, which is inherited through patrilineage, is of special importance in matters such as marriage regulations and certain taboos⁴⁵.

⁴⁰ Kegnazmatch Berinas was chosen to be their representative, their *balabat*, towards the Ethiopian government. (Strecker 1976b: 65).

⁴¹ Women are not directly involved in politics, but they surely have a subtle influence on the course of things. As Lydall points out, "...behind the apparent male domination, we find a hidden, but non-the-less effective, female domination (Lydall without year.a: 2).

⁴² "This goal, directed action, is the essential part of the definition of the 'zarsi'" (Strecker 1976b: 59).

⁴³ The office of an *ayo*, is not an inherited one, but one which has to be gained. Only very competent men may become *ayo*. The *ayo* carries a special kind of spear as social symbol for his right and duty to speak up at public meetings (Strecker 1976b: 60).

⁴⁴ Nine clans, *gir*, belong to the *binnas* moiety (practicing exogamy) and fourteen to the *galabu* moiety, whereas the *rach* clan is affiliated with both moieties (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 231).

⁴⁵ To cite an example from 'Baldambe Explains': "Now people don't marry the girls of WORLA. The girls of WORLA must seek far. When one of their girls does marry, the husband dies. When men marry them, the men die (...) That's how it is. Hamar's girl talk" (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 135).

"A woman who marries DUMA, LAWA, or ADASA, will be allowed to milk goats, if a young boy of her husband's clan ritually milks a goat on her behalf. Otherwise, she will be never be allowed to milk the goats. This is so for all GALABU clans" (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 142).

Jensen also noted, that, "Wenn ein galabu mit einer galabu oder ein binna mit einer binna Liebeshandel hatte, die Folgen trugen, so wurde das Kind im Walde ausgesetzt und nicht aufgezogen." (Jensen 1959: 329). Unfor-

After her marriage a woman will not only move to her husband's house (vitriolocality), but she will also take on her husband's clan and with that all the clan obligations and taboos. Marriage affiliations also secure the kinship relations throughout the Hamar country as girls are often married off far afield and by doing so the widely dispersed network of relatives is secured (Lydall 2004: 218).

The primary social unit, however, which influences the people's everyday life most, is the nuclear family. The nuclear family, consisting of a husband and his wife, lives together in one homestead, the *dele*.⁴⁶ As a family grows with the years the *dele* extends as well. The couple bears children and eventually the grown up sons will bring their wives to live with their family and bear further children. A *dele* usually consists of a couple of houses, a goat enclosure and a cattle kraal. The authority within a *dele* always lies with the senior most male person, the father, or if he dies, with the oldest son. In my case the *dele* I lived in was composed of Shada's father Alma, the head of the family, his wife Hailanda, his brother's widow Almanda,⁴⁷ her three children, Shada himself and his wife Eilanda, their three children and Shada's young sisters Wante and Waya and Shada's brothers, whom I did not meet much, as they spend most of their time with the cattle. During my first two stays Shada's younger sister Haito also lived at her mother's house, but when she married in 2003 she moved to her husband's home.

An agglomeration of different *dele* is called *gurda*, which can be translated as 'village' or 'settlement'. As already mentioned in ch.2., these can be of a scattered or of a compact type. A *gurda* is not necessarily permanent; external as well as internal factors may lead to its move or even to its dissolution. The relationship between the inhabitants of a *gurda* is most often characterized by neighborly and family affiliation. Furthermore, a *gurda* forms a living but also work community in which many, informal and formal, relationships are maintained. There is no political head within a *gurda*, the decision makers are the *donza*, the married men (see above).

3. Transcendental Concepts

3.1. *Barjo* – Well Being and Good Fortune

The Hamar do not believe in a specific creation of the world at a particular point in time. In their understanding everything is interlinked dialectically, a continuous creation, in which nothing, neither humankind nor nature, changes without the other. The Hamar term *barjo*, or *bairo*, has often been misconstrued as something comparable to the Christian notion of God and not only Jensen,⁴⁸ but also Missionaries⁴⁹ working in South Omo tend to interpret *barjo* as such. The Hamar say that *barjo* has created the world; however, *barjo* implies more than just 'creator'. *Barjo* moreover may mean 'well being', 'good fortune', 'creative power' or 'fate'. The notion of *barjo* is not specific in itself, "but gets its meaning in its context" (Strecker 1976b: 78). The Hamar elders call forth *barjo*, (*barjo äla* means 'to call forth *barjo*'), and by doing so they bless the country, its people and maintain the balance of things. *Barjo* is called forth in ritual, but also seemingly profane but ritualized situations, such as the daily coffee-sessions. Every morning the men of my host father's homestead

tunately, however, I know too little about clan specific variations of rituals or customs to be able to incorporate them into my accounts.

⁴⁶ The term *dele* applies to the homestead itself, but also the actual family.

⁴⁷ After the death of her husband a widow becomes the head of her own household. She also has the option to leave and to live with somebody else. In Almanda's case she decided to stay and to continue to live with her deceased husband's family.

⁴⁸ "Der Gottesname ist bei den Hammar ist *bargo*." (Jensen 1959: 342).

⁴⁹ p. i., Epple 01.11.04.

gather in Alma's house and he, the most senior one, calls upon *barjo* before drinking coffee. Alma takes the first sip of his coffee and sprays it through his lips into the air; chanting calling for *barjo*. The other male representatives of the family would join in, repeating the last word of each phrase. Men call for good things to come, such as health, rain, bees and harvest and for the bad things, like draught, hunger, sickness to leave. Even though there is no centralized social or political structure in Hamar,

“...there still exist some basic hierarchies. It is within these hierarchies that the concept of *barjo* and the practice of the *barjo äla* function. Who tries to control whom in Hamar may be seen by who calls *barjo* for whom. It is the older, married men who call *barjo* for the young, the women, the livestock, the bees, and by extension, the whole world around them. Women⁵⁰ and children may not call *barjo*.” (Strecker 1988a: 73)

Nevertheless is *barjo* not only something which comes from the ‘exterior’, it may also be ‘within’. There are certain plants,⁵¹ places, animals and objects that are considered to be *barjo* and which therefore are of great ritual importance.⁵² *Barjo* is also part of a person's own self, though. Its loss may lead to severe sickness or even to the death of a person. Someone who has died is said to have lost his/her *barjo*. Consequently it is crucial for the well being of every person to have and to keep one's own *barjo*. For this reason the Hamar also do have certain rituals which are meant to help increase or repair someone's *barjo*. This concept does not only apply for the adult Hamar, but is also crucial for the well-being and fate of unborn babies and small children. I will therefore come back to this topic in ch. 6.4. in which I will describe a ritual with which children – even the unborn – ones receive *barjo*.

3.2. *Maeshi* – Ancestral Spirits

Another immanent transcendental aspect in Hamar life is the belief in ancestral spirits, the *maeshi*. As I have shown above; *barjo* plays a vital role within the social structure of Hamar, it encompasses the well being of the country and the people. While *barjo*, however, has a general and constructive function, the *maeshi* have a particular, destructive and malevolent function. Any human being who is an incorporated member of the Hamar society will become a *maeshi* after his/her death. As such it may exercise negative power over the living. A dead spirit is believed to be able to harm its descendants if angry, bringing sickness and disease over the living.⁵³ To console the *maeshi* the living must sacrifice food, drink and other objects to the ancestral spirit.⁵⁴ In order to assess the cause of someone's sickness a diviner is consulted. Often the cause is said to be the malevolence of a

⁵⁰ Women do not call *barjo* as the men do, they create it “through daily actions: by sweeping the gateway, by praising the men in the harvest songs or by simply wishing others well.” (p. i., Lydall in Epple 1995: 103)

⁵¹ Plants which are considered being *barjo*, such as coffee, the *baraza* tree and the creeper-like plant *gali*, are of special interest here as they are not only used in many ritual occasions but also play an important role in children's rites such as the naming ritual of which I will talk of in ch. VI. (the *gali* plant has been defined as *Ipomoea spathulata* Hall and the *baraza* as *Grewia mollis* A. Juss by Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 212).

⁵² For further details on the different concepts of *barjo* see Strecker 1988a.

⁵³ “When the burial rites have been completed the dead spirit is said to have gone across the big waters (*baz*) and will not afflict the living any more” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 178).

⁵⁴ As the dead spirits are dead, animals, which are given as gifts must be killed, so that the spirit of the dead animal can enter the world of the *maeshi*. The killing of an animal for a dead spirit is called *uka*, jab. Food and Drinks, however, are spilled onto the places of which is said, that the dead spirits resides, for example, at the hearth where the ashes of the dead fires lies (Lydall 1992: 2).

maeshi. If the sick person does not get better, though, the diviner must have done wrong and another dead spirit or the sick person's own *barjo* must be responsible for the illness.⁵⁵

If rituals are not performed correctly or not performed at all during one's lifetime, the unfinished rituals later become a threat to the person's undisturbed existence as a dead spirit. After the person's death his/her spirit will bring misfortune over his/her descendants "in order to induce them to complete the outstanding rituals" (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 183). *Maeshi* are moreover displeased by mistakes made in ritual performances and "whenever the living leave their traditional way of life. As such the *maeshi* are the most important factor in Hamar conservatism" (Strecker 1976b: 81).

The belief that members of Hamar society are capable of becoming "vehicles of ancestral presence" (Fortes 1987: 256) after their death is also of interest in the search for an answer to the question who is incorporated into or excluded from becoming or being a member of the society. As Fortes writes on the Tallensi, "So one can say that the real test of having achieved personhood is to have had the potentiality, all through life, of becoming a worshipped ancestor..." (Fortes 1987: 257). If someone is said not to become a *maeshi* after his/her death, this consequently implies that he/she is not seen as person and a member of the Hamar society. Status in after-life is therefore directly linked to who one was and which status one had when still alive.

⁵⁵ For more information on ancestral spirits and their influence on the living see also Lydall 1992.



fig. 4 The homestead of my host family

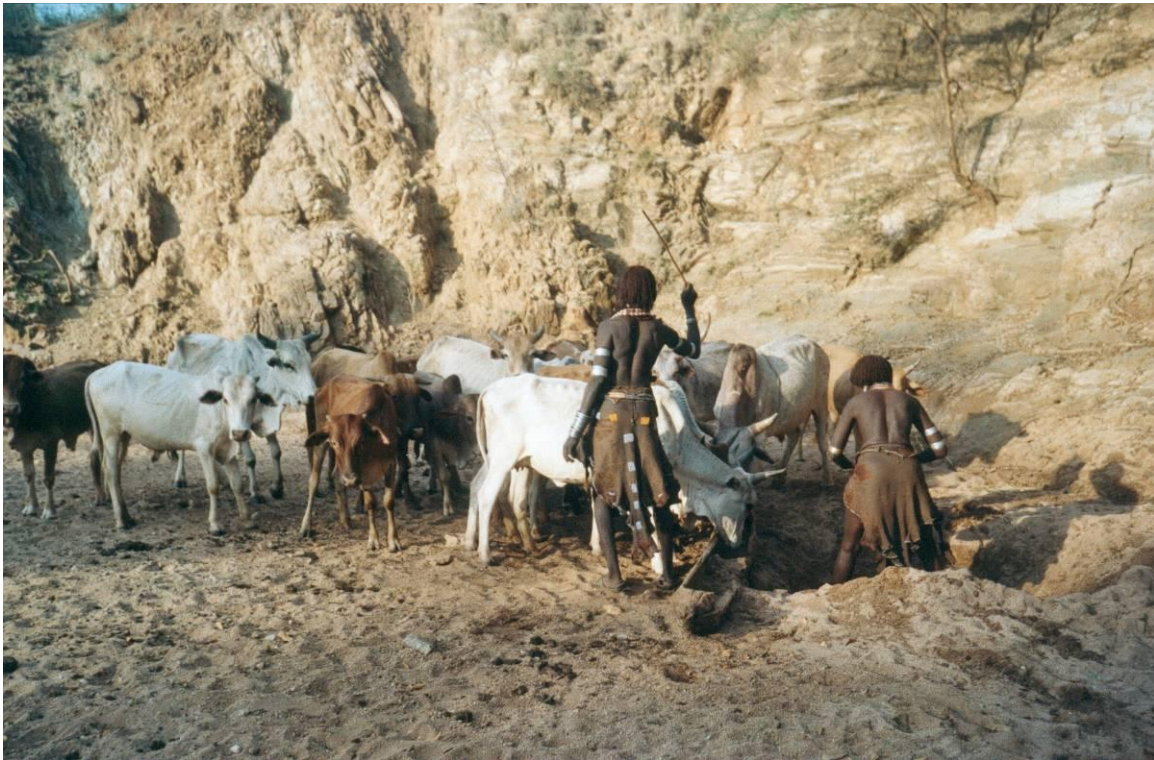


fig.5 Women watering cattle at the river bed



fig. 6 Sorghum field



fig. 7 Hamar woman sorting coffee



fig. 8 Shada (left) and his brothers collecting *shoko gurri*, a special honey taken from earth bees, which is said to be *barjo* and is used as medicine.

“When you have become a woman,
after you have given birth to a child (...)
then you notice that it is good to be a woman,
‘Why did I not become a woman earlier?’
That is what you say then.
It is so good to have children.
“Why did I just sit around?”
That is what you think with you heart.
When you are a girl you think it is awful to marry.
But when you have become an *uta*,
and you have your first child,
you start thinking that being a girl is awful.”

(Kerri in Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 44)

III. The Path to Legal Parenthood: Preconception and Prenatal Rituals

The incorporation process of a child into Hamar society starts long before the baby is even begotten by its parents. The path of unborn life must be primed through several preparatory preconception and prenatal rituals, which are not always explicitly recognizable as such as they – at the time at which they are performed – may appear to be primarily rituals concerning the integration or status change of the man and the woman involved. As van Gennep points out,

“...rites of pregnancy and childbirth must be viewed as having considerable individual and social importance; rites (...) intended to facilitate delivery (...) and those involving transference of roles (...) should be placed in a category of secondary rites of passage, since they assure to the future mother and father an entrance into a special segment of society, the most important of all, and the one which constitutes society’s permanent nucleus.”
(van Gennep 1960: 49)

However, most rituals such as initiation and marriage not only concern the actual boy/man or girl/woman in their present state, they furthermore are of vital significance for the descendants of the person and his/her reproduction. As “the social status of the child” needs to be “secured through the legitimate union of the parents” (Raum 1940b: 77). Strecker and Lydall and some of their students have already described most of these rituals in Hamar. Nevertheless, I wish to discuss them one more time, this time focusing on their precursory meaning for unborn life. In the following chapters I will therefore deal with the rituals in Hamar, which secure the legitimate reproduction of men and women such as marriage, bridehood and bridal rituals and prenatal rites.

4. Becoming *Donza* – The Right to Father Legitimate Children

“After he has killed some fierce animal or man, then: ‘Take the *boko* stick.’⁵⁶ Otherwise: ‘A, a! I have not killed a hyena, I have not killed a lion, so I will not marry a woman. Only when I have killed a hyena will I marry. Only when I have killed a lion will I marry. Only when I have killed a leopard will I marry. Only when I kill an elephant will I marry.’ (...) ‘Who is it? Has his head been shaved for a woman or why was it shaved?’ If he has been feeble, if he has fucked donkeys and was outdone by the hyena and the lion, then his head will be shaved only because of a woman. (...) ‘Let him take the *boko* stick for he has grown up. Now let him become an adult man.’” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 74-75)

In ch. 2.1. I have already pointed out some of the political importance and implication of the social status of *donza*. Being a *donza*, though, does not only imply an increase of political influence, it furthermore has great impact on the social position of a man.⁵⁷ By being initiated a boy gains the right to marry and to father legitimate children and therefore to secure the continuation of his lineage.⁵⁸ To become a *donza*, requires a boy to pass

⁵⁶ The *boko* is a short carved wooden stick, which is taken by a boy who is going to undergo initiation and become an *ukuli*. For further explanations on the *boko* see Epple/Brüderlin 2002: ch. 3.

⁵⁷ See also ch. 10. on the sitting ritual, the *dotin gilo*.

⁵⁸ To die before one has had the chance to marry and father legitimate children is considered the most unfortunate death, as the deceased is then deprived of his right to continue his lineage. Would he at least have been

through several steps of initiation, which climax in the leap over the cattle.⁵⁹ At what age a *marid*,⁶⁰ an uninitiated boy, becomes an *ukuli*,⁶¹ an initiate, may vary as the male members of a family are initiated following the order of seniority.⁶² On the one hand the term *ukuli* refers to the impureness of the initiate's childhood⁶³ and on the other it hints to the sexual taboos of uninitiated boys. Does an uninitiated boy have sexual contact with females it is often connected with trouble, as they officially should stay away from the girls and women.⁶⁴ Uninitiated boys further have no right to officially claim children they may have fathered (see below).⁶⁵ Reality shows, however, that premarital intercourse occurs as in any other society and I will address this aspect and its consequences further in ch. VII. If an uninitiated boy wants to avoid conflicts and trouble in pursuing his sexual activities, he either may choose to have a relationship with a widow⁶⁶ (p. i., Epple 19.10.04) or he will mingle with the donkeys, the *ukuli*. As Baldambe tells,

“Now the youth has no woman. One youth is bright, bright and finds a woman; but for the one who is feeble, feeble, then the donkey is a woman! A donkey has top teeth. A cow has no top teeth. A cow is forbidden. One is not allowed to touch a cow, one is not allowed to a goat, one is not allowed to touch a sheep. But a donkey is *mingi*,⁶⁷ he has top teeth. If you want to fuck, fuck a donkey!” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 73-74)

During the initiation period the *ukuli* is supported and accompanied by the *maz* (initiated men who have not married yet) who help him to perform the necessary rituals and who hold the cattle during his leap. After his leap the *ukuli* himself becomes a *maz*.⁶⁸ From now on he is allowed to marry and to found his own family. “Now he has been a *maz* for some

married his widow would have had the right to birth children after his death who would secure her deceased husband's family line (p. i. Epple 20.10.2004). Shada once also told me that the ancestral spirits of these men are feared most, as they are explicitly malevolent (p. i. Shada 19.09.2001).

⁵⁹ For a detailed description of this initiation rite, see Strecker, F, 1979 “Der Sprung über die Rinder: Ein Initiationsritus der Hamar in Südäthiopien” and the explanations given by Baldambe in Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 74-98.

⁶⁰ *Marid* comes from the verb *mara*, which means ‘to stop from’, ‘not allow’. The *marid* are the boys and men, who have not been allowed to become full adult men, to grow up and to marry (Epple 1995: 43).

⁶¹ Boys are circumcised before they are initiated; this is mostly done at when they are in their teens.

⁶² In Dambaiti I have met men who were approximately around their late twenties or early thirties who have not been initiated yet. But I also have heard about boys who were around fifteen or even younger who had already leapt. It is said, that the initiation of the male youngsters is sometimes purposely delayed, so that there are sufficient boys to go and herd the cattle at the far away cattle camps (Lydall, without year.b).

⁶³ “He [the washer who ritually washes the *ukuli* with sand before his initiation] washes away all badness. He washes away all that was bad in his [the *ukuli*'s] childhood, his intercourse with donkeys and relatives (...) Now he contains nothing bad” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 81).

⁶⁴ An exception being that young men are encouraged to have sexual relations with the wives of their elder brothers (p. i., Shada 15.09.02).

⁶⁵ Children fathered by uninitiated boys, are either considered to be the children of the woman's husband if married, or must be aborted if the girl is unmarried (see further ch. VII.).

⁶⁶ Not only uninitiated boys, but also men who are waiting for their bride to come to live with them do sometimes have relationships or even live with widowed women. Children born by widows are nevertheless considered to be the legitimate children of their deceased husband independent of who is the biological father. This kind of relationship is called *baski*. On *baski* relationships see also Mohaupt 1995: 43-45 and Epple, 1995: 90-96.

⁶⁷ *Mingi* means to be ritually impure. I will further discuss the concept of *mingi* in ch. VII.

⁶⁸ On *maz* see Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 95-98.

time. Let the *maz* marry a girl" (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 98). As the age at which a boy becomes a *maz* may vary, the age at which a man marries varies accordingly.⁶⁹

To become a *donza* however does not only require passing initiation and marriage, but also to father a legitimate child. Without legitimate descendants a man does not become a full member of the society in the ritual sense.⁷⁰

As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the network and interdependence of the generations is not only significant for the status of the man, who by fathering a child becomes a full male member of the Hamar society, but also for the status of the child⁷¹ itself. One of the indisputable concepts with regard to the social position of children within Hamar society is that a child always needs to have a legitimate father (and mother)⁷² or someone who will be regarded as such, meaning either the child's genitor must be married to the mother of the child, or the mother must still be or previously has been married to a man who officially will be considered as the pater of the child.⁷³ The child will not be recognized and accepted as a member of society if neither of these conditions are given and consequent measures will be taken. The manner and dimension of these measures will be discussed in ch. VII.

5. *Kemo* – Marriage

As laid out in ch. 4., the men's path to legal fatherhood is to become a *donza*, which requires the man to be married. For a girl, however, motherhood is even more interlinked with marriage. Whereas an uninitiated boy, or unmarried man may unofficially father a child before his marriage, a baby conceived by an unmarried girl is doomed to be aborted⁷⁴ or killed postpartum. Therefore marriage is an indubitable requirement for women to secure their reproduction. Through marriage a man has fulfilled his requirements for social fatherhood. For a woman, though, marriage itself is the initial rite and she must perform further rituals, which will be discussed in the following chapters, during her bridehood period, antenatal and repeatedly after the birth of each child, so that she may legitimately conceive and bear children.

⁶⁹ On marriage practices see further ch. 5.

⁷⁰ A man who dies without fathering a legitimate son is not going to have the same mortuary rites as a man who has fathered legitimate sons. On mortuary rites see Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 64. However, may the wife whose husband has died bear further children, even after his death. These children are still considered to be the legal offspring of deceased man.

⁷¹ Women and motherhood shall be discussed in the following chapters.

⁷² On ritual preparation for pregnancy see ch. 6. On illegitimate pregnancies see ch. 13.

⁷³ Lydall writes, "...the desire to secure descendants for a man even after his death is basically his widow's desire to retrain the kindred of her husband for her children. If her children all belong to her dead husband they also have legitimate claims on all the kinsmen of her dead husband" (Lydall 2001: [unpublished letter]). The same concept applies to Kara as described in Strecker/Lydall 1979a, "Choke talks with Dore about marriage in Kara: 'When we have returned to Dus I will talk to the men and tell them that they should change their way of marriage.' (...) 'Yes, we should marry like the Hamar do,' meaning that they should not marry all the men of one age-group at one and the same time, but that each man should marry when it is most convenient for him and his family. Dore laments that there are too many grown-up men like himself who have not yet married and may not legitimately claim any children as their own: 'It would be better to hold a child on one's arm instead of throwing it into the bush.' Dore has had three unmarried girls as lovers and they all had children whom they had to abandon" (Strecker/Lydall 1979a: 131).

⁷⁴ The aspect of girl-pregnancies will be discussed separately in ch. 13.

5.1. Ways of Marriage

There are two ways of marriage⁷⁵ in Hamar, one through negotiation of the parents of the couple involved, the other by taking the girl by force.⁷⁶ Marriages are arranged between families who are not related to each other⁷⁷ and who usually live in different parts of the Hamar country (Lydall, without year.b: 4). The *Binnas* moiety practices exogamy whereas the *Galabu* moiety may, but must not, practice endogamy. An exception is the *Rach* clan, as it is affiliated with both moieties and therefore is allowed to marry exogamous or endogamous (Strecker/Lydall 1979a: 214). Is a marriage settled through negotiation the parents of the boy will send a go-between to the family of the girl to ask for permission to marry her to their son. As Gude Dalko from Bashada tells it,

“The family, the first thing they will ask of the new husband is a goat and gourd full with honey. The next time the go-between comes to the girl’s homestead, they will ask him for cows. They will ask for honey. When he has brought all these things they will say: ‘Now marry the girl!’”
(Epple/Brüderlin 2003: 59)

The marriage negotiation process and the bridewealth payment⁷⁸ is an extensive one and I will not be able to describe it at length in this context. For more detailed accounts, see the descriptions given by Gude Dalko from Bashada in Epple/Brüderlin 2002 and Baldambe’s explanations in Strecker/Lydall 1979b. Once the parents agree to give their daughter to the boy, a date is set at which they both go to the *wokati k’adä*, the butter man.⁷⁹ The *wokati k’adä* ritually seals the marriage by rubbing cow dung, in this context referred to as butter, on the couple’s hands. The girl then feeds the boy with sorghum, which as a *maz* he was not allowed to eat. Taking turns she takes four⁸⁰ bites of the sorghum rolls and he takes four bites of the sorghum rolls. Baldambe recounts,

⁷⁵ On marriage rituals see also Epple/Brüderlin 2002: 59-63.

⁷⁶ Duka also mentioned that it sometimes happens, that a boy and a girl who have fallen in love with each other decide to run away to secretly marry without the permission of their parents (p. i., Duka 07.10.02). Baldambe also said, that girls may force a *maz* to marry them, by taking hold of his headdress, “That’s why the *maz* always runs away from the girls, because if a girl takes a *maz*’s headdress, he must marry her.” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 154). Hence, both of these variations are not common ways of marriage.

⁷⁷ Legitimate marriage partners are called *tsangaza*. The prohibition of marriages between relatives ensures that the children can trace their kinsmen through the mother’s and the father’s line (Lydall 2004: 218).

⁷⁸ Baldambe described how the first Hamar elders, after having appointed a *bitta*, asked their ritual leader to set the price for a bride: “‘Bitta!’ ‘Woi!’ ‘The people are all poor, they have no cows, they have no goats. It would be bad if one had to give much to get married. Tell us what to do.’ ‘Do you ask me as the *bitta*?’ ‘We have asked you.’ ‘Eh-eh. My country had mountains only. Over there Irgil Barga, here Mama Dunta, and up there Bala Kuntine. Give twenty-eight goats plus one male goat and one female goat.’ ‘Good. What about the cattle?’ The *bitta* said: ‘Both rich and poor should give the same; eighteen head of cattle, plus one ‘stone cow’ and one ‘cloth bull’ which makes twenty altogether.’ (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 5-6).

In contrast to other ethnical groups in South Omo, such as the Mursi, the bridewealth in Hamar is not paid all at once, though. The bridewealth is paid in installments, which are negotiated upon each time the bride’s brothers or cousins come to claim it at the husband’s family. The husband remains indebted to his in-laws for the rest of his life and often times this debt is even inherited by the man’s descendents (Lydall 1988b). On bridewealth depths see also Lydall/Head, F, 1994 “Our Way of Loving”.

⁷⁹ Baldambe recounts that the ascribed office of the *wokati k’adä* is held by someone from the *Gulet* clan. I was not able to find out, however, if this is always the case. This aspect would require some further research.

⁸⁰ The number four is a repetitive theme in Hamar rituals, as many ritual actions are repeated four times. When asking why four is such an important number, Shada explained to me that the number four symbolically relates to the tits of a cow (p. i., Shada 20.09.02).

“After this the girl pulls off your *binyere* belt and you pull off a string from her skirt. You put the string on your lap and she puts your belt around her neck and you drop the skirt string into the bowl. That is all. Now she is a married woman and you are a married man (...) Now you are an elder and no longer an unmarried youth.” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 99)

Once the marriage has been sealed by the butter man it is valid, whether the girl has agreed to it or not and – in the case of forced marriage – whether the parents have actually approved to the marriage or not. Divorce is not possible.⁸¹

Girls often are very young when they are married to a man. However, they usually do not immediately move to their husband’s homestead.⁸² They may stay at their parents’ homestead until they have grown old enough to go to live with their husband. After some years, though, the girl’s husband may say, “Now my wife has grown up (...) bring a stick to her father [send a go-between]” (Sagonda in Eppe/Brüderlin 2004: 91). Again gifts such as goats and honey are brought to the girl’s father. Finally the girl goes to live with her husband at his father’s homestead.⁸³

If a man has insufficient economic resources to pay the high bridewealth for a girl, or if the moving in of his bride takes too long, a man may decide to take hold of a girl by other means.⁸⁴ Girls may be stolen into marriage through magic (as described in Eppe 1995: 66-67 and Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 154-155), or simply by force.⁸⁵ Forced marriage is not practiced in some of the other ethnic groups in South Omo, such as the Kara or the Mursi.⁸⁶ This is a culturally specific practice allowing every male, regardless of his family background and economic status to marry and thereby secure legitimate offspring. As Baldambe points out, “Women are born for all men, they are born for poor men, they are born for evil-powered man, they are born for rich men, they are born for elders” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 135). Although even forced marriages only become valid through the ritual sealing of the butter man.

⁸¹ A woman or a man is not able to actually divorce from his wife/her husband; however, if a man does severely maltreat his wife she may leave and go back to her father’s homestead. The husband may come after her and try to take her back home. If he keeps beating her, though, the husband himself may be put in his place by the woman’s male relatives and the wife may stay at her parents (Lydall 1994: 16 and Eppe/Brüderlin 2004: 12-13).

⁸² “There are no customary limits on the age at which a girl may marry. She may marry at any age, and may even be promised in marriage before she is born. The daughter of poor parents are likely to be married earlier than those of wealthy parents, because poor parents will benefit most from marriage payments which they receive.” (Lydall 1980: 151).

⁸³ On marriage and the moving in of the bride see further Lydall/Head, F, 1991 “Two Girls Go Hunting”, in which a detailed portrait of Duka and Gardi, two Hamar girls from Dambaiti, their marriages, and their leaving of the parent’s homestead is drawn.

⁸⁴ Gude Dalko from Bashada describes the conflict of stealing a girl, “The father just does not let her go, he just does not give her. So the future husband will steal her. He will wait for her in the bush and take her with him (...) At first, the father of the girl will be very angry. Her elder brother also will be very angry. Her mother will cry and then the man with the *koli*, the go-between, will take the *koli* and go to the family to settle the conflict (...) Maybe at first the father will not accept the *koli* and send the go-between away (...) Maybe after three days, he will come back with his *koli*. The go-between will say, ‘Why do you send me away all the time? When you were young, why did you steal the mother of your daughter? Didn’t you? Haven’t you done it the same way? Haven’t you fathered this daughter, because you liked her mother so much that you stole her? (...) Do not quarrel! (...)’ Now the father will accept the payment, the conciliation.” (Eppe/Brüderlin 2002: 61-62)

⁸⁵ On forced marriages see also Tsasi’s accounts in Lydall/Head, F, 1990 “The Women Who Smile”.

⁸⁶ See also Eppe/Brüderlin 2004.

6. Bridehood and Bridal Rituals

Only after a girl has moved to her husband will she be considered an *uta*,⁸⁷ a bride. The period of bridehood signifies the most drastic change in a girl's life. She must leave her family behind and lives from then on under the supervision of her husband and especially of her mother-in-law. Duka and Gadi, two girls from Dambaiti, described their concern of becoming brides in an interview with Lydall:

Jean Lydall: When you become a bride, what then?

Duka: Then you belong to your husband. As a bride you sweep the dung and wear a big cape. You make coffee for your father-in-law and sweep the dung. That's what you do as a bride.

Jean Lydall: Can't you dance anymore?

Duka: You can't.

Duka and Gadi: You can't dance with the girls. You can only talk to them. You have become a married woman.

(Duka and Gadi in Lydall/Head, F, 1990)

Haito, Shada's younger sister had just moved to her husband's homestead when I was in Dambaiti in 2002. She came to visit as she had heard that I had arrived and also told me about the hardship of leaving her family, friends and her life as a girl. She said that she had cried a lot as she had not known her future husband and that she had been very much afraid of what now laid ahead of her (p. i., Haito 25.09.02).

In this transitional period the bride is very dependant on her new mother-in-law, as she is the one who ritually prepares the *uta* for her future role, the role of being a wife and mother. This includes social as well as ritual aspects.⁸⁸ During the first three months of bridehood⁸⁹ the *uta* lives in seclusion and has no contact with her future husband or any other person besides her mother-in-law. The bride is kept away, staying in the *shala*, the loft of the house, only leaving it to urinate or to sweep the kraal at night⁹⁰ (p. i. Almanda 17.09.02). During this time, but also in the future, the mother-in-law instructs her on what to do and how to behave.

The transition from girlhood to bridehood is additionally made visible by a transformation in the looks of the bride. The mother-in-law shaves the *uta's* head and rubs her with red ochre and butter. All her girlhood belongings are taken away, in return she later receives a new *karke* cape and a married women's skirt, the *aizi* (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 140-141).

During her bridehood the *uta* is seen as a guest in the house of her new family and is treated as such. Epplé compares the bridehood period with a kind of initiation where the bride dies a 'symbolic death' and is later ritually reborn by her mother-in-law (Epplé 1995: 71).

The first rituals that an *uta* undergoes during her bridehood are rituals that mark her transition to womanhood and respectively motherhood, such as the *koli shurta*, the rubbing of staffs, and the making of the *binyere*, the married women's neckband, and the fetching of the *binyere* water (see below). These rituals are then followed by preconception

⁸⁷ "*Uta* is both the term of reference and a term of address for a bride. It means to leave, to come out and to go up and may refer to the fact that the bride has left her parental home. A woman is called an *uta* at least until she has had a child or two" (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 207).

⁸⁸ This bridal ritual may vary slightly from clan to clan, however, I do not know sufficiently about the clan variations to be able to discuss these in detail.

⁸⁹ On the relationship between husband and bride see Epplé/Brüderlin 2004: 45-48.

⁹⁰ According to Baldambe's description an *uta* only stays in the loft for three days and three nights (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 140). I was given the information, however, that she must stay there for three months.

rites, which are performed after she has had her first period. Both, bridehood and preconception rites, must be completed so that a woman may become pregnant for the first time. Whereas a woman must only go through bridehood rituals once, the explicit prenatal rituals must be repeated after the birth of each child. A child conceived before these prenatal rituals have been performed is considered ritually impure, *mingi*, and has to be aborted.⁹¹

It is in this context that the power and control of elderly women over others finds its most vital expression, as it is the mother-in-law, who ritually gives the bride to her son and therefore controls her son's reproduction.⁹² Alga, an elderly woman from Bashada, confirms, "I am the one who gives her to her husband. I make her lay down by his side" (Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 97).⁹³ After the bride has been kept away for a certain time and has physically separated herself from her former life, the mother-in-law symbolically gives birth to her, reintegrating the *uta* into social life and ritually preparing her for her future role, the role of being a married woman. As Sagonda puts it,

"I have given birth to her and rubbed on butter, just as one rubs butter on a new born child. As one feeds a baby with butter and breastfeeds him, I will feed her with food, cook good food for her. Milk the cattle and feed her with milk... She will be like a child, and then I will bring her up and when she has grown up after three or two months, I will give her to her husband saying, 'She has grown up now.'" (Lydall, without year.b: 17)

6.1. *Koli shurta* – The Rubbing of the Staffs

Haito told me about the *koli shurta*,⁹⁴ a ritual in which the bride receives ritual staffs called *koli*, with which she later may claim cattle at her in-laws (see below). It is also through this ritual that, following Haito's explanation, the mother receives her *nasiinda nabi*, her 'child-mother name'. After this ritual a mother is called after her, yet, unborn child.⁹⁵ Almada (mother of Alma), Shada's sister-in-law, however, told me that she received her *nasiinda nabi* after she had performed her *gungulo gilo*, another preconception ritual of which I will talk of in ch. 6.4. As these both descriptions diverge, it remains to be ascertained at which point in time a mother actually receives her *nasiinda nabi*.⁹⁶ It is most likely, though, that this name is given to a woman before she has given birth to her first child, as I met childless mothers who also were addressed with their *nasiinda nabi*. The importance, though, lies not in the point in time of the actual adaptation of the teknonymy, but rather on the fact that the name change occurs. In this context it should be noted

⁹¹ On illegitimate pregnancies and ritual impurity see ch. VII.

⁹² Lydall documented the escalation and its consequences of such a dependence on the mother-in-law in her film *Duka's Dilemma*, (Lydall/Strecker, F, 2001). In the film, Sagonda, the mother-in-law, refuses to perform the name-giving rituals for her grandson and therefore uses her power over her son to force her will onto him.

⁹³ The ritual preparation of the daughter-in-law is a very significant source for the pride of elderly women in Hamar, Banna and Bashada. The women themselves are much aware of their position and the power they have over their sons by way of their son's wives, see Epple/Brüderlin 2004.

⁹⁴ *Koli* is the name of the ritual staffs (on different usages of *koli* see Epple/Brüderlin 2002). *Shurta* means to rub, referring to the wands being rubbed with red butter.

⁹⁵ A child receives its actual name, its *gali nabi*, in the *gali gilo*, its name-giving ceremony, which will be described in ch. 11.1.

⁹⁶ That the mother adapts a new name after the birth of her first child is a custom observed in many different cultures, see for example Conklin/Morgan 1996. Behrend also mentions that the East African Tugen women change their name after the birth of their first child into 'mother of so and so'. Behrend suggests, that the name change of a woman is an expression of the woman's adoption to the new family and their respective lineage, leaving her foreign descent (patrilocality) behind (Behrend 1985: 87). In how far the name change of the mother in Hamar may also be understood in this sense I was not able to find out.

that Hamar men respectively receive a new name when they are initiated, their *gari nabi*.⁹⁷ The *gari nabi* refers to the color of the *garro* calf, a special calf that stands at the head of the row of cattle over which he leaps (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 84, 93). The man is said to be the father of the *garro* and therefore his name is composed of the term *imba*, father, and the color of the *garro* (Lydall 1999: 5). This *gari* name not only alludes to the tie between men and cattle but expresses the status change of the man as well. In this sense the *nasiinda nabi* is also the linguistic expression not only of the bond between mother and child, but also of the woman's change in status.⁹⁸ The *gari nabi* and the *nasiinda nabi* do hence define the respective gender role and domain within the Hamar society, pronouncing the association of the sexes with either cattle or children. R. Watson further suggests that through teknoymy women are – compared to the men, who receive an individual name – deprived of an own individual status as they “exist only in relation to others” (Watson 1986: 626-628). In Hamar however, one might argue that the men are not given an individual name either, as they are put into relation with the cattle. Therefore should teknonymy in Hamar rather be seen as an expression of great appreciation towards the child and the pride and worthiness of the role as mother, in the sense of L. Charles: “...this ‘acting as if’ the personality of parents were worth designating only so far as related to the child, constitutes an ultimate form of respect to the newcomer's importance” (Charles 1951: 28), than as a deprivation of women's individuality.

TB:⁹⁹ Are you called differently, now that you are a married woman?

Haito: Yes, I am now called Haito Bonande.

TB: When did you receive this name?

Haito: There is a special man, who comes and brings a *koli* [ritual staff]. He brought it from far away. He comes calling me: ‘*Uta!* Come out!’

TB: That's when you were already living at your husband's house?

Haito: Yes. He calls me and I go outside. The men, the *donzas*, they also have come as guests. I go to take their things. So I take the *koli* and bring the two *koli* to the goat enclosure. We go to the gateway. Then the *donza* come. I sit to the right of my husband. The two *koli* are laid upon our legs. We sit next to each other. He [the ritual assistant] spits on the staffs. Four times he spits. Four times onto my husband's staff, four times onto mine. The *koli* still have its bark. I take one of the *koli* and hand it to the *donza*, who will take the bark off. They take the bark off and call me. I give them both. They call me and I go back. They give me my new name, Bonande. My husband's elder brother is called Bonna and therefore I am called Bonande. My child will be called Bonna. I am his mother, Bonande. (p. i., Haito 25.09.02)

The staffs, the *koli*, of which Haito speaks are taken from the *baraza*¹⁰⁰ tree, a tree that is said to be a *barjo* tree. The branches may not be cut, but must be pulled off by hand.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ The term *gar* is derived of the term *gari* which in this context means ‘grown up’.

⁹⁸ Spencer also reports of the Massai of Matapato that, “through their children's names, the parents are endowed with status” (Spencer 1988: 42).

⁹⁹ I will abbreviate my own name in interview excerpts with TB.

¹⁰⁰ On *baraza* and *barjo* see ch. 3.1.

¹⁰¹ Sago from Banna, confirmed by Tsasi and Shada from Dambaiti, gives some more details, “The future husband asks a boy who belongs to his moiety to make the *koli*. But it must be a boy who has not yet been initiated, someone who has not leaped over the cattle (...) So they, the husband and the boy, bring the *koli* and a *micere* [whipping wand], both made from the same tree. They bring two sticks like this and one *micere*. One of

The staffs represent the future children of the *uta* and are addressed as such, “‘*Uta*, come on out, your children have been born. Come out and take them.’ So the *uta* comes out and takes the children into her hands” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 144). After the ritual assistant has spat on the staffs four times he hands them to a man, who is known for his skills of preparing *koli*. In the cattle kraal the staffs are carved and adorned. One *koli* represents a girl, the other a boy. The female wand is decorated with beads on the top end and a metal ring at the bottom end, representing the typical female adornment. The male staff is kept plain. After the *koli* have been rubbed, *shurta*, with butter, they are given back to the *uta*, “Take them, here are your children. Put them away.” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 144).

It is with the male *koli*, her symbolic child that the bride later goes to claim reproductive livestock from her in-laws, kinsmen and bond-friends of her husband’s parents. For a detailed description of the exact procedure of the collecting of cattle see Lydall, without year.a and Baldambe’s accounts in Strecker/Lydall 1979b pages 147-148. It is the woman who allows her husband to acquire a starting stock for an own herd and therefore enables him to become independent of his parent’s control.¹⁰² She is the one who may claim the so called ‘bowl’ livestock from her husband’s patrilineal seniors each time she bears a child, at the child’s naming ritual (*gali gilo*) and the child’s ‘tying-on-of-bands ritual’ (*gore gilo*) of which I will talk of in the following chapters (Lydall, without year.a: 21).

6.2. The Making of the *Binyere* – The Married Women’s Neckband

For every first wife¹⁰³ a *binyere*, a special neckband made from the leather of the dik-dik antelope,¹⁰⁴ in Hamar called *segere*, is made.¹⁰⁵ This band is made from two twisted dik-dik skins, one from a female, one from a male animal. The dik-dik leather has a special meaning in this context, as the dik-dik antelope is monogamous and therefore stands for a lifelong partnership. The dik-dik leather is bought by the husband and tanned by his sisters. According to Baldambe’s accounts the ritual of making the *binyere* is performed one day after the *koli shurta* ritual (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 145). Conflictingly, Sago from Banna said that the *binyere* is given to the bride as part of the *koli shurta* ritual (see above), and that only after the *uta* has been given her *binyere*, the *koli* are handed to the bride (Epple/Brüderlin 2002: 64). This account was confirmed by Shada and Tsasi from Dambaiti. Even though the exact course of when and in which order these rituals are performed varies in the descriptions of Baldambe and Sago, the essence of the making of the *binyere* in both explanations is very much the same and complement each other.¹⁰⁶

The boy who earlier brought the *uta*’s *koli*, an expert on making the *binyere*, and the husband come together to prepare the *binyere*. They sit down on a special cowhide that is said to be *barjo*¹⁰⁷ in the cattle kraal. Baldambe says that after the leather has been twisted¹⁰⁸ and a small piece of *baraza* wood has been worked into the pointed end of the neck-

the sticks resembles a girl and one a boy. The one that represents the boy will receive the name of the boy who brought the sticks.” (Epple/Brüderlin 2002: 63-64).

¹⁰² On the collecting of cattle by the bride see also the descriptions given by Tsasi, Kolle, Bashiri, Gude and Sago in Epple/Brüderlin 2002: 22-23.

¹⁰³ The first wife is addressed as *binyere ma*, *binyere* woman, whereas the second wife will be called *marrima*.

¹⁰⁴ The dik-dik antelope belongs to the family of the Madoqua or *Rhynchotragus* (Seifert 1993: 28).

¹⁰⁵ How the bride’s *binyere* is made is also shown in Lydall/Head, F, 1991 “Two Girls Go Hunting”.

¹⁰⁶ As I did not have the chance to actually partake in any of these rituals I must use these descriptions as an idealized explanation of how the ritual of the making of the *binyere* is performed.

¹⁰⁷ This cowhide is called a ‘goat-cowhide’, as the cowhide must have been bought with goats (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 208).

¹⁰⁸ The leather from the male and female dik-dik are twisted into each other, symbolizing the man and the woman, who from now on shall live their lives together (p. i., Epple 10.12.04).

band,¹⁰⁹ the ritual assistant takes a bloodletting arrow. Spitting on the arrow's blade he then touches the pointed end of the *binyere* four times (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 145). Sago narrates a further detail, as he mentions that the boy pretends to shoot the dik-dik skins and calling out, "I cut the umbilical cord! Now she has born children. I cut off the child" (Epple/Brüderlin 2002: 64-65). The *binyere* is then put around the bride's neck. A woman will only take the *binyere* off when her first son becomes an initiate, when her eldest daughter gets married, or her husband dies. Kerri from Bashada explains,

"When your daughter marries first you will take off the *binyere* for your daughter. Your son might not have leapt yet [is not initiated]. If a daughter and her mother both wear a *binyere* at the same time, it is said to be bad. When your son leaps [is initiated], you take it off for your son. That is how it is."
(Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 59).

It is said, that the *binyere* is like *ch'aaki*, like evil power, if the mother of a married daughter or son keeps wearing it.¹¹⁰ It then may cause the mother's husband to die. After removing the leather, the *binyere* is buried in the cattle kraal; the place where dead children are also buried. The silver rings are passed on to other women and girls, who later use it to make their *tirre*, the headdress of women whose sons have been initiated.

6.3. The Ritual of Fetching the *Binyere* Water

The ritual of fetching the *binyere* water¹¹¹ is one of three preconception rituals (the ritual fetching of the *binyere* water, being rubbed with sand by the mother-in-law, and breaking the *kolosho*, both part of the *gungulo gilo*, see below) a bride must perform before she may 'share a cowhide with her husband', meaning before she is allowed to become pregnant.

The bride and a ritual assistant go to a riverbed east of the Kaeske River, the original settlement area of the Hamar. The *uta* takes a white water gourd and a *baasalla*, a gourd bowl for scooping up water; the ritual assistant also brings a *baasalla*. Opposite from each other they kneel down on an untouched stretch of sand. The ritual assistant scoops sand twice downriver and twice upriver. Then he takes an additional scoop of sand and pours it into the gourd. Taking turns, the *uta* and the ritual assistant scoop sand into the gourd four times. The white water gourd is then taken home by the *uta* and hung into the rafters of her house. The gourd is kept in the house until the woman goes back to ritually fetch water for the *gungulo gilo* (see below). An *uta* who has not performed this ritual is not allowed to go fetch water in any riverbed east to the Kaeske (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 145-146).

6.4. The *Gungulo Gilo* – The Rubbing on Ritual

During the interviews I conducted in Dambaiti I asked which ritual is the most important one for women before they may bear children. The answer was always the same:

¹⁰⁹ The pointy *binyere* of the bride is replaced by a blunted one before she gives birth to her first child. The piece of *baraza* wood is taken out, as it is said, that if this wooden piece is not removed the child's birth will be troublesome (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 148-149).

¹¹⁰ The mother should also perform the 'sandal ritual', which stops her menstruation, so that she does not bear any further children when her daughter gets married. If mother and daughter were to be pregnant at the same time, both children would be endangered and may die (Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 59-60).

¹¹¹ The bride and the ritual assistant actually do not fetch water, but sand, which in this context is referred to as water.

the *gungulo gilo*.¹¹² “Our most important rituals are the leap over the cattle, our mortuary rites and in regards of bearing children the *gungulo gilo*” (p. i., Aikenda 18.09.02).

The rites described above can be categorized as strictly bridal preconception rituals, as they are only performed once and belong to the *uta*’s preparation rites. Whereas the *gungulo gilo*, also referred to in literature as the rubbing-on-ritual (Epple 1995 and Streck-er/Lydall 1979b), and the ritual of fetching water (see ch. 6.3.) are performed once during the woman’s bridehood, but must also be repeated before each further pregnancy to secure the social legitimacy of the child.¹¹³ The focus here lies therefore not only on the ritual legitimization of the bride’s first pregnancy, but moreover on the ritual legitimization of every single pregnancy of a married woman.

The *gungulo gilo* is the final ritual preconception preparation of the woman. Without its performance the woman may not become pregnant as her pregnancy and respectively the child would be illegitimate and ritually impure. In this case the fetus would have to be aborted, or if abortion fails, the infant must be killed immediately after being born. The affected woman’s homestead and its members must be cleansed through purifying rituals.¹¹⁴ As the *gungulo gilo* is a prerequisite to become pregnant the ritual may also be used as means of birth control exercised by the mother-in-law, who is essential for the ritual and has the prerogative to determine the date of the ritual, or also by the woman herself, as she may choose to delay the rite and therefore her next legitimate pregnancy (Lydall, without year.b: 15).¹¹⁵

The *gungulo gilo* is performed for the first time when an *uta* has her first menstrual period¹¹⁶ after moving to her husband. The mother-in-law takes some of the ritual sand, which previously was collected at the ritual of fetching the *binyere* water and which has since been kept in a gourd in the house (p. i., Hailanda 18.09.02). Baldambe describes the ritual proceeding as follows,

“She [the mother-in-law] puts the sand in a ladle and pours water on top. The *uta* and her mother-in-law go to the gateway of the goat kraal where the mother-in-law tips out some sand and water, which is called butter, on the *uta*’s hands. The *uta* rubs her hands together. This is repeated, altogether four times. Then the mother-in-law rubs some on the *uta*’s thighs. Next time the *uta*’s rain comes, this ritual is repeated this time only with water. Then the mother-in-law takes a piece of broken gourd and scoops up some ashes and together the two women crush the gourd and ashes with their toes: ‘Bear your child. When you

¹¹² *Gungulo* is a calabash ladle, which is used to serve coffee. *Gilo* is the Hamar term for ritual.

¹¹³ Ken Masuda who worked in Banna recounts of a ritual called *boDi*, which he says is performed for women before they may bear children again. Even though there are quite a few divergences, some of the aspects and consequences of the rite described by Masuda do hint towards the assumption that this so called *boDi* ritual is the same as the *gungulo gilo* (Masuda 2000: 27). As I also interviewed women from Banna and none of them ever mentioned a *boDi* ritual I do have doubts concerning the accuracy of Masuda’s information.

¹¹⁴ On ritual impureness and purification see ch. VII.

¹¹⁵ By the way of the ritual a woman can determine if her pregnancy is legitimate or not and consequently if the child is allowed to be carried out. However, is her own will and influence on the matter of pregnancy itself somehow limited, as the husband may force her to have intercourse even though the ritual has not yet been performed. Therefore it may happen that a woman becomes pregnant despite the fact that her preconception rites have not been completed. This child then will be considered ritually impure and must be aborted. On ritual impureness see further ch. VII.

¹¹⁶ In Hamar menstrual blood is referred to as *dobi*, rain, or *gilo zombi*, ritual blood. It is further believed, that if the women’s blood and the men’s sperm comes together the woman will become pregnant (p. i., Haito 25.09.02). Sagonda confirms, “As they [the sperm] has met it [the blood] it does not come down.” By saying that ‘it did not come down’ Sagonda here refers to the absence of the woman’s menstruation, implying that she is pregnant (Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 108).

have given birth, he will die. Let him die like this.' Having done this ritual the mother will not cry if her child dies." (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 146)

Baldambe's account that the mother of the child will not cry, if the child dies after this ritual has taken place, implies two concepts of Hamar culture: on the one hand it entails the notion that the child receives its own *barjo* through the *gungulo gilo*. So if the infant dies, despite the fact that all maternal prenatal rituals have been performed correctly, it will not be blamed on malevolent influences, but simply on the fact that the child's own *barjo* was not strong enough to survive (p. i., Lydall 04.10.04). In addition to that, the breaking of the *kolosho* – the piece of gourd – ritually prepares the woman to cope with the possible death of her child thereby giving her comfort. In this context I want to refer to Dohrmann's M.A. thesis "Kürbisgefäße im Leben der Banna" in which she writes about the ritual usage of calabashes in South Omo. Her paper gives some further insights on the symbolism of the breaking of the *kolosho* during the *gungulo gilo*. In Banna, Bashada and Hamar the calabash is seen as a general symbol of life, consequently the ritual breaking of a calabash a representation of death. However, the gourd which is stepped upon during the ritual is only a broken piece of a calabash, it is not complete, as the child itself who might die, is not yet a full person and therefore should not be mourned for (Dohrmann 1996: 116-117).

Epple further points out that there are certain differences concerning the *gungulo gilo* between Bashada, Banna and Hamar. In Bashada the *gungulo gilo* is not performed for the first child. Instead, it is necessary that the mother-in-law gives the *k'achi*, the married woman's cape, to the bride before she may become pregnant.¹¹⁷ The *gungulo gilo* itself is only done after the first child is born (Epple 1995: 76). In Banna and Kara, though, the ritual is only performed once at the first menstruation and is not repeated at the second menstruation as it is done in Hamar. Torgo, a married woman from Kara, added that they do not break the *kolosho* (Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 58). Even though there are certain differences in the actual proceedings of the rite, the structure remains the same and the consequence of not performing the *gungulo gilo*, or performing it incorrectly, are alike in Hamar, Banna, Bashada and Kara.

An infant whose mother has not undergone the *gungulo gilo*, or incorrectly is said to be *mingi*, ritually impure. In this context the ritual impurity of the infant is attributed to the fact, that the baby has never received its own *barjo* (see above). A child without *barjo* is *mingi* and therefore is not and never will be an accepted member of the Hamar society (p. i., Lydall 04.10.04). Pitta, an elderly woman from Bashada, stresses the importance of this ritual, which applies to all of these groups,

"If you do not do this ritual and the woman gets pregnant the child will be *mingi* [ritually impure]. Then you have to throw it away. It will be impure if you have not done this ritual. This is our ritual. This is what we women do." (Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 58)¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Alga, from Bashada explains, "I put the apron onto my eldest son's wife. I do the rituals for her. I am the one who gives her to her husband (...) when the bridehood ends, I throw the apron onto her. Once she has seen her first ritual [menstruation], I throw the apron onto her and make them [the couple] lie together." (Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 97).

¹¹⁸ See also Lydall, F, 2001 "Duka's Dilemma" on the importance of the *gungulo gilo* and the ritual power a mother-in-law exercises over her son and his wife.

Alga, an elderly woman from Bashada, further comments, “That is our way, the Bashada’s! And also the Hamar’s. Everybody’s! All!” (Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 98). The descriptions given by Baldambe and the supplementary accounts of the women during the workshop *The Pride and Social Worthiness of Women in South Omo*¹¹⁹ confirm the information that I was given on the *gungulo gilo* in Dambaiti.

With the performance of this ritual the path¹²⁰ for the woman’s legitimate pregnancy and the rightful birth of the child is prepared (p. i., Lydall in Dohrmann 1996: 100). Only then is she allowed to sleep with her husband and to become pregnant.

As mentioned above, this ritual must be repeated after every birth to secure the next child’s legitimate birth. However, the following *gungulo gilo* of a woman who has given birth to a child is chronologically interlinked with the *gali gilo*, the name-giving ritual of the child¹²¹ and the *gore gilo*, the child’s band-tying ritual.¹²² The *gungulo gilo* may only be performed after the child has had its *gali gilo* and its *gore gilo*. In Hamar there is no set period at which the *gali gilo* and the *gore gilo* should be take place. Accordingly, the lengths of the time span between the birth and the *gungulo gilo* of the mother vary. A woman herself, or the mother-in-law, may therefore choose to postpone the child’s rituals and by doing so delay the woman’s next pregnancy. In this context it is interesting to note, that the Bashada, Banna and the Hamar customs diverge. Duka explained that in Banna the *gali gilo* is to be performed four days after the child’s birth.¹²³ Furthermore, the *gore gilo* of a child is performed independently and is neither connected to the child’s *gali gilo* nor to the women’s rites.¹²⁴

As shown above the *gungulo gilo* entails three different functions: it may be used as a means of birth control by the woman herself and her mother-in-law, but most importantly it is essential for the legitimization of a married couple’s reproduction and the future well being of the unborn child, as it is the foundation of the child’s *barjo*.

¹¹⁹ Epple/Brüderlin 2004.

¹²⁰ In Hamar a woman’s vagina is also referred to as *barjo gointi*, the path of *barjo*. It is said, that through this ritual the *gointi* of a woman is prepared for pregnancy (p. i., Lydall in Dohrmann 1995: 100 and Strecker 1988a: 69).

¹²¹ On *gali gilo* see further ch. 11.1.

¹²² In Hamar both of these rituals, the *gali*-and the *gore gilo* are usually performed at the same day. On *gore gilo* see also ch. 12.

¹²³ The same applies to Bashada (p. i., Epple 02.12.04).

¹²⁴ This also applies to Bashada (p. i., Epple 02.12.04).



fig. 9 Eila, young unmarried boy with painted face for the night dance. He is Shada's eldest son's namesake

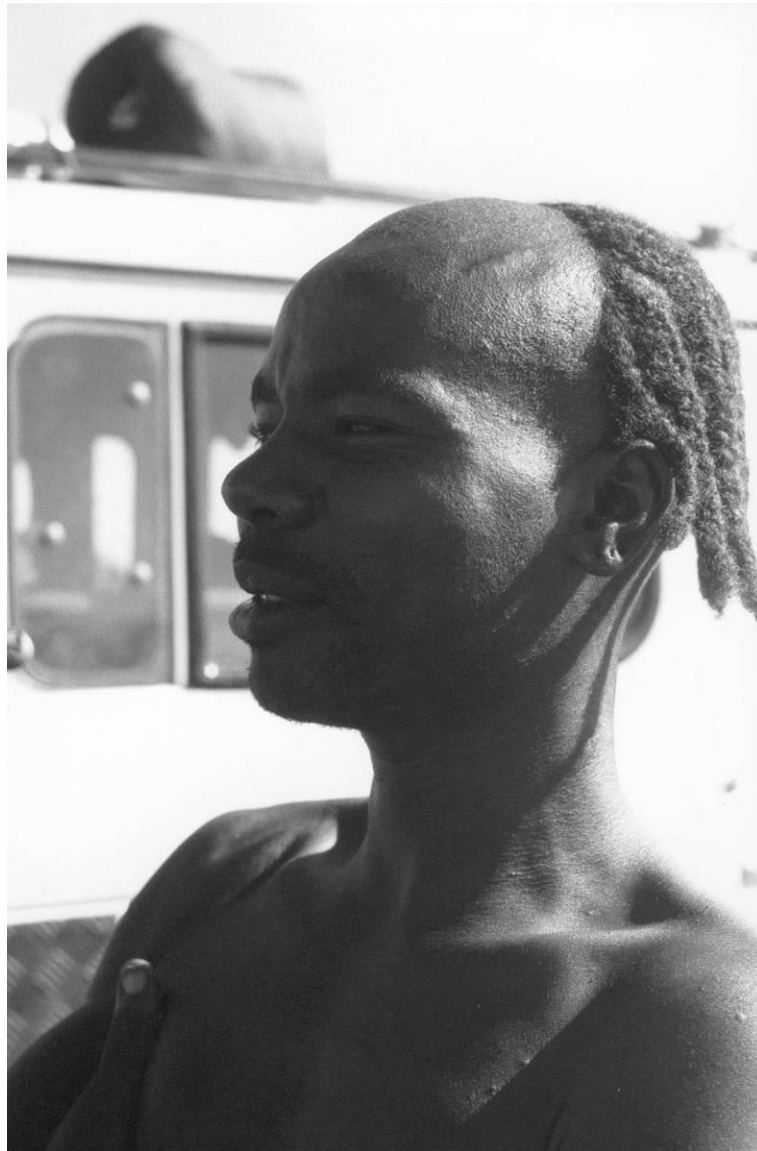


fig. 10 Derimbe, as *ukili* [initiate] with the typical hair style of an initiate



fig. 11 Ritual sealing of marriage (Bashada)



fig. 12 Haito, Shada's junior sister, her cousin Ali (both unmarried) and Yayu, Biirinda's eldest daughter who just became an *uta*, a bride (left to right)



fig. 13 The change in looks of females (left to right): unmarried girls, the widow of Shada's brother Haila, the wife of Shada's brother Shardumbe (wearing the Binyere), Hailo as bride and littel Natal

“Barjo makes a little one
grow in my womp.
Before I was one.
But now I have become two.”
(p. i., Duka 09.10.02)

IV. Pregnancy and Birth

“There are no particular rituals or taboos for Hamar women during their gestation period, as is reported, for example, in other ethnographic literature on East African groups such as the Chaga or the Tugen (Kenia) (Raum 1940: 80-81 and Behrend 1985: 85). The women still pursue their daily chores, working on the fields, fetching water and taking care of the household. Aikenda,¹²⁵ who at that time was probably in her seventh or eighth month of pregnancy, laughed when I asked her why she was still carrying such a heavy load of firewood on her back. “Who should do the work if I just keep lying around?” she asked amused.

Almanda¹²⁶ and Hailanda (Almanda’s mother-in-law) further told me about pregnancies.

Almanda: We do not know that we carry a child in our womb in the first month. In the second month, I do not know. In the third month, I know it. After four month, everybody knows.

Hailanda (laughing): After three month it is like a little animal.

Almanda: When I go to collect firewood and break the branches my belly starts to hurt, then I know. So I go and tell my mother-in-law. During pregnancy there is nothing bad about carrying heavy things. But after I gave birth to the child I am not supposed to carry heavy things anymore. My back would break!

TB: Does Hailanda help you when you are pregnant?

Almanda: She helps me a little. We talk with the elders about the pregnancy.

TB: What do you do when you notice that something is going wrong? Maybe the child is not turning around.

Almanda: The *gal* [the people who live in the towns] go to the doctor. But there are no doctors here; we have people who know how to make it [the baby] turn around by massaging the belly.

TB: And if there are complications during the birth, is it some *maeshi*¹²⁷ who makes the birth so hard?

Almanda: Maybe you have been waiting for the child to come since two, three days (...) and you are in pain, but it does not come out. Then we say it is a *maeshi*. Then your arm is rubbed with butter. And she (the diviner) will see that you have a *maeshi* (ancestral spirits) and that you should give a goat, that you should give food to the *maeshi*¹²⁸ (...) Then I give birth. There are people to whom the *maeshi* come, but others give birth without any complications.

(p. i., Almanda & Hailanda 20.09.02)

In her film “Duka’s Dilemma”, Lydall documented the birth of Boro’s (Sago’s second wife)¹²⁹ first child (Lydall/Strecker, F, 2001). As shown in the film, the actual act of deliver-

¹²⁵ Aikenda is the wife of Tsasi Aike, the son of Baldambe and brother of Duka.

¹²⁶ Almanda is the widow of Shada’s elder brother Haila.

¹²⁷ On *maeshi* see also ch. 3.2.

¹²⁸ There are two kinds of divination in Hamar. The most common is done by certain men, who beat sandals, so-called *dunguri kanä*. The *dunguri* man is usually consulted in men matters, such as hunting, warfare and cattle. Women and health issues are usually the object of the female diviners, called *moarano*, who rub either the belly or the upper arm of the affected person with butter to find out the reason for their ill being (Lydall 1992: 2).

¹²⁹ Sago is the husband of Duka, the daughter of Baldambe. Duka is from Dambaiti but now lives with her family in Banna. Boro is Sago’s *marima*, his second wife.

ing is not accompanied by any rituals. It is the mother-in-law (or in the case of Boro, Duka¹³⁰ and her mother-in-law) who assists the woman during the birth telling her what to do. The mother-in-law helps the baby to come out by massaging the belly and the woman's back with butter. As Sagonda retells, "I took butter, and rub, rub, rub. 'Come out! As I'm your grandma, come out!'"¹³¹ (Lydall/Strecker, F, 2001). The birth takes place outside the house; there is no special location or actual birth hut.¹³² As Almanda also mentioned, "...it might happen that you are down at the riverbed when you give birth to your child" (p. i., Almanda 20.09.02).

After the baby is born the mother-in-law, if present, cuts¹³³ the umbilical cord¹³⁴ and washes the newborn. She also takes the afterbirth and buries it in the cattle kraal.¹³⁵

TB: What do you do with the afterbirth?

Aikenda: After it has come out, then you bury it in the cattle kraal.

TB: Why do you bury it?

Aikenda: It is like a human. You do not leave it lying on the ground. You have to bury it. It is like an *edi*, a human.

(p. i., Aikenda 18.09.02)

Hailanda and Almanda confirmed that the afterbirth should be buried properly as it is a part of the person.

TB: Eikenda told me that the afterbirth must be buried, because it is part of a human.

Almanda: She said it well.

Hailanda: If it is from an animal it is thrown onto a tree. The dogs will eat it afterwards. But from a human, it must be buried.

(p. i., Almanda & Hailanda 20.09.02)

Strecker described how the female relatives collectively helped Bargi, the wife of Baldambe's brother, after she had given birth to her son and what is done with the newborn:

"...I hear the baby cry and see Aikenda carry it into Gadi's house. Bargi rushes to get wood for the fire. I enter the house and see Aikenda with the baby. It is a boy. She cleans his head with slithers of freshly cut wood. When the water is warm, Bargi pours it into a bowl and Aikenda takes a big mouthful and sprinkles the water over the baby, washing his hair first, then his face and then his

¹³⁰ Duka says that she helped Boro because it was her first child and Boro did not know what to do and was too scared of giving birth (Lydall/Strecker, F, 2001).

¹³¹ In the film, Sagonda also takes a *gali* leaf and strokes with it over Boro's belly. The *gali* is associated with softness and well-being, it therefore is probably meant to soothe the woman's delivery pain (Lydall/Strecker, F, 2001).

¹³² Jensen, however, wrote about the Banna, "Bei der Geburt eines Kindes zieht sich die Frau in eine Geburtshütte zurück, wo sie anderthalb Monate verbleibt." It appears though, that the information given to Jensen actually referred to the woman's postpartum seclusion, during which the woman stays inside the house. But this house is not an actual birth hut, as translated by Jensen (Jensen 1959: 335).

¹³³ The umbilical cord is mostly cut with a razor blade (p. i., Aikenda 18.09.02).

¹³⁴ Strecker writes about an 'arrow' ritual, in which an elder symbolically cuts the umbilical cord four times with an arrow and blesses the child and gives it a name (Strecker/Lydall 1979a: 43). I have never been given any information on a ritual referred to as the 'arrow' ritual and must therefore leave this point to further investigations.

¹³⁵ The cattle kraal is also the place at which people who have neither been initiated nor married nor initiated are buried.

whole body. Next, Bargi brings a gourd containing butter mixed with red clay and Aikenda rubs this over the baby, who having been quite white at first now becomes the proper colour for a Hamar, red and brown. Then Bargi fetches some roasted coffee beans. She crushes them on a cowhide, puts them into a bowl and then pours water (cold and unboiled) over them. Aikenda takes a mouthful and feeds the baby from her mouth.”

(Strecker/Lydall 1979a: 42)

The mother and the child won't leave the house for a couple of weeks, as they are now supposed to stay in seclusion. I will come back to the aspect of postpartum seclusion¹³⁶ in ch. 9.

The woman I talked with in Dambaiti all confirmed that they were a bit afraid of giving birth. The first birth is the hardest, because the woman does not know what will happen. But even if a woman has given birth to a child before, the actual act of birthing is still accompanied by fear and respect, as complications may occur which endanger the mother's and the infant's life (p. i., Almanda 18.09.02). But not only do the women worry, the men are also afraid.¹³⁷ Shada expressed his worries,

TB: Were you scared when Eilanda¹³⁸ gave birth to Uri?

Shada: *Barjo* does not show you the way how to get children. As a man you are scared, you worry. You just sit and she is in pain, then you are afraid. You worry.

(p. i., Shada 17.09.02)

7. Miscarriage and Stillbirths

Literature on the South Omo region does not report much on subjects such as miscarriage and stillbirths or other complications during pregnancy. Lydall only wrote once about the topic of miscarriages and stillbirths in the context of Hamar medical concepts and sources of ill being. She recounts that Biirinda¹³⁹ kept losing her babies through miscarriages and stillbirths. And that she then went to consult a diviner to trace the reason for her misfortune. The diviner found out that the cause for her miscarriages was that Baldambe, Biirinda's husband's cousin, was cross with her, as Biirinda had not consulted him before arranging the marriage of her husband's sister. Baldambe's anger had caused her misfortune. To get rid off such a curse, the person who has spoken badly must be ritually cleansed and purified (Lydall 1992: 3).¹⁴⁰ This example shows that people in Hamar do not only get afflicted by *maeshis*, but that malevolence, bad talk or even bad thoughts of other people can cause harm as well. Almanda had said earlier that the *maeshi* may cause complications during birth (see ch. IV.); however, Biirinda's example demonstrates that other non-biological negative influences may cause severe harm to mother and child as well.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ See ch. 9. on woman's postpartum seclusion.

¹³⁷ See also Sago commenting on his worries about the birth of his wife Boro's first child (Lydall/Strecker, F, 2001).

¹³⁸ Eilanda is Shada's wife. She is the mother of three children. Uri, the youngest, was born in 2001.

¹³⁹ Biirinda lives in Dambaiti and is Judith Melzer's former host mother. Throughout my stays in Hamar Biirinda and her family became dear friends to me.

¹⁴⁰ Baldambe had to rub his chest with butter, in upwards motions, so that the anger would come out of his stomach. (On taking back curses see also Kolle's account in Epple/Brüderlin 2002: 23).

¹⁴¹ Kerri from Bashada also commented on this topic: "We women do not call *barjo*. Only men do that. If, for example, a woman is not able to become pregnant because she had always quarreled with others, then these women will say, 'What is the matter with you?' And they will be angry with her. From then on this woman will not become pregnant anymore. She won't be able to give birth to children. She will start to think, 'Why

As the topic of miscarriages and stillbirths is a very sensitive one, I chose not to ask many questions on it during my interviews. Eikenda, though, once commented, that it does not make a difference whether you lose a baby after six, seven or eight months of pregnancy, or after it already has been born, the grief stays the same.

“It hurts each time you lose a baby. I carried it in my womb. I gave birth (...) The men also get sad. The small ones would also have grown into children, who would have been able to help him...” (p. i., Aikenda 18.09.02).

Miscarriages and stillbirths are buried in the cattle kraal without any further rituals. It is nevertheless necessary that women, who suffered stillbirth or miscarriage¹⁴² perform the same postpartum and prenatal rites in reference to their next birth, such as the *gali gilo* and the *gungulo gilo*, before they may become legitimately pregnant again (p. i., Shada 17.09.02).

8. Babies with Congenital Disabilities and Multiple Births

Infanticide¹⁴³ of babies who belong to the category of so-called ‘unusual births’, such as babies with congenital disabilities, mental or physical, and multiple births has been reported from many different regions of the world (e.g., Conklin/Morgan 1996, Granzberg 1973, Hausfater 1984 and Schuler 1993). Schuler, for example, states in her book “Infantizid – Biologische und Sozial Aspekte: Eine Untersuchung anhand von Fallbeispielen aus Neuguinea” that, next to preferential female infanticide, abnormalities in physiognomy

am I not getting pregnant? Is it because I have quarreled with the other women? Then she will prepare coffee and invite all the women of her age. The women will come to her house, also two or three old men will come (...) and call *barjo* for her. They will say that she shall have as many children as dogs have puppies! After that she will become pregnant again. This is where *barjo* is called...” (Epple/Brüderlin 2002: 64).

¹⁴² Aikenda told me, though, that sometimes women do not even notice that they have been pregnant. Very early miscarriages may therefore not be recognized as such, as the embryo was too small (p. i., Aikenda 16.09.02).

¹⁴³ There are various definitions of the term ‘infanticide’ used in literature, varying from purely factual definitions such as given by Scrimshaw, “...behavior ranging from deliberate to unconscious which is likely to lead to the death of a dependent, young member of the species. In humans, these behaviors (past and/or present) include the following, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive: deliberate killing, placing in a dangerous situation, abandonment where survival is possible, ‘accidents’, excessive physical punishment. Lowered biological support, and lowered emotional support.” (Scrimshaw 1984: 442), to factual definitions which are bound to a specific time period in which the act is still called infanticide, not murder, such as proposed by Williamson, “Defining it as the deliberate killing of a child in its infancy, up to two years of age, covers the majority of cases” (Williamson in Schuler 1993: 10). Kohl further suggest that it “...is also useful to distinguish between malevolent and benevolent infanticide, where the latter is understood to be an act whose purpose is to benefit or help, or at least not to injure, the one who dies” (Kohl in Schuler 1993).

Whereas Conklin and Morgan critically point out, that the term infanticide is rarely used to describe the killing of a western child “...perhaps because it implies a normative practice associated with ‘uncivilized’ peoples. From an anthropological perspective, the term is ethnocentric because it ignores any distinction that a society might make between social and biological birth” (Conklin/Morgan 1996: 679). In the following I will use ‘infanticide’ to describe the deliberate killing of an infant who has not yet been ritually or socially integrated into the society. In this context, however, it is not useful to make a distinction between social and biological birth, as I will use the term infanticide to describe the factual act of killing an infant. Furthermore do I want to broaden Kohl’s definition of benevolent infanticide, as it appears to me that benevolent infanticide in the specific cultural context of Hamar serves to benefit or help the community, not the individual who is doomed to be killed (Kohl in Schuler, 1993). Nevertheless, should this kind of infanticide also be defined as benevolent as its purpose is the well being of the community (see further ch. VII).

and multiple births are one of the prevailing reasons for the practice of infanticide in traditional societies¹⁴⁴ (Schuler 1993: 167). Ford adds that,

“The advantage of destroying deformed infants seems obvious. By this means many who could seldom be other than liabilities to the community are prevented from becoming useless dependents...Primitive societies are grounded on normality. When an abnormality is born they destroy it primarily because they do not know how to place it in their social scheme. There are seldom places in the society for such people. Since people don’t know what to do with them, they destroy them.” (Ford in Schuler 1993: 167)

Schuler further defines this form of infanticide as a means of expulsion of individuals, who do not fit the social norm, from the society: “Infantizid bei Kindern, die von der Norm abweichen, ist eine der häufigsten Methoden, die Ausstoßung einzelner aus der Gesellschaft zu realisieren” (Schuler 1993: 167). Whereas babies with mental or physiological abnormalities appear to be a prevailing threat to the cultural concept of normality, infanticide of twins¹⁴⁵ is moreover portrayed in literature as a means of survival for one of the kids¹⁴⁶ (Schuler 1993: 168). As Granzberg states, “Twin infanticide is found in societies that provide insufficient facilities for a mother properly to rear two children at once while at the same time fulfilling her other responsibilities” (Granzberg 1973: 406).

With these theses in mind, I tried to find out how such situations are handled in Hamar. Interestingly though, none of the above-mentioned concepts does apply to Hamar.

TB: What happens, if a baby is born with a defect? Maybe it is blind. Maybe it is deformed.

Shada: These things do not happen in Hamar. Such problems only happen afterwards. Maybe he gets injured later.

TB: Children are never born with defects?

Shada: No, those things only happen later. Maybe he has a bad leg, or bad arms.

TB: But didn’t I see an *ukuli* [initiate] when we went to the leap, wasn’t there an *ukuli*, who had a leg that was much shorter than the other?

Shada: Sometimes this happens...

TB: So what do you do with such children?

Shada: *Barjo* [fate] has made him that way.

TB: So this is not a reason to abandon him?

Shada: *Barjo* sometimes makes children have problems. But it is nothing bad. It is the child’s *barjo*.

TB: But how will he be able to leap over the cattle and become a *donza*?

Shada: His *anamos* [age-mates] will help him to leap.¹⁴⁷ They will carry him across the cattle.

TB: So he will marry and have a normal life?

¹⁴⁴ Scrimshaw adds that illegitimacy of the baby and/or the fact that it is born too close in time to a sibling may also put an infant at risk for infanticide (Scrimshaw in Hausfater 1984: 501).

¹⁴⁵ I will use Granzberg definition of twin infanticide as “...the disposing of an infant and/or its sibling because they are twins of one another” (Granzberg 1973: 405).

¹⁴⁶ “In the society where the rearing of twins may be difficult or even impossible, the mother is provided with an expedient solution: the disposal of the weaker twin” (Granzberg in Schuler 1993: 168).

¹⁴⁷ “If a youth is blind or crippled either he will be lifted over the backs of the cattle or he will be allowed to run under their necks” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 197).

Shada: He will marry and have children.
(p. i., Shada 17.09.02)

Aikenda confirms Shada's account:

TB: What does a woman do, if she sees that her child is different, right after the birth she sees it, what does she do?
Aikenda: When something like this happens, we say it is *barjo* that made it be like
TB: So there are no problems with that? It will grow up like any other child and have the same rituals done?
Aikenda: That is how it is. *Barjo* made it like that.
(p. i., Aikenda 18.09.02)

As these interview excerpts show, the destiny of a child born with congenital disabilities is ascribed to its own *barjo*, its own fate. The notion that *barjo* is the reason for the birth defect entails that there is no ritual or social legitimacy for exclusion of such a child from Hamar society. The baby will therefore grow up as if it were a normal child. As far as possible will a girl grow into a woman and will be given to a husband to bear children. A boy will be initiated, married and become a *donza*. The same concept is reported by Spencer from the Massai of Matapato:

"...but God condoned this birth and God alone should choose the moment of death. As children are progressively exposed to the outside world, those that are maladapted are less likely to survive, but still a few may do so and even live to raise healthy families of their own. It's God's will, they say." (Spencer 1988: 42)

Nevertheless, the question remains in which degree Shada's and Aikenda's accounts portray an ideal. And how handicapped children are dealt with in reality. I merely emphasize this point because I have seen noticeably few people with apparent physical birth defects in Hamar, unlike mental defects that can be observed more often.¹⁴⁸ Hausfater and Hrdy point out the difficulty of researching such a topic: "Infanticide must therefore be derived primarily from interviews with individuals who recount – with varying degrees of reliability – personal experiences or village hearsay" (Hrdy/Hausfater in Schuler 1993: 21). However, I must note that infanticide of ritually impure (*mingi*) children is openly talked about in Hamar (see ch. VII.) and not at all something the people would withhold from me.¹⁴⁹ In the matter of infanticide of handicapped infants, though, it appears that, as there is no social or ritual legitimization for killing such a child, it is done privately and not talked about. Maldo Lito from Bashada, an informant of Epple, confirmed my pre-supposition on this matter, as he told Epple that women who give birth to a child with a severe birth defect would kill the baby right after the birth and pass it off as a stillbirth (p. i., Epple 10.12.04). However, the absence of congenitally disabled children and adults might not only be due to the fact that these infants are actually killed after birth, but may also be traced back to the short life expectancy of weaker children. As Spencer states,

¹⁴⁸ As mental disability is most often not recognized as such right after the birth, it might be that these babies are more likely not to be killed and passed off as stillbirths as physically handicapped infants.

¹⁴⁹ It is in this context that the specific cultural attitude towards killing an infant is reflected, as a distinction is made between social and biological birth. I will turn to this subject when discussing infanticide of ritually impure children see ch. VII.

“The general absence of congenital disabilities inevitably raises questions regarding the fate of defective babies. (...) I am grateful to David Turton for pointing to the significance of general absence of congenital deformities in societies similar to the Maasai (personal communication). Extrapolation from data previously collected among the Samburu suggested that possibly one half of the children under 14 years were unlikely to survive to that age.”
(Spencer 1988: 42-49)

Nonetheless, this topic demands further investigation to be able to give an accurate portrait of Hamar customs in this matter.

Literature on infanticide stresses that multiple births are also often seen as something unusual, as signs for the mother’s adultery, curses or evil, and therefore are treated with corresponding measures¹⁵⁰ (Granzberg 1973: 406, Schuler 1993: 167-169). However, a multiple birth does not only threaten the cultural concept of normality, it furthermore entails an economic challenge for the child’s family. Twin infanticide is hence often said to be practiced in societies in which women do not have the economic means to rear two children at once or in which “the mother of twins, (because of what she carries) on her back, she dies” (Messing in Granzberg 1973: 406). Interestingly, twin infanticide is not practiced in Hamar, even though economic sources may be scarce at times and the women do most of the daily work. Aikenda confirms this:

TB: What happens if a woman bears twins?

Aikenda: That is nothing bad. Everything is done the same.

TB: So there is no problem?

Aikenda: No.

TB: Do twins get their children’s rituals done at the same time, together?

Aikenda: Yes, it is all done at the same day. Both get the *gali gilo* at the same day.
(p. i., Aikenda 18.09.02)

Aikenda’s account was verified by Duka, who herself is the mother of twins, “*Barjo* gave you two. You are the mother of two. It means more work, but having many children is something good” (p. i., Duka 09.10.02). These examples show that infanticide of children born in multiple births is not practiced in Hamar. Even though this was also stated in the case of children born with congenital disabilities (see above), it appears that the dealings with multiple births are actually concurrent with the information given to me in my interviews.

¹⁵⁰ Fortes writes of the Tallensi of northern Ghana, that twins “exemplify an important rule. To become a person one must be properly and normally born and this, ideally, means single born, head first, of parents licitly permitted to procreate. A breech presentation is feared, is magically and classed with twins, but anyone successfully born thus is treated as a single eventually” (Fortes 1987: 261). This approach is not only interesting in the above discussed context, but will also be of significance in the further exploration of Hamar dealings with children.



fig. 14 Biiirinda's sister during pregnancy



fig. 15 Boro, the wife of Sago, during labour. Sagonda, her mother-in-law, is assisting her



fig. 16 Alma, youngest son of Almanda, during postpartum seclusion



fig. 17 Little daughter of Allo (Bashada)



fig. 18 Yayu as a young wife with her first child

“Women shall give birth to children,
like the monkeys give birth to their’s.
The homestead should be filled with
cattle and with children.
That is how it shall be.”

(p. i., Shada 20.09.02)

V. Postnatal Rituals

“The ceremonies of pregnancy and childbirth together generally constitute a whole. Often the first rites performed separate the pregnant woman from society, from her family group, and sometimes even from her sex. They are followed by rites pertaining to pregnancy itself, which is a transitional period. Finally come the rites of childbirth intended to reintegrate the woman into the groups to which she previously belonged, or to establish her new position in society as a mother, especially if she has given birth to her first child or to a son.” (van Gennep 1960: 41)

A Hamar woman is not ritually separated from the society during her gestation period (see ch. IV.). However, mother and newborn are kept in temporary seclusion after birth. The postpartum rituals described in the following section do therefore not only include the seclusion of the infant and mother, but subsequently, as van Gennep points out, also their reintegration into the group.

Furthermore, I am going to explain the *dotin gilo*, a ritual performed to assert the new social position of the parents after the birth of their first child.

It is important, though, to keep in mind that with each birth the cycle of prenatal and preconception rites that a woman needs to perform before she may become legitimately pregnant begins again (as described in ch. 6.3. and 6.4.).

9. Postpartum Seclusion and Taboos of the Mother

“If you go out too soon, your hair falls out. You catch a cold they say. If you go out before one month, it’s bad. So we stay in the house.” (Duka in Lydall/Strecker, F, 2001)

Immediately after birth mother and newborn are taken into the house.¹⁵¹ They will stay there at least for one month or even longer.¹⁵² When I came to Dambaiti in September 2001, Almanda, my *muna bel* (bond friend) had just given birth to her third child, a little boy called Alma. During my whole visit she stayed secluded inside the house taking care of the newborn.

TB: How long do you stay inside?

Almanda: I will stay for two moons.¹⁵³

TB: Do you stay inside the house the whole time?

Almanda: Most of the time I am inside. Sometimes I go outside, but I do not leave the homestead.

(p. i., Almanda 17.09.02)

¹⁵¹ Jensen wrote, “Für die Geburt wird nur ein Teil der Hütte durch ein Gitter abgetrennt von dem übrigen, in dem die Frau sich aufhält (...) Anderthalb Monate lebt sie vorwiegend von Blut und Fleisch.” (Jensen 1959: 345). Even though the Bashada women do not actually give birth inside the house, they, as claimed by Jensen, stay behind a kind of shield inside the house during their postpartum seclusion (p. i., Epplé 10.12.04).

¹⁵² Lydall mentions that a mother only stays in the house a couple of days (Lydall 1993: 6). My own observations and the information given to me, however, indicate that the mother usually stays in the house for at least a month.

¹⁵³ *Arphi lama*, which translated means two moons, however, this does not necessary mean two months, as the way the moon in Hamar is counted is different than ours. It therefore is not clear to me which exact time span is meant.

The mother does not work during this time; her relatives and friends take care of her, pampering the mother and the baby. They take over the grinding, bring firewood, water and anything else she needs during this time. Aikenda illustrates this:

Aikenda: After I have given birth to a child, I will only eat soft things. I eat it, so that the child becomes strong and does not get any stomachache. I may leave the house after two months. But the child will stay inside for longer. It must become strong enough to be able to handle the sun. When it comes out of the house, it is already a bit strong and can move.

TB: Are people allowed to visit you during this time?

Aikenda: My *anamos* [age-mates] will come to see me. The *anamos* of my husband bring blood and milk for me to drink. They slaughter a goat for me, so that I get strong.¹⁵⁴ They come and bring water, sorghum flour, wood and *baraza*¹⁵⁵ leaves. They bring everything I need.

TB: These are your friends, the friends of your husband and your relatives? They take care of you the whole time you are inside?

Aikenda: Yes.

(p. i., Aikenda 18.09.02)

Almanda adds followings:

Almanda: This is our *dambi* [custom]. Women come and bring *baraza* leaves. They bring it for the *barjo* [well being] of the child. With these leaves you wipe off the baby shit. And the women say, "Use the leaves I brought! The child shall grow and have *barjo*!"

(p. i., Almanda 17.09.02)

To strengthen the newborn, it is rubbed with butter and *assili* (ground red stone powder), especially on its fontanel.¹⁵⁶ Some female guests also bring butter and feed bits of it to the baby. After their visit the mother strikes each guest on the chest with a mixture of *assili* and butter.

In Almanda's case many women came to see her and the baby. Everybody was very affectionate to the newborn, holding it and playing with it. Alma's siblings or other young children would come and hold it in their arms, singing lullabies and playfully caressing it. Whenever the baby urinated on my lap while I held it, it was greeted with much laughter and the comment, that it will bring me good fortune.

Lydall wrote that men do not come inside the house during this time, but stay outside, asking about the woman's condition (Lydall 1993: 7). During the time I spent with Almanda, however, men also came to chat with her, but I do not know if that was an exception due to the fact that I was also there and people often came out of curiosity to see the *ferengi*, the foreigner, who lived with Shada's family. It appears though, that men in general do keep some distance to the very small babies. Shada explained why this is so,

¹⁵⁴ Raum recounts of the East African Chaga that the men are also obliged to supply their wives who have just given birth with special food, in recognition of "the service to his family". The special diet consisting of meat, fat, blood, and milk is supposed to increase the flow of mother's milk (Raum 1940: 97).

¹⁵⁵ On the *baraza* plant see also ch. 3.1.

¹⁵⁶ van Gennep states, that "...rites such as the first bath, the washing of the head, the rubbing of the child have hygienic purposes, they seem at the same time to be rites of purification falling into the category of rites of separation from the mother" (van Gennep 1960: 52).

- TB: Is it taboo for a man to take the newborn and to hold it?
 Shada: No, it is not taboo. I am just afraid. I do not want to take it, because I do not know what to do. The mother might not know either, if it is the first time. That's why the grandmother takes the newborn. With the time I will learn it. When it has grown a little and has gotten stronger and his head is not dangling anymore, then I will also take him.
 (p. i., Shada 17.09.02)

For the duration of her seclusion the mother is additionally supposed to follow certain *kais*, taboos.¹⁵⁷ For example, she is not allowed to climb up the loft, to make or to blow into fire nor to give away any of her bracelets (p. i., Almanda 18.09.02). During one of my visits, however, Almanda climbed up the *shala*, the loft of the house, to bring me some ginger. When I asked her why she did climb up the loft, even though she had told me before that she was not supposed to do so, she just laughed and said, that I was right to scold her for that.¹⁵⁸

- TB: Don't you fear that by breaking the taboo, something might happen to you or your baby?
 Almanda: I shouldn't do it.
 TB: And if something bad happens now, will people say that it happened because you broke the taboo?
 Almanda (laughing): Maybe people would say that. But now, it's only you and me. No one has seen it. There won't be any problems.
 (p. i., Almanda 20.09.02)

As these descriptions of the postpartum seclusion of mother and child demonstrate, this period serves various purposes: Firstly, the seclusion is a time intended to develop the bond between mother and child. Secondly, it is a time of physical recuperation enhanced by protectoral postpartum taboos, which serve to shield the mother and child from external harm. The mother is given special nutritious food and advised to rest so that she is able to regain strength. Its mother and kin pamper the newborn, as it is buttered and first guests come to bring gifts of *baraza* leaves in order to increase the *barjo* of the baby. This leads to the third aspect of the postpartum period: The commencing incorporation of the child into its network of kin. After the child has been introduced to its close circle of female relatives,¹⁵⁹ it is now the time for it to be also presented to its wider kin group. The seclusion is therefore not only a time during which the newborn and its mother bond and recover, but moreover a time in which the baby is gradually introduced into its social environment.

9.1. Coming Out of the House

"...the physiological occurrence of birth in itself does not introduce a child into society. A variety of ceremonies following successively upon one another, take

¹⁵⁷ A woman who has not yet performed her *gungulo gilo* and is on the way to break the *kolosho* with her mother-in-law may also not touch the *doala*, the milk-container (see ch. 6.4.).

¹⁵⁸ The concept that the mother's actions have a direct influence on the development of the child is a culturally widespread belief. Morton, for examples, reports on Tonga, that women are supposed to follow certain taboos, which serve to restrict the mother's behavior in order to protect the infant. Breaking the taboos is not actually sanctioned, but may later be used "as posthoc explanations for a baby's condition" (Morton 1996: 47).

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, the role of the mother-in-law during the birth, ch. IV.

hold upon it, and, by making it the centre of social undertakings, fit it into the various kinship groupings.” (Raum 1940: 295)

After the mother and the newborn have stayed semi-secluded inside the house for a couple of weeks and have recuperated, the time “to open the way” (Duka in Lydall/Strecker, F, 2001) for the child, or as van Gennep puts it, “to introduce the child into the world” has come (van Gennep 1960: 54). In Hamar, taking the baby out of the house is one of the first actual postnatal incorporation rites of a child.¹⁶⁰

TB: Who takes the child out of the house, the first time?

Almanda: It is its *misha*, older sister. She carries the baby outside. She goes out and comes back in. Goes out and comes back it. Four times. After she has opened its way, I am allowed to go outside, too. If his/her older sister does not take the baby out, I am not allowed to leave the house.

(p. i., Almanda 17.09.02)

The elder sister of the baby repeatedly carries the child outside the house, ‘opening its way’, as Duka says (see above). The child is carefully held by its kin and carried into the open but also brought back in. Moreover does this act enables the mother to come out of the house again and to finish her seclusion period as her children smoothen her path back into her normal life. Her children prepare her path back into normal life. This rite once more entails the Hamar notion of the interdependence of the generations and the unity of mother and child.

In “Duka’s Dilemma” it is also shown that only after the baby has been taken out of the house, the pater of the child, in this case Sago, lifts up the newborn and has a closer look at it, examining if everything is all right with it (Lydall/Strecker, F, 2001). As Shada has mentioned before, there is no taboo for men to take up the newborn. However, it appears that men feel a certain hesitation to come close to newborns. The fact that Sago waits until his child is brought out of the house implies the notion that now that the baby has spent the seclusion period inside, it has gained strength and lost its fragility. This would also explain why none of the men who came to visit Almanda during her postpartum seclusion would hold little Alma or play with him.

10. *Dotin-Gilo* – The Sitting Ritual

The *dotin gilo* is a ritual, which is either performed when an *uta* is pregnant with her first child or after her postpartum seclusion. The *dotin gilo*, translated as the sitting ritual¹⁶¹ by Strecker/Lydall (1979b), is therefore either a pre- or a postnatal ritual, depending on the individual circumstances. It is, however, only performed once, either before or after the first birth.

“‘Yi! The *uta* is pregnant. What should she do?’

‘She should go and perform the sitting ritual, with the man at Ansonda.’”¹⁶²
(Baldambe in Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 149)

¹⁶⁰ See also Lydall/Strecker, F, 2001, in which the taking out of the house of Duka’s child Tini is documented.

¹⁶¹ The ritual is referred to as *dotun* by Strecker and Lydall, which translated means “placing in an upright or sitting position” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 209).

¹⁶² The *baje* man.

The *dotin gilo* is especially important for a woman and a man as it marks the change in the child's parents' social status after the birth of their first child and establishes their new position in society as adults.

The ritual is performed by the *baje* man¹⁶³. Each region has a *baje*,¹⁶⁴ a man who is responsible for performing the sitting rituals for the couples. Strecker and Lydall mention that there were four *baje* in Hamar at the time in which "Baldambe Explains" was written: one in Kufire, one in Assile, one in Wungabaino and one in Simbale (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 196). Epple told me, though, that nowadays all the *baje* live in Banna (p. i., Epple 10.12.04). *Baje*, itself is a term with various meanings. It sometimes is used to refer to a certain occupation or skill such as blacksmiths or "anyone who has an exceptional talent in hunting or making artifacts" (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 209). Sometimes it may also be used as an insult. Jensen translated *baje* as "gemiedene Kaste", avoided caste¹⁶⁵ (Jensen 1959: 324). Following Epple's description of the *baje* who is responsible for the region of Bashada, he is someone who is considered to be exceptionally powerful. Hailo Lito, an informant of Epple, even said, that *baje* and *ch'aaki*, evil power, are the same. The *baje* does "observe no rituals himself" (Baldambe in Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 149), meaning that he does not leap over the cattle, nor do his relatives and therefore has a different social position from men who are initiated. He himself says that he is even higher ranked than the *bitta*, because the *bitta* also depends on him to perform the *dotin gilo* (Epple 1995: 79). The *baje* is also referred to as the grandfather¹⁶⁶ of all people.

As I never had the chance to witness a *dotin gilo* myself, I must rely in my description on Baldambe's accounts in Strecker/Lydall 1979b pages 149-150 and the additional information provided by Epple 1995 pages 79-83.

Before the ritual may be performed the *uta* needs to provide a goat, which later will be given to the *baje* as payment for his service.¹⁶⁷ The *uta* further collects some special items from her female relatives which are later needed for the ritual, such as *kandi*,¹⁶⁸ a specially ground flour that is put into some *koisi*, small calabashes, *k'alchi*,¹⁶⁹ women's

¹⁶³ The office of the *baje* is inherited through the male family line (Tsulda Banko in Epple 1995: 78).

¹⁶⁴ Epple wrote that there was only one *baje* in Banna, named Gaito Irbano, who performed this ritual for all Bashada in 1995. But there are several other *bajes* in Banna each responsible for a certain region (Epple 1995: 77). I do not know the name of the *baje* responsible for the region of Dambaiti, but Baldambe called him "the man at Ansonda" (see above).

¹⁶⁵ Jensen, though, was also told that all the Bashada are *baje*, which as such is not the case (Jensen 1959: 344). The Bashada may devaluatingly be called *baje* because they are the only people in this region who do pottery and therefore entail a special position (p. i., Epple 20.12.04).

¹⁶⁶ "He is the *eyke* [grandfather] of all the children and everybody who came to him for the sitting ritual." (Dobi in Epple 1995: 80).

¹⁶⁷ Baldambe says that the goat is given to the *uta* by her father (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 149). Epple, however, recounts that the goat was given to the bride by her husband (Epple 1995: 79).

¹⁶⁸ *Kandi* is a Hamar term with various meanings. It literally means 'being beaten', 'knocked' or 'driven'. In this context and in the following, though, it refers to the flour, which the *uta* takes to the *baje*. *Kandi* is also the term for animals which were collected through raids, of which the husband is not allowed to drink milk if he has not yet performed the sitting ritual (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 194).

¹⁶⁹ The *k'alchi* is a belt made out of leather adorned with beads and cowrie shells. A woman may wear a *k'alchi* when she has turned into a *gol*, an adult married woman. Depending on the sex of her first child the woman then sews rows of cowrie shells onto the back, three for a boy and two for a girl. If her first child is a girl she sews two rows of cowrie shells, but may add another if the second child is a boy (p. i., Hailanda 18.09.02). The *k'alchi* is also needed for the *gali gilo* of a child. Jensen wrote about the *k'alchi* of the Bashada women: "Frauen, die ein Kind geboren haben, tragen bis zur nächsten Schwangerschaft einen ca. 8 cm breiten Gürtel (*kalsi*) aus steifen Leder mit Kauri verziert, der am Rücken zugebunden wird. Wenn sie in das Alter kommen, in dem sie keine Kinder mehr bekommen, tragen sie den kalschi-Gürtel nicht mehr" (Jensen 1959: 353).

cowry shell belts, and *tirre*, women's headdresses. The *uta* also brings her male *koli* staff.¹⁷⁰ Bearing these things the *uta* and her husband consult the *baje* man. If the *uta* is pregnant but has not given birth yet, she will collect an oblong, gray or black stone from a riverbed. This stone will symbolically be used in the ritual representing the unborn child. Has the *uta* already given birth to her first child she will bring the baby. Having arrived at the *baje*, the *uta* and her husband sit down facing each other on a cowhide. The wife of the *baje* takes the headdresses and the cowry belts and places them upon the *uta*'s head or next to her. The *uta* sits with her legs stretched out straight in front of her. The wife of the *baje* sits down opposite of her holding the *uta*'s head. The wife of the *baje* swayingly rocks the head to and fro making a wailing sound four times.¹⁷¹ If the *uta* has not given birth yet she will be asked,

“‘What is the name of your father-in-law?’

‘My father-in-law’s name is so-and-so.’

‘If you have a boy may the father-in-law’s name be given. If you have a girl may she be named as you wish. If you have a girl may she be named as you wish, I don’t give her a name.’”

(Baldambe in Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 150)

If the *uta* has already given birth to a child it is the parents who name the child and not the *baje* (see ch. 11.). Baldambe does not give any further description of the procedure of the rite in case the *uta* has actually brought her first-born child. I therefore will use the explanation given to Epplé by Dobi's, the wife of the *baje* in Banna. Dobi said that her husband takes the baby and ties some bark of the *lazi* tree¹⁷² around the baby's waist, neck and wrist and blesses it by spitting onto it, *patzema* (Epplé 1995: 80).

The *baje* man further takes a tuft of sheep's wool, which was brought by the couple, and ties it to a piece of bark, either of the *lazi* or the *gumaza*¹⁷³ tree. This arrangement is then knotted around the husband's right calf. The *baje* rubs his fingertips with some ash and gum and pretends to pull some pubic hair from the husband's belly and some of his forehead hair. Then he throws the imaginary hair and the gum into the bush (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 150). In Epplé's description the *baje* did not only pretend to pull hair, but actually really took some pubic hair of the husband. He also did not use sheep wool, but folded the hair into a three Birr note, which he then rubbed on the husband's leg. Epplé's informants Jammo and Tsulda provided another detail to the ritual mentioning that either sheepskin, or *lazi* bark is wrapped around the ankle or big toe of the husband. Only through having this knotted around a body part, the husband is again allowed to drink milk or eat meat of a *kandi* cow (Epplé 1995a: 81). The *baje* then takes the goat as payment.¹⁷⁴ If the *uta* has a leg ring, she will also give it to the *baje*. The couple further hands over the *koisi* with the flour and some milk, honey or beer as payment to the *baje*. After

¹⁷⁰ This is the staff, which she was given during the *koli shurta* (see ch. 6.1.). Epplé's description of the *dotin gilo* does not mention the *koli* staff (Epplé 1995: 77-83).

¹⁷¹ In Epplé's description of the *dotin gilo* this sequence is a bit differently. The wife of the *baje* takes some *maka-la*, little orange fruits, which have been kept with the flour inside the *koisi*. She chews on the fruits and touches the *uta*'s head, breast and shoulder with them. The wife of the *baje* further blesses the *uta* by spitting on her (Epplé 1995: 80).

¹⁷² *Lazi* has been identified to be '*Ficus thonningii* Blume' in Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 212.

¹⁷³ The *gumaza* tree has been identified to be '*Lannae triphylla*' in Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 212.

¹⁷⁴ Epplé writes that in the sitting ritual, which she saw, the wife of the *baje* did not do the wailing sound for the *uta*, because the *baje* had been angry with the couple. He did not perform the rite correctly, as the goat had been too small. However though, the couple later brought a bigger goat and nobody talked about this matter anymore (Epplé 1995: 82).

this, the sitting ritual is finished. “Before he [the husband] was a child. Having grown up, he came here bringing his wife, now he has become big, he has changed into an elder” (Dobi in Epple 1995: 80). But,

“Now when you [the husband] return you may drink *kandi* milk for you have become an elder. Now when someone dies you may dig the grave and collect the grave stones. Now you may perform the children’s *gali* ritual. Now you are an elder” (Baldambe in Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 15).

The sitting ritual stresses two major aspects of Hamar culture: First it shows, the importance of social standing in Hamar, as it confirms the status of the married couple as adults, as full members of the Hamar society, with all the accompanying privileges and duties. Secondly, it embodies the significance of legal descendance through children, as only through legal procreation a man and a woman have the right to achieve full membership in this society.



fig. 18 Almanda during her postpartum seclusion after the birth of her son Alma

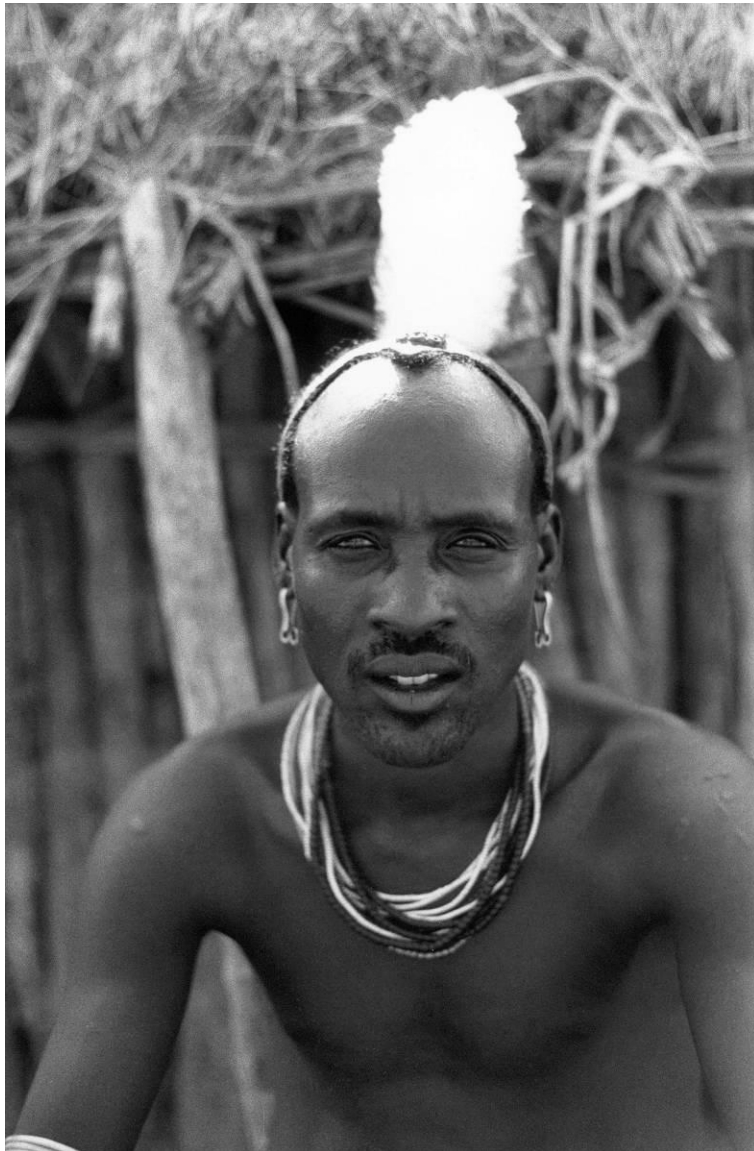


fig. 20 Shada (my host father) with clay cap, which may only be worn by *donza*



fig.21 Eilanda, wife of Shada, with her little daughter Natal. She is wearing the married woman's *binyere*



fig. 22 Waki (left) and her cousin Natal (Shada's daughter)

“Richness!
Fruitfulness!
Bad away!
May he take the whip,
the goat whip, the cattle whip.
May he make his father famous,
Make his mother famous.
Good things come from above.
May they descend!
May he herd cattle and goats!
May the cattle and goats increase!
May all flourish!
Bad get lost!
May foreigners come,
Come happily,
asking for you,
raising your name.
All is well!
Nagaya!”

(*barjo äla* at a *gali gilo* in Lydall/Head, F, 2001)

VI. Children's Confirmation Rites

Now that I have described the parental preconception and prenatal, postpartum and postnatal rituals I want to turn to, what I call, confirmation rites for young children. All the rituals dealt with in the previous sections must be seen as part of the social incorporation and becoming of a Hamar child, even though they are performed prenatally. Each ritual represents a crucial step in the process of ritual incorporation and social legitimization of the infant. The omission of any such ritual would have consequences on the child's social position and lead to its exclusion from the society. As explained, though, these previously described rituals focus more or less on the legitimization and protection of the infant and its birth through the consolidation of the social and ritual status of its parents¹⁷⁵ and their procreation. In the following chapters, I will talk about central children's rituals,¹⁷⁶ such as the *gali gilo*, the naming ritual, and *gore gilo*, the band-tying ritual,¹⁷⁷ that focus on confirming, protecting and strengthening the social position of the child in the group. As I will lay out, they serve as precautionary measures for the child's yet unborn siblings and furthermore are important for the fertility of the mother. Each of these steps is necessary for the child's integration irrespectively of its sex.

11. Naming the Child

"When a child is named, he is both individualized and incorporated into society. He may be brought into the society at large, in which case there is a general celebration involving the whole village (...) Or he may be incorporated into a restricted group, such as the family..." (van Gennep 1960: 62).

Naming ceremonies of children are found in many cultures mainly serving the purpose to "reaffirm a child's embeddedness in a network of kinship" (Morton 1996: 50)¹⁷⁸ and to make the child stand out from others who are not granted the privilege to carry a name and therefore are restrained from becoming an acknowledged member of the respective group (Kurella/Neitzke 2002: 191).¹⁷⁹ Following Behrend, the first name given to a child is its first attribute of being a social person (Behrend 1985: 24).¹⁸⁰ Strecker writes on names, *nabi*, in Hamar:

"The name is an intrinsic part of the person, and the social worthiness of a person accumulates in the name (...) 'Name' already acquire some coercive force by

¹⁷⁵ An exception is the 'coming out of the house' ritual (ch. 9.1.), which also should be classified as a children's incorporation rite.

¹⁷⁶ Behrend wrote on the Tugen, "...so machen sie auch aus ihren Kindern in Ritualen Personen. In Ritualen, die den Lebenszyklus markieren, erschaffen sie die soziale Person, und prägen ihr ein, wer und was sie ist" (Behrend 1985: 17).

¹⁷⁷ It should further be noted that all of these children's rites are gender unrelated and therefore are equally performed for either boys or girls.

¹⁷⁸ Morton (1996) wrote on naming as a social mechanism of children's incorporation within the Tongan society in her book "Becoming Tonga: An Ethnography of Childhood".

¹⁷⁹ Kurella and Neitzke report, for example, on the Kayapo of the Brazilian Amazon basin: "Man wird ein 'Schöner Mensch', indem man während einer Zeremonie geehrt wird. Dadurch setzt man sich von anderen ab, denen diese Ehre nicht zuteil wurde, die daher als 'gewöhnliche Menschen' bezeichnet werden (...) Jungen wie Mädchen können während einer Namensgebungszeremonie geehrt werden" (2002: 191).

¹⁸⁰ Behrend further suggests that the first name given to a Tugen child – being an ancestral name – is meant to incorporate it into the society. Whereas the names given to the person during later life, such as his/her 'goat' name or a name which refer to a certain event, pronounce its individuality and personal character (Behrend 1985: 25).

simple fact that by giving a name to someone, one usually implies the recognition of her or his social value. Naming is equivalent to valuing! People are given names in order to become socially valuable." (Strecker 1993: 5)

The child's naming ritual in Hamar, the *gali gilo*, however, entails another important social aspect as it relies on the functioning of the network of local people. The family of the child in question not only needs the support of its own family members to be able to perform this ceremony, but also relies on the participation of the local people, especially of the elders. The social embedding of the child therefore not only depends on its own legitimacy, but also on the local acceptance of its family (Lydall, without year.a: 9). I will come back to the topic of social recognition by the community and the dimension of this communal control over children in ch. 15. when discussing ritual impurity of children. Besides the ritual and social function the *gali gilo* and also the *gore gilo* have an important economic meaning for the family as it is an occasion at which the mother may claim further 'bowl' cattle and gifts from her husband's patrilineal senior kinsmen and their wives¹⁸¹ (see also Biirinda's claiming of gifts in Lydall/Head, F, 1990) (Lydall, without year.a: 20).

In Hamar it is common practice that the eldest son of the family names his firstborn male child after his father, the child's patrilineal grandfather.¹⁸² The next eldest son then gives his firstborn son the name of his elder brother, the child's most senior uncle. And accordingly, the next son gives his firstborn male child the name of his older brother and so on. Female children are most often given the name of their father's elder sister or some other senior female relative (Sagonda in Epplé/Brüderlin 2004: 83). Raum points out that among the Chaga the name given to a child is likely to be the name of a deceased ancestor. By doing so the name is remembered¹⁸³ and the ancestral spirit is bound to the child and therefore prevented from doing him or her harm (Raum 1940: 296-297). I do not know if this protective connection is also the reason for giving children the names of relatives in Hamar, as infants mostly receive names of living family members, but I do, however, suggest that the names are purposely passed on so that they are kept in memory. Shada further pointed out that children are thought to and also encouraged to adopt certain positive character traits and skills of their name giver (p. i., Shada 16.09.02). Strecker pronounces the significance of names: "To have a good name is almost like being good; to have a bad name is almost like being bad" (Strecker 1993: 5).

Alternatively, a family may also choose to name their child as they wish or have it take on a name by an unrelated name giver called *magó*.¹⁸⁴ The mother of the child may ask someone, who then is referred to as *magó*, to pass his or her name on to her child.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Lydall documented how Biirinda claimed gifts at her daughter Issere's *gali gilo*, asking, "Why don't you give me a cow? (...) Or give me iron rings instead! Why don't you buy me iron rings and say: 'Come put these rings on.' What is stopping you?" (Lydall/Head, F, 1990).

¹⁸² Sometimes the parents of a baby choose to save the grandfather's name for the next child. Almunda for example only named her second male child after the grandfather Alma.

¹⁸³ "'O you father, we would like to call this child by your name so that it be mentioned again among us (...) We beg of you your name that he may receive it!'" (...) 'Your ancestor, may you be mentioned in this house at all times. Protect this, your grandchild, lest your name cease to be remembered by us!'" (Raum 1940: 296).

¹⁸⁴ Girls sometimes also make adorned calabashes as presents, which are then referred to as *nasi*, child. Haito once made me such a calabash, *nasi kóisi*, and by accepting this gift I am now expected to name my child Haito. Sometimes this is also done with *gaus*, golden rings, which are given as presents. (On *nasi kóisi* and their adornments see also Dohrmann 1996)

¹⁸⁵ After the birth of a baby, Strecker wrote into his work journal: "...Baldambe says, that from now on many people will offer their name to the child but that the one who is most persistent and provide the most generous gifts will win in the end." He further recounts how he became the *magó* of this baby, "Gadi left her house. She comes to see me and we talk. She says she wants to call her boy 'Ivo', not 'Sigmund' as Baldambe suggest-

This is often done after the child's birth, but may also be done before the child is born (Lydall 1999: 4). During my first stay in Dambaiti in 2000, Sven Müller was asked to be the *mag*o of Biirinda's sister's unborn child. Sven spat onto the woman's belly and by doing so blessed her and her unborn baby. Shada told me how he blessed his *mag*o by chewing some Ari coffee, which he then spat onto the child four times,¹⁸⁶ meanwhile calling out his name and exclaiming: "Your name shall become as big as mine! You shall become big!" (p. i., Shada 17.09.02) The name-giver is later addressed by the child as *imago*, my *mag*o and treated as part of the family even if actually unrelated. The relationship between *mag*o and the child who has received the name is comparable with that of namesakes.¹⁸⁷ The child also adopts its namesake's terms of address, calling, for example, the mother of its *mag*o *inda*, mother, and the father of its name-giver *imbo*, father, etc. (p. i., Shada 17.09.02).

11.1. The *Gali Gilo* – The Child's Name-Giving Ritual

The first name is given to the child during the *gali gilo*, the name-giving ritual.¹⁸⁸ The name given to the child is its *gali nabi*, which is kept until the person, grown into an adult, takes on either its *gari nabi* or in the case of woman the *nasinda nabi* (see ch. 6.1.) (Lydall 1999: 4).¹⁸⁹

In Hamar, the parents may choose when the *gali gilo* is performed for their child. But often it is said that it is time to perform the ritual when the child is said to have '*tisha gaidi*', chewed fresh grain, meaning that its first teeth have come out. In Banna and in Bashada, however, the *gali gilo* is set to take place four days after the birth¹⁹⁰ (p. i., Duka 09.10.02). In Hamar the only given restriction is that no *gali gilo* shall be performed in the month¹⁹¹ of *mingi*¹⁹² (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 121).

The *gali gilo* derives its name from the creeper-like *gali* plant, identified by Strecker and Lydall as '*Ipomoea spathulata* Hall' (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 212), which is considered to be sacred, *barjo*, and therefore used in many rituals in Hamar. As such it plays a vital role in the *gali gilo*.

During my time in Hamar I had the opportunity to witness a *gali gilo*. The child was approximately three or four years old. Shada told me that normally the *gali gilo* is performed at an earlier age. But in this case the mother was a widow, who had no hurry to perform the rite, being in no rush to bear further children and correspondingly to perform her postpartum and prenatal rites, which are timely interlinked with the child's *gali gilo* (see ch. 6.4.).

ed. 'Ivo' is more Hamar she says. In the afternoon Gadi invites me for coffee in her house. I bring the last red beads I have and some blue ones. My 'god-son' is now one month old and already quite fit and fat. Wishing him good health, I give him my name together with the beads" (Strecker/Lydall 1979a: 43-44).

¹⁸⁶ Sometimes the chewed coffee is also spat right into the child's mouth (p. i., Mohaupt 17.01.05).

¹⁸⁷ Mohaupt further told me that as the *mag*o of a baby girl she was also expected to make the first string skirt for the little girl, who now carried her name. In return the father of the girl slaughtered a goat and made a big feast (p. i., Mohaupt 17.01.05).

¹⁸⁸ Lydall twice filmed the *gali gilo* of a child, of Biirinda's daughter Issere in Lydall/Head, F, 1990 and also of Duka's son Tini in Lydall/Strecker, F, 2001.

¹⁸⁹ Irrespectively of the *gali nabi* a child sometimes is also given a pet name, a *ganat nabi* (Lydall 1999: 4).

¹⁹⁰ Dohrmann writes about Banna that the parents freely choose the point in time at which the *gali gilo* of a female child is performed. The *gali gilo* of a male child, though, is set to be done after four days (Dohrmann 1996: 101). In my interview with Duka from Banna, though, she made no distinction between male or female children (p. i., Duka 09.10.02).

¹⁹¹ On Hamar terminology of months see also Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 158- 159.

¹⁹² Couples should also not conduct their sitting ritual in the month of *mingi* (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 121).

One morning Shada came to me, telling me that I should come to see the *gali gilo* at Muda's house.¹⁹³ Many people had gathered in the house, mostly elders, men and women. I knew some of them, but I did not know the mother of the child. Shada later told me that she had come from further away to have the *gali gilo* done at her relatives' house in Dambaiti (p. i., Shada 17.09.02).

The procedure of the ritual I saw largely confirmed with the description given by Baldambe.¹⁹⁴

"...it's time for the children's *gali* naming ritual. 'The wife, the mother, should go and fetch water.' That is the child's grandmother. (...) Off she goes to fetch water. Next, coffee is put on. (...) So the son goes and gets four *gali* leaves and puts them in a bowl. When the coffee is ready, four ladles-full are served into the small Ari coffee pot which had already been placed on the hearth. When the coffee is ready, four ladles are served into the bowl with *gali* leafs (...) The old lady (...) grandmother of the child to be named, puts her headdress on her right arm, takes the *gali* leafs out of the bowl of coffee and splashes coffee on the shoulders of the child's mother, four times, *bau!* on each shoulder twice (...) 'Take the headdress!' And the child's mother takes the headdress and cowrie shell belt from the grandmother, from right arm to right arm. She puts them on (...) Next, the wife¹⁹⁵ (...) takes a large food bowl and puts fresh butter inside and a string of beads and an iron bracelet for the child's mother. She hands the bowl to her eldest son who then hands it first to the child's mother and then to all women who are mother¹⁹⁶ to the child. Next, he hands it to all women who are grandmother to the child¹⁹⁷, then to all men who are grandfather to the child. (...) When this is done and the coffee has been drunk, the child is named. First the men take the child and holding him high spray him with coffee 'pssss, so-and-so'. The name is given, you as you like, I as I like, and thus the *gali* is beaten." (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 49-50)

Even though the description given by Baldambe is detailed, I want to add some particulars and variations of the rite, which I observed myself or were told during the SORC workshops or by my informants in Dambaiti.

When I came into Mulda's house a girl brought in a *karamb'a*, a calabash coffee bowl, filled with some coffee and some *gali* leaves. The coffee had been prepared before in a

¹⁹³ The *gali gilo* is mostly done in a private surrounding and not much talked about, even though it is of vital importance for the communal integration of the child (see also Dohrmann 1996 and her description of the *gali gilo* on pages 101-103).

Charles suggests why first-naming ceremony of children is often not particularly staged: "According to data in the Cross-Cultural Survey, no elaborate developed dramas occur as part of the first-naming ceremonies; this is in marked contrast to high dramas occurring at other crises in personal living. (...) Many cultures appear to lack any dramatic first-naming ceremonies. One suspects that for many people the mere arrival and presence of a baby, an entirely new little impersonation, is in itself so exciting an event that it requires very little heightening. The baby is an obvious cheerful bundle of human potentialities; therefore elaborate, dramatized ritual is not necessary..." (Charles 1951: 13).

¹⁹⁴ Only two aspect of the ritual which I saw deviated from Baldambe's description: there was no calabash bowl with butter used during the *gali gilo* in Dambaiti, which might have been due to the fact that it was a dry season and butter was scarce in general. Secondly, the mother of the child was not given an iron ring.

¹⁹⁵ She is the grandmother of the child.

¹⁹⁶ Meaning they are classificatory mothers of the children

¹⁹⁷ This also refers to the classificatory grandmothers of the child.

small Ari coffee pot¹⁹⁸ and was then poured into the *karamb'a*. The girl took the leaves and dipped them into the coffee sprinkling some of it onto the ground and the threshold. The *karamb'a* was the same that was later used by the elders. The mother sat down holding her child on her lap while an elder woman¹⁹⁹ sat down in front of her. This elder woman gave her *k'achi*, the women's apron, to the mother of the child, who put it on. The elder woman also took off her *tirre*, headdress, and her *k'alchi*, her woman's cowrie belt, and some white *shekeni*, beads, and put all of these items onto her right arm. The mother of the child then stretched out her right arm and the elder woman transferred the *tirre*, the *shekeni* and the *k'alchi* from her arm to the mother's arm. The mother of the child put the headdress on, put the beads around her neck and tied the belt around her waist.²⁰⁰ The elder woman took the coffee bowl and dipping the *gali* into the coffee anointed the shoulder and breast of the woman and also the child's head, who still was sitting on his mother's lap.²⁰¹ Four times she did this. While doing so she asked, "For whom is this ritual?" And the name of the child, "Walle!" was replied. The coffee bowl was then passed on to Muda, the senior most man and he took the *gali* and repeated the anointment.²⁰² Two more persons, who I did not know, repeated this procedure. The coffee bowl was then passed around following the order of seniority, first the men and then the women. The men also passed around the child, holding him up and spraying some of the coffee onto him and calling forth their good wishes for the boy:²⁰³

"Walle shall become big. Become big, *gebba*, Walle! He shall grow and go with the goats. His name shall be called everywhere he goes. He shall be known wherever he goes. He shall be liked by all people." (p. i., Shada 17.09.02)

Following this individual blessing the men collectively chant to call forth *barjo* for the child, "*Bodi! Gembala! Shati! Bodi! Gembala! Shati!*" Shada later told me what this blessing meant. *Bodi* refers to a glooming white fat, which evokes saturation and richness. *Gembala* is the name of a beautiful tree in Hamar and means that the child shall have many children. *Shati* is a demand for the child to get up and also means tastiness (p. i., Shada 17.09.02). When this ritual was finished, the guests stayed drinking coffee and chatting.

¹⁹⁸ The Ari pot is of special interest as it reveals the intercultural and historical connection of the Ari with the Hamar, Banna and Bashada. Even nowadays this cultural connection is mirrored in the importance of the Ari pot for some of the Hamar ritual, such as the *gali gilo* and the *duki*, the funeral of a person, two most essential rituals in the lifecycle of a Hamar. As Shada explained for the *gali gilo*, "The real important pot for the ritual is the small Ari pot. This is the elder brother of the Bashada pot." And Gude from Bashada added, "If you do not have a pot from Ari you can take a *gali* leaf and use it instead of the pot. You place the *gali* leaf here and say: 'This is my Ari pot.' You put four coffee beans onto the leaf and say: 'It is my Ari pot.' If you do not have the pot you use the *gali* leave. If you have a pot you use the Ari pot." (Epple/Brüderlin 2002: 13).

¹⁹⁹ In this case I do not know the exact family relationship between the mother of the child and the elder woman who performed the ritual. But in general it is the mother-in-law who does this ritual for her daughter-in-law (p. i., Shada 17.09.02).

²⁰⁰ Epple said, that the woman is supposed to wear these items given to her during the *gali gilo* the whole day (Epple 1995: 85).

²⁰¹ Dohrmann's account of a *gali gilo* in Banna, shows some differences to the *gali gilo* I observed in Hamar. According to her, the *gali gilo* was performed by a boy who was addressed as *äke*, grandfather, during the ritual (Dohrmann 1996: 102). I, however, was told that the ritual is always performed by the mother-in-law (p. i., Almanda 19.09.02). Dohrmann also mentions that the mother wore a leopard skin during the rite which resembled diversity. I have never been told that such a special skin is used in the *gali gilo* (ibid.). In this occasion the skin might have had a special meaning, as Duka had given birth to twins.

²⁰² Epple recounts that the anointment is done by two men and two women (Epple 1995: 84- 85).

²⁰³ In his cross-cultural survey on children's first-naming ceremonies Charles found that "frequently at the social gatherings, specific advice and admonitions, and prayers for hoped-for social accomplishments are dramatically given" (Charles 1951: 26).

When I asked my informants about the *gali gilo* all of them stressed that through this rite the child is not only named but that its *goiti*, its journey through life and future is ritually prepared and blessed. Nonetheless, this ritual entails even more:

It is - in the connection with the *gore gilo* - the central transitional rite for a child. Through the blessing of the elders, the child is fully integrated and confirmed as an individual into its kin and the community. Strecker confirms as he says, that through a name the child is "given a value precisely to enter the social domain and aspire to social worthiness" (Strecker 1993: 6). It ritually becomes a member of the Hamar society, now equipped with all the ritual prerequisites and rights to grow into a full social persona and to undergo all further lifecycle-rites, such as initiation or marriage (p. i., Almanda 20.09.12). Dohrmann writes – in reference to Baldambe's description (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 64) – that a child who dies before its *gali gilo* has been performed will be buried in the cattle kraal without any further ceremony, which is also the case for children who die after having had their *gali gilo* performed. She further writes that adornments of a deceased child who has had its *gali gilo* are stored in the loft and are never reused whereas possessions of a child who has not had a *gali gilo* are passed on to others (Dohrmann 1996: 113). I make a specific reference to this, as Dohrmann fails to make a distinction between legitimately born and illegitimately born children. Every infant that has been conceived in a legitimate union and has not become ritually impure will undergo a *gali gilo* done in its honor; thereby it is irrelevant whether the child is still alive when the rite actually is performed. Should a child die, its rites are completed posthumously, but never omitted (p. i., Duka 09.10.02).

In Hamar the only legitimately born children who are excluded postpartum from the right to a *gali gilo* are children who are considered to be *mingi*. Such children are either aborted or killed without performing any further rites on their behalf (see ch. VII.). It is therefore crucial to ritually guard a child from becoming *mingi*, which is achieved by correctly performing the rites. As the *gali* and *gore gilo* serve to ritually assert that the child and also its yet unborn siblings do not become *mingi*. As Duka said,

"The *gali gilo* is done for both, the living child and its next sibling. Each child's ritual is done for the one who is born and for the ones who are not yet conceived. All are blessed through this ritual. The *gali gilo* is for both." (p. i., Duka 09.10.02)

Another aspect of the *gali gilo* that should be pronounced – in addition to the communal incorporation and ritual protection of the infant and its unborn siblings – is the concurrent blessing of mother and child, which endorses and emphasizes their connection. The elders strike both, mother and child, in one movement with the *gali* leave, from the woman's shoulder over the breast down to the infant. This close relationship between mother and child, and their ritual interdependence for their individual, but also mutual well-being, is moreover expressed through the belief that the *gali gilo* is mandatory. The *gali gilo* is held for every legitimate baby, even if it was a late miscarriage, a stillbirth or dies postpartum (see Eppe 1995 for a description of a *gali gilo* performed for a miscarried baby page 84). Through these rituals the mother is allowed to perform her *gungulo gilo* and thus to become legitimately pregnant again (see ch. 6.4.).

Further must a woman who has become pregnant before her youngest child has had its *gali gilo* and its *gore gilo* abort her baby, as it is said to have been conceived illegitimately and therefore is considered to be *mingi*. Moreover she must kill her first child, as it is

considered to be *mingi* as well (p. i., Duka 09.10.02).²⁰⁴ The childrens' *gali gilo* and *gore gilo* are therefore also crucial for the fertility of women as without their children's rituals they are kept from procreation (Epple 1995: 85).

As shown, the *gali gilo* is a ritual that fuses several different symbolic aspects and that is of greatest significance for the mother and her children. It is the decisive rite for the integration of a child: its correct performance confirms the child's stand as a member of Hamar society and blesses its further life and the siblings to come. Its incorrect performance or even omission leads to the social exclusion of the child, alive or unborn. The *gali gilo* once more expresses the ritual and social interdependence of siblings and generations as they are ritually connected and any mistake or incorrectness during the rite bears irreversible consequences not only for the living but also for the unborn.

12. The *Gore Gilo* – The Ritual of Tying on Bands

In Hamar the *gore gilo*, or *goro gilo*, is usually performed in sequence with the *gali gilo*, or even as part of the *gali gilo*, maybe also on the following day, sometimes even only after a couple of years (see below) (p. i., Almada, 17.09.02).²⁰⁵ While some of the mentioned ritual aspects of the *gali gilo* reoccur in the *gore gilo*, such as the collective blessing, there are nonetheless some essential differences. It appears that even though the child, its unborn siblings and also its mother are blessed during the *gali gilo*, the focus of the *gore gilo* lies more on the child as an individual.

During this ritual several bands, called *gorr*, made of bark strings are knotted around the child's arms and legs as well as waist and neck.²⁰⁶ These bands are until they fall off (p. i., Aikenda 18.09.02). Unfortunately I was not given the chance to see a *gore gilo*, therefore I will use the sources available in discussing this children's rite.

"...the next day the *goro* ritual is performed. The child has never had any beads. The grandmother has beads or an iron ring or a headdress, and she puts one of these on the child. The eldest son (...) goes out and collects branches of the *lazi* or *donga* or *gumaza*,²⁰⁷ strips off the bark and puts them on a hide of a goat-cow,²⁰⁸ If there is no goat-cowhide, the hide of a spear-cow, which was acquired without incurring loss of human life is used. 'Such a cow is well, its hide is good.' The bark is brought and spit, spit, spit, and chewed, chewed, chewed, and twisted into strings and they are said to be beads. Four are tied round the child's neck, four round the waist, one on each wrist, one at each elbow, that makes four on the arms, one at each ankle, one at each knee, that makes four on the legs, and altogether with the neck and waist there are ten! 'Are the *goro* bands tied?' 'They are tied.' The reward for the job is

²⁰⁴ The problem that the mother cannot become pregnant again before her child's *gali gilo* is performed only occurs in Hamar, as the *gali gilo* in Banna and Bashada is done directly in subsequent to the birth (four days up to one week) (p. i., Duka 09.10.02).

²⁰⁵ For a description of the *gore gilo* in Kara and cultural divergences see Gezagh 1994: 62-64.

²⁰⁶ In this context I want to refer to van Gennep, who stresses that "All the rites which include the act of cutting, on the one hand, and of tying, on the other, hardly present material for discussion (...) In rites of incorporation there is a widespread use of the 'sacred bond', the 'sacred cord', the knot, and of analogous forms..." (van Gennep 1960: 166).

²⁰⁷ These trees have been identified as *Ficus thonningii* Blume, *Cordia ovalis* R. Br. and *Lannea triphylla* by Streckler and Lydall in Streckler/Lydall 1979b: 212. I was told by Almada, however, that the bark of the *baraza* tree is also used for these strings (p. i., Almada 17.09.02).

²⁰⁸ Other descriptions given of this rite mention that the bark strings are placed inside a calabash bowl filled with butter. I do not know if in former times a goat hide was used, or if Baldambe's account varies, as he talks of a *gore gilo*, which was performed in a context in which the grandfather of the child had died, but still was included in the performance of the child's rites.

boiled sorghum for the girls who chewed the bark, porridge for the older sister who tied on the bands, and coffee for the elders..." (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 50).

Strecker provides some more details on the *gore gilo* in his work journal (Strecker/Lydall 1979a: 162-163, 192-193): The *gore gilo* is not, as it is the case for the *gali gilo*, performed by the mother-in-law, it is the local *gudili*,²⁰⁹ the patrilineal grandfather or senior-most uncle of the infant, who is the central active figure in this rite. He is the one who passes around the *sherka*, the calabash bowl, with which the child is blessed and with which the relatives of the child may claim gifts from each other (Strecker/Lydall 1979a: 162, 193). It is important for the child, however, that once more it has been blessed collectively by the elders and its kin, as they all gather to participate in the *gore gilo*.

The male guests take several slices of bark, separating the inner from the outer bark. The female guests chew the inner bark until it becomes soft and then twist it into strings, which are bound around the extremities of the child. The rest of the strings are put into a *sherka*, a calabash bowl, containing some butter. This bowl is then passed around by the *gudili* (or the child's grandfather or its senior uncle) and handed to each person present following the order of seniority. This person then takes the opportunity to claim gifts from his/her relatives (see also Lydall 1988b). If a consent with intended donor is reached the claimant takes several symbolic sips from the bowl (three times if female, four times if male) and rubs him/herself with a bit of butter (on the forehead, collar bone or leg if female; on the forehead if male). The bowl is then passed on to the next person. Only after all the guests are satisfied is the focus shifted back to the child who is then held up and collectively blessed by the men, similarly to the *gali gilo*, calling out: "*Bodi, Bodi, shati, shati, gembala, gembala...*"²¹⁰ (Strecker/Lydall 1979a: 162, 193).

The accounts of the *gore gilo* found in literature, however, mainly appear to emphasize the process of demanding gifts by its participants rather than the blessing of and the significance for the young child. But Duka and Sagonda gave me some further insights, which assert the role of the *gore gilo* for the child's social status.

Duka: This ritual is done after the *gali gilo* has been performed. It is important for the mother, without, she may not bear any further children. All the children's rituals must be performed before she may become pregnant again. It is very important for the woman. Her son later will say, that it was good that she had all the rites done properly. And later he will be careful to make the same ritual for his children.

TB: Is the *gali gilo* more important than the *gore gilo*?

Duka: No, both are important. Together they bless the child.

TB: But didn't you tell me before, that in Banna, the *gore gilo* is sometimes done when the child is already grown up, sometimes even before its leap over the cattle? So how can the *gore gilo* be so important for the infant?

Duka: That is right, but women do not want to marry men, who have not had their *gore gilo* done. People will gossip about him. They will say: "He didn't have his *gore gilo*! How can he marry? How can he father children?"

²⁰⁹ The *gudili* is a kind of local 'land priest' who is responsible for the "seasonal rituals of fertility and protection, that ensure the well being of the locality, its fields, pastures and forests. And that of its human and animal population. He also performs a ritual of reconciliation whenever some serious conflict has disrupted the social group" (Strecker 1976b: 62). The office of the *gudili* is either inherited or ascribed by the local *zarsi* (ibid.).

²¹⁰ For explanations of these terms see ch. 11.1.

Sagonda: If he has not had his rituals, he won't be allowed to leap over the cattle.

Duka: And the girls won't be allowed to marry.

TB: So the *gore gilo* is sometimes even done in retrospect?

Sagonda: Yes, in Banna it is often done when they are already grown-up. But in Hamar this is not possible. There it needs to be done right away, when the child is still small.

(p. i., Duka & Sagonda 09.10.02)

Duka and Sagonda's explanation show that this ritual is of great importance for the individual's future and its social acceptance. Its omission would prevent that person from undergoing further rituals through which he/she would gain the status of an adult and consequently of becoming a fully integrated member of the group with the right to legitimately produce offspring. Even though the age of the protagonist for whose sake the rite is performed may vary in Hamar, Banna and Bashada, the concept expressed through this rite is the same: the collective blessing and approval by its kin and its symbolic integration into the society through the tying on of bands.²¹¹

Nonetheless, the *gore gilo* appears to entail less drama for the individual involved when compared to the *gali gilo*, as the *gore gilo* may be delayed and performed in retrospect (see above) without any obvious or immediate consequences for the actual current well being of the child. Whereas in contrast the omission of the *gali gilo* would lead to direct consequence for the child and its following siblings. The customary ideal in Hamar nonetheless requires the sequence of children's confirmation rites, meaning both the *gali* and the *gore gilo*, to be completed so that the child is incorporated into Hamar society and before its mother may bear further children.

12.1. The *Katchi* Ritual

I briefly want to mention a third rite which is performed for children. It is the *katchi gilo*,²¹² translated as the 'necklace ritual' by Lydall (without year.a: 18). As I have never witnessed this rite myself, nor was told about it in my interviews, no sufficient information can be obtained from the literature the discussion must remain preliminary. Lydall briefly mentions this ritual in the context of the power of elderly women in Banna, as this rite must also be performed by the mother-in-law (ibid.).²¹³ Sagonda, the mother-in-law of Duka, describes it:

"So, I the grandmother, should do it. 'The boy [Tammo] has chewed fresh grain, the cattle [i.e. his teeth] have come up, go now to the child's grandma for the *katchi* ritual.' If this were said, I would do it with my *tiri* [headdress], putting it

²¹¹ Raum also depicts a children's ritual of tying on bands among the Chaga. While the grandfather of the child prays for the child's well being he ties two leather rings onto the child's wrist and onto the child's mother's arm. These rings are supposed to protect the child in its liminal state from the malevolence of its deceased ancestors. Through the tying these rings the infant is "accepted into the human society and taken out of its sacred state of belonging to the ancestors" (Raum 1940: 297- 298).

²¹² The term *katchi* is derived from the Hamar verb to put on something (p. i., Eppele 10.01.05).

²¹³ The *katchi* ritual was the source for the conflict between Sagonda and her son Sago portrayed in the film *Duka's Dilemma* (Lydall/Strecker, F, 2001). Sago had put some beads on his baby son without having Sagonda perform the *katchi* ritual. She felt betrayed by her son and consequently refused to do the *gali gilo* and the pre-conception rite for Sago's wife. I therefore conclude that the *katchi* rite is normally performed before the *gali gilo*, but do not know for certain.

on four times. Then his wife may rub *bodi* [i.e. perform the preconception rituals] in order to birth" (Lydall, without year.a: 24).

Sagonda's account reveals that the rite is probably performed around the same time as, or even before, the child's *gali* and *gore gilo*, as she says that afterwards the woman may perform her preconception rites. Eppele told me that in this ritual the small child is given the grandmother's headdress for a day and that only after this rite is performed, the child may wear adornments such as beads (p. i., Eppele 09.01.05). I want to point out, though, that some of the ritual aspects described in the context of the *katchi*, such as the putting on of the grandmother's headdress and the pronouncement that the child is now allowed to wear beads are also found in the description given by Baldambe on the *gore gilo* (see above). Maybe the Banna and Bashda *katchi gilo* takes on some of the same aspects as the Hamar *gore gilo*, since the Banna and Bashada *gore gilo* may also be postponed until the child is already grown-up, whereas this would be impossible in Hamar. This is however speculative; this aspect of regional ritual divergence must – at this point in time – be related to further research.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Lydall in an informal conversation confirmed, that the *katchi* ritual and its implications and regional divergence are not yet sufficiently researched in order to be able to give an accurate portrayal of it (p. i., Lydall 01.02.05).



fig. 23 Elder performing the *gali gilo* (Bashada)



fig. 24 Anointing the mother's breast and the child's head during the *gali gilo* (Bashada)



fig. 25 Hailanda, Shada's mother, is the one who performs the preconception rituals for the wives of her sons. She is wearing her *tirre*, the women's headdress



fig. 26 Eilanda's *k'alchi* [women's cowrie shell belt]. The three rows on the back show that she has given birth to a male child

“Such a child
will bring
misfortune to our people
and to our country.
The rain won’t come
to Hamar.
Our country will dry up.
Misfortune will come.”

(p. i., Shada 17.09.02)

VII. *Mingi* and *Dakka* – Concepts of Ritual Impurity

In the previous chapters I have given a perspective on the social and ritual mechanisms of children's incorporation into the Hamar society. I have described the prerequisite parental rituals, which serve to prepare and legitimize the union of parents and therefore the birth of their offspring and the essential children's rites that confirm and protect the status of an infant and its yet to be born siblings. Rites, by which the infant is ritually incorporates into its kin and into the society. The question, which should be asked, at this point thus regards breaking of these ritual traditions and social norms, its direct consequences, and what this entails for the born or unborn life. The key concept to investigate in this context – which I already have referred to in the previous sections of this paper – is the Hamar notion of ritual impureness, *mingi*.

The Hamar concept of *mingi* is applied to various aspects of life. This concept is found among different groups of South Omo, not only in Hamar, Banna²¹⁵ and Bashada, but to my knowledge, also in Kara, Ari²¹⁶ and Arbore. The spectrum and implications of this concept may vary, nevertheless they are always considered to be negative. To give an impression of the persistence of this concept I am going to quote some examples outlined by Baldambe:

“The Tsamai are bad people, they have the evil eye, they are *mingi*. People who kill a Tsamai will get lost. If anybody steals Tsamai cattle he will get lost. The Tsamai have magic which drives people crazy (...) and all the homesteads will die and be finished.” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 23- 24)

Baldambe recounts, that the Tsamai, a neighboring group of the Hamar (see map 2), are said to be *mingi* in a magical sense as they have evil powers, which are used in order to harm others.

The concept of *mingi*, is furthermore applied in various ritual contexts, in which its negative consequences are said to harm the ritual processes. For example, is a specific season considered to be *mingi*, and as such, certain rituals should not be performed during this time. Baldambe exemplifies,

“Later on follows the month called *mingi*. In this month one does not slaughter goats to consult their intestines, one does not perform the *gali* naming ritual for a child, one does not go with one's pregnant wife to the sitting ritual at Anson-da.” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 121)

Certain animals may also not be used for ritual purposes, as the Hamar say, that they are *mingi*,

“Some cattle are bought with the elephant tusks, they may not be used for the *garo* calf, they are *mingi*. Cattle bought with rhinoceros are not used, they are *mingi*. The cattle bought with donkeys are *mingi*. People don't use these for the

²¹⁵ Masuda writes that illegitimate children are called *ubasa* or *duba* in Banna and that “in the past both *ubasa* and *duba* children were aborted or killed as soon after the birth as possible, but nowadays an *ubasa* baby can be kept alive after ritual purification by the chief (*bita*)” (Masuda 2000: 27). Ritual purification of impure children appears to be practiced in Banna, but to my knowledge is not accepted as an option in Hamar. Duka from Banna and the Banna women at the SORC workshop in 2002 further never made a distinction between ritually impure children, nor were these children referred to as *ubasa* or *duba*, but always as *mingi* (p. i., Duka 09.10.02 and Epple/Brüderlin 2004, confirmed by Lydall, p. i. 01.02.05).

²¹⁶ On concepts of children's ritual impurity among the Ari see Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 107-110.

ukuli rituals nor for the funeral rituals. ‘What are these cattle?’ ‘They are elephant-cattle.’ ‘Yi!’ The elephant grows teeth in the upper jaw, it is *mingi*. The rhino has teeth on its upper jaw, it is *mingi*. The lion grows upper teeth, it is *mingi*.” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 75- 76)

In this context, though, it is important to note that these described applications of the *mingi* concept all are said to be *mingi* as such. This kind of ritual impureness is immanent and therefore irreversible.

In other cases, though, ritual impureness is brought about through negative influences such as human wrongdoing or breaking of taboos²¹⁷ so that people, places or things are considered to become *mingi*. Sometimes this ritual impureness can be annulled through ritual cleansing.²¹⁸ In other cases, though, caused ritual impureness is irremediable, as Baldambe points out:

“When a man’s penis is cut off he is *mingi*. When a Korre kills a woman he cuts off her breast, as he cuts off a man’s penis (...) All those whose breasts are cut off or whose penises are cut off are *mingi*. People don’t bury them. They throw them to the vultures and hyenas (...) The dead man has no *baba* stone, he has no burial.” (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 65-66)

As this example shows, the consequence of an injury on the male genitals or the female breast is the postmortem exclusion of the affected person from society by depriving him/her of the right of a proper burial. Moreover, this person is not only denied a full burial; it is as if he/she never existed. All his/her belongings will be lost. His/her spouse is not considered to be his/her legitimate spouse anymore. The children are not considered to be his/her descendants anymore. The cattle may not be inherited by his/her family.

In a comparable sense a baby or child, unborn or born, who is said to be *mingi*, is doomed to be excluded from society. Such a child is seen as a threat to the family and community. The notion that a single child may threaten the existence of the whole group is also reported by Raum of the Chaga:

“The chief, as arbiter over the life of a child (...) takes specific anomalies to be threatening to the country as a whole (...) In these instances of general danger, the killing carried out by the chief’s orders assumed the form of a purification rite.” (Raum 1940: 90)

In Hamar, though, the actual fault for the infant’s ritual impurity is not thought to be with the child, rather it is the inevitable consequence for its genitors’ wrongdoing and disregard of ritual and social norms. I will return to this topic in detail in the following. Beforehand, however, I would like to draw attention to ch. 3.2. in which I pointed out that *maeshis*, the ancestral spirits, and their power over the living serve as an important mechanism for conserving the traditional way of life in Hamar. Whereas *maeshis* belong to the transcendental world, the concept of ritual impureness belongs to the indirect earthy

²¹⁷ The notion that something is *mingi* is a very powerful one, but not every breaking of a taboo necessarily leads to something’s or somebody’s ritual impureness. Oftentimes things are said to have been spoiled, *seesidi*, which can be reverted by ritual cleansing. In Bashada, for example, a woman who has her menstruation or is illegitimately pregnant may not go to collect clay. Does she disregard this rule, the place will spoil and all the pots made with this clay will break. The place needs to be ritually cleansed with *gali* leaf by someone from the Binnas moiety so the clay becomes usable again (Gude and Bashiri in Epplé/Brüderlin 2002: 19).

²¹⁸ For example, when a woman’s front skirt has fallen off, is she not allowed to put it back on herself, but must call the *bajje* man to do it, as it has become *mingi* (p. i., Epplé 10.01.05).

realm, as it catalyzes human wrongdoing into negative consequences for the community. In this sense, the concept of *mingi* plays a vital role in providing rationalization for unexplainable occurrences and moreover may be used as an indirect means of social control over the actions of others (see ch. 15.). Raum also mentions the influence of social control on infanticide among the Chaga:

“...one is constrained to look at the custom of infanticide, not as a sign of depravity, but as an instance illuminating the extent and limits of parental authority as society imposes them on the individual.” (Raum 1940: 91)

Another Hamar concept which I would like to introduce in this context is *dakka*, translated as ‘dirt’ by Lydall (p. i., Lydall 01.02.05). Children conceived in a premarital union are said to be immanently *dakka*. *Dakka*, is the Hamar term usually used for dirt in general, normally there is no ritual implication attached to it. In this context, nonetheless, the term *dakka* is used to describe a ritual dirtiness. The notion that these children are *dakka* is similar to the concept of *mingi*, whereas *dakka* only affects the child itself²¹⁹ but not – as *mingi* does – the whole community.

In the following I will describe the dimensions the *mingi* and the *dakka* concepts have on the social incorporation into or exclusion of children from Hamar society, the various reasons for their occurrence and the consequences for the child itself, its genitors and the community.

13. Anza Nas – Premarital Pregnancy and Consequence

In this paper I have estensively described parental pre- and postnatal rituals at lengths, because - as variously emphasized - they constitute the prerequisite for the social and ritual incorporation of a couple’s offspring as a child fathered without its genitors ritual preparation is considered illegitimate. Hence unmarried girls – but also betrothed girls who have not yet undergone their bridal rituals²²⁰ – do not fulfill the social and ritual prerequisites for reproduction. If a girl nevertheless conceives a baby, this child is said to be *dakka*,²²¹ dirt, as it is an *anza nas*, a girl’s child conceived without ritual preparation (p. i., Lydall 01.02.05). As Duka says, “She had no marriage rituals. She was not married. She still was wearing her girl’s skirt, not her woman’s skirt. The child was begotten in the bush” (p. i., Duka 09.10.02).

Although girls officially are not supposed to have sexual intercourse with boys or men, they sometimes do have premarital relationships, which are kept semi-secret.²²² It appears that the social ethos in Hamar attempts not as much to prevent the relationship itself, but rather the consequence of illegitimate premarital pregnancy.²²³ As Duka said,

²¹⁹ The Bashada say, that such a child is a threat to the mother as it will cause its mother to become infertile, if she does not abort (p. i., Epple 01.02.05). However, does this in a way seem to be irrelevant, as no unwed girl is allowed to actually bear a child conceived in a premarital union.

²²⁰ Epple described a case of an *uta* who was brought to her husband’s homestead being pregnant by another man (1995: 71-75).

²²¹ Interestingly, the Hamar women I talked to did not make a distinction between *mingi* and *dakka* when talking about illegitimate children. They always used the term *mingi* to describe unaccepted children. It was not before Lydall pointed this differentiation out to me, that I learnt that a distinction is made between *mingi* and *dakka*.

²²² On secret lovers see also Mohaupt 1995: 46- 48.

²²³ Kerri from Bashada recounts, “A good girl, a girl who has already been promised to someone or is married to someone would not sleep with boys. She would say, “I have a young husband! I will only sleep with him. I will only give birth to his children! That is our tradition. There are also girls, girls who go with the young men and who sleep with them. Some of them become pregnant (...) those who like to meet up with boys have boy-

“...the mother tries to keep her daughter away from the men, so that she does not become pregnant” (p. i., Duka 09.10.02). Whereas married women, who are pregnant with an illegitimate baby, may try to conceal the child’s illegitimacy (see below), an unmarried girl is left with no other option than to abort the baby or, if abortion fails, to kill the newborn immediately after birth (p. i., Eikenda 18.09.02).²²⁴ Haito elaborates the dilemma,

- TB: What does your mother tell you? Does she say that you should stay away from the dances, or does she tell you that you should go and enjoy them as long as you are young?
- Haito: She tells me: “Go dancing!”
- TB: But don’t you meet boys at the dances?
- Haito (laughing): Yes, I meet boys there. But I do not go there for the boys. I go there to dance with my girlfriends.
- TB: But doesn’t it happen, that girls meet with the boys and then get pregnant?
- Haito (laughs): Some girls get pregnant.
- TB: And what do you do if that happens?
- Haito: You must abort the baby. You go to a woman, who massages your belly by stepping onto it. She pushes so hard, that the baby dies.
- TB: Is it very bad if a girl gets pregnant before she is married?
- Haito: It is bad, especially if I have already been betrothed to someone. My future husband will go to kill the man with whom I laid. He probably will kill me too. It is also very bad to become pregnant if you have not been married.
- TB: Why do you have to abort the baby?
- Haito: Such a child is no *edi*, human It is an *anza nas*, a girl’s child.
- TB: But wouldn’t it also grow-up to become a person?
- Haito: This is our Hamar *dambi*, our custom. You must abort it, because it would not be accepted. There is nothing you can do.
- TB: Whom do you tell that you are pregnant?
- Haito: My mother.
- TB: Does your mother tell your father?
- Haito: No, she does not tell him.
- TB: What would your father do, if he would know that you are pregnant?
- Haito: He would beat me. My mother does not tell my brothers either, because if they knew, they would go and beat the boy with whom I laid. My mother takes me to the woman who knows how to do the abortion. If people ask what is wrong with me, she tells them that I am sick. We do the abortion as soon as possible, because otherwise the people will know.

(p. i., Haito 18.09.02)

As premarital pregnancies are considered to be a fundamental taboo in Hamar, I asked Aikenda if a girl gets a bad reputation or even has difficulties to find someone to marry if

friends, but those who don’t like to have lovers simply do not have lovers before they get married ” (Eple/Brüderlin 2004: 21- 22).

²²⁴ Masuda writes that among the Banna premarital pregnancies may retrospectively be legitimized through urged marriage insisted on by the family: “If an unmarried girl becomes pregnant and the fetus’s biological father is apparent, they can urgently marry (...) Thus the child’s legitimacy would be ensured by establishing a legally sanctioned father (pater)...” (Masuda 2000: 28). However, I was told that even if the girl would promptly be married to a man – which to my knowledge is not really practiced in Hamar – the baby would still have to be aborted as its legitimacy cannot be established in retrospect (p. i., Shada 17.09.02).

people know that she was pregnant premaritally. But Aikanda told me that premarital pregnancy in itself is not considered to be something disgraceful, as the Hamar say that even the daughter of the *bitta* had been pregnant before she was married (p. i., Aikanda 18.09.02). However, the problem in the case described by Haito lies with the fact that Hamar girls are betrothed at a young age and therefore most often are already considered to be the wife of someone, even if they still live at their parent's homestead (see ch. 5.). If such a girl involves herself in a love affair, it is seen as adultery.²²⁵ The husband consequently is expected to save face²²⁶ by either demanding compensation or by actually killing his wife's lover and maybe even the girl.²²⁷ Baldambe recounts an incident in which the husband demands compensation,

"When her husband hears that his wife is pregnant he says nothing, but is quiet. He will leave her. Later when the child has been born and thrown in the bush he will take cattle on account of the child. If there are no cattle he takes the younger sister and thus gets married twice." (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 153- 154)

To avoid escalation it therefore is most important to conceal the pregnancy is from the girl's in-laws.²²⁸ In Lydall's film "The Women Who Smile" Hailanda, Shada's mother, reports what happened when one of her sons impregnated a girl, who was already betrothed to another man:

"My son laughed with a girl and she got pregnant. The midwife couldn't abort it. The girl was given to her husband. When she reached his home they asked: 'Who was it? Who did you lie with?' 'It was Alma's son,' she said. She told the truth so when her stomach was massaged it came out. 'I am a young man!' her husband said. 'How dare he lie with my wife?' So he came to make battle and took away many animals." (Lydall/Head, F, 1990)

Although Haito stresses that premarital pregnancies are kept secret, I nevertheless have doubts how successful an occurrence as pregnancy can actually be withheld from public knowledge. Lydall told me, that women most often actually know about it, but that, as told by Haito, such matters are, if possible, not divulged to men (p. i., Lydall 01.02.05). An exception, though, is the boy who has impregnated the girl, as he usually is asked by the girl to pay for the abortionist's²²⁹ service (p. i., Yayu 22.09.02). I was also told that the girl is asked to reveal the name of her lover during the abortion. Should she conceal his name, the abortion is said to fail (p. i., Epple and Lydall 01.02.05).²³⁰ Premarital pregnancy there-

²²⁵ Kerri from Bashada even stated that a woman's love affair itself might kill her husband, as "having a lover is like having the evil eye" (Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 21).

²²⁶ On aspects of honor and pride among the Hamar see Strecker 1996.

²²⁷ Yayu, a young wife from Dambaiti, told me, that her husband had repeatedly impregnated a young girl. One day the girl's husband came to Yayu's homestead and threatened to kill her husband. Luckily, though, her husband was away with the cattle and therefore was not killed (p. i., Yayu 22.09.02).

²²⁸ Lydall in an unpublished letter to Masuda wrote that the pregnant girl's husband will "be appeased with gifts of livestock from the girl's family as well as the boyfriend's family. the mother of the girl will forsake the milk cow which the girl's husband would otherwise give her as part of the bride price" (unpublished letter by Lydall 2001)

²²⁹ The abortion is performed by women of whom it is said that they know how to do it well. Aikanda, for example, told me that Hailanda, Shada's mother, knows how to do it. To my knowledge, abortion is induced by what Devereux calls 'mechanical abortion' as the abdominal wall is externally massaged until the fetus dies and comes out (Devereux 1960: 33).

²³⁰ See Epple 1995: 71-77, where a case is described of an *uta*, who refused to reveal her lover's name.

fore appears to be treated as a kind of silent secret as some people know about it, but do not talk about it, as long the socially expected measure of abortion is taken.

Masuda states about Banna that the answer given to him in reply to the question why such a child is doomed to be aborted or killed, primarily accentuated the aspect of kin relation and care taking: “If we let the baby live, who could be its legal father?” or “Who on earth would foster it?” (Masuda 2000: 28). Nonetheless, this pragmatic answer does not sufficiently explain the taboo and the notion that such a child is considered to be *dakka*. There are various other aspects, which come into play: Firstly, this child is ritually illegitimate, as its parents’ union has not been ritually acknowledged. Secondly, no pre-conception rituals were performed and therefore the child has not received *barjo* (see ch. 6.4.). A child without *barjo*, however, is not considered to be *edi*, human. Accordingly, it is barred from the right to become a member of Hamar society. Thirdly, I further do suggest that the taboo on premarital pregnancies as well as the concept of *mingi* play an important role as an indirect means of social control over the actions of individuals. I will return to this topic in ch. 15.

14. Ritual Impureness as a Consequence of Disrespecting Parental Rituals

Even if a couple’s union has been ritually sealed, their reproduction must each time be ritually legitimized anew, before and after the birth of every child (see ch. 6.3., ch. 6.4.). A baby conceived before the mother has passed through all her pre- and postnatal rites or before the couple’s first child’s *gali gilo* and *gore gilo* are performed is said to be immanently *mingi*. The same applies if the rituals are not performed correctly. A *mingi* child, though, is not accepted into Hamar society and must be aborted or killed postpartum.²³¹ Shada also told me that *mingi* children are not only expelled from the world of the living, but also from the afterworld. It is said that these children do not become ancestral spirits postmortem whereas children who died but were legitimately born and ritually incorporated become *maeshi*²³² after their death, even if they die at a young age (p. i., Shada 17.09.02) (see ch. 3.2.).

Sagonda exemplifies the case of a married woman who disregards her ritual preconception preparation and becomes pregnant with a second baby before the senior sibling’s confirmation rites have been performed:

“‘The ritual [menstruation] has not come to me. It has not come!’ you say. But her husband says, ‘Ah, her ritual has not come yet, what may happen? If we sleep together, it is without consequences!’ he says (...) Now that it [the woman’s menstruation] has left for a long time, ‘the ritual has not been coming to me in the near past. So what makes my blood get lost? My belly is simply growing! Ag, ah! I have not seen the *gilo* [menstruation] with me. Did it meet [with the sperm] when my husband and I were sleeping together?’ (...) Mmmh. Did they meet on the way? Now what is growing in the inside is *mingi* [impure]. It is very, very, very *mingi*.” (Sagonda in Epplé/Brüderlin 2004: 108-109)

²³¹ To my knowledge children are either killed by abandoning them in the bush and leaving them to die, or by suffocation. Lydall stressed, that no blood shall be shed when killing a child (p. i., Lydall 01.02.05).

²³² Even though these children’s *maeshi* do not have the same power over the living as adult *maeshi*, they may harm their junior siblings. A child’s sickness often times is said to come about due to its deceased senior sibling’s malevolent *maeshi*. The mother therefore must console its spirit by sprinkling some mother’s milk onto the ground (p. i., Aikenda 18.09.02).

In this case, not only the unborn baby is said to be *mingi*, but also the one who has already been born. Hamar custom consequently demands that the unborn child is aborted and its senior sibling is killed. To secure legitimate reproduction a couple therefore must ensure that all the rituals are performed correctly, because even if the pregnant woman would try to hide the fact that she has become pregnant before finishing all required rituals, it sooner or later would show. Kerri from Bashada gives an example:

“If they [the woman pregnant with an illegitimate baby and her husband] went to an initiation, when the initiate is going to leap over the cattle, the cattle would go crazy. The cows would go wild and then everybody would say: ‘There is someone who carries an impure child! She has to go, otherwise the *ukuli* cannot leap over the cattle.’ Once she has left, the cows calm down.” (Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 62)

The Hamar say that it is impossible to conceal the ritual impureness of a child. If a woman obscures the illegitimate conception, the ritual impurity of the child will eventually take its toll. The ritual impurity is said to not only to affect the child itself, but also to bear wider negative consequences for its family and the community. If a woman, for example, becomes pregnant with a *whuta* child,²³³ not only her family is affected by it, but also the homestead and the fields are said to be spoiled.²³⁴ After the abortion or killing of the *mingi* child, a special cleansing rite, *shorda*, must be performed by the *baje* so that the ritual impureness is taken away from the homestead and the grain (p. i., Almanda 18.09.02). Pitta, an elderly women from Bashada explains:

“If a woman is pregnant with an impure child, the husband is not allowed to go hunting. The woman who is pregnant with an impure child goes to the *baje*. The *bajje* will slaughter a goat and take a piece of the goat’s stomach and tie it onto the woman’s apron. He then holds the apron and pours the *soko* [the stomach content of the goat] into it. Then he goes to her house and sprinkles the *soko* everywhere: at the waterhole where that woman used to fetch water, in her homestead and the cattle kraal. By doing so, he ritually purifies the homestead.” (Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 62)

A woman pregnant with an impure child is also not allowed to dig her fields, because

“...all her sorghum has gone bad. She cannot use it as seeds anymore. The people will not come to get seeds from her. This year she will have to use the seeds of other people. Her’s have gone bad. She can only eat it. But she cannot buy goats with this sorghum. She cannot buy cows with it. She can only eat it. The sorghum has been spoiled, one can only eat it. One cannot use it for anything else.”

(Kerri in Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 62).

When I asked Shada about the exact threat such a child supposedly poses to the community, he gave me following explanation: “Such a child will bring misfortune to our people and to our country. The rain won’t come to Hamar. Our country will dry up. Misfortune will come” (p. i., Shada 17.09.02). Consequently, the prevention of ritual impureness is not

²³³ Antenatally a *mingi* child is referred to as being *whuta*. The implication is the same, though.

²³⁴ On this topic see also Mohaupt 1995: 38- 40.

only of private concern to the parent's who wish to secure reproduction, but it is also of communal interest, as ultimately everybody would be negatively affected by it.

In the last years the Ethiopian government has attempted to prohibit infanticide in Hamar as Shada tells,

"The *gal*²³⁵ told us: 'Give us your children! Do not throw them into the bush! Bring them to us instead!' So we have promised to them that we bring our children to the towns. They often have tried to stop us from killing the *mingi* children. We talked with our *donza* and we said, that we won't kill them anymore and that we won't go to our wives if her rituals have not been finished, so that the children she bears do not become *mingi*."
(p. i., Shada 17.09.02)

Although the Hamar officially should give their *mingi* children, for example, to the Missionaries, it appears that infanticide of *mingi* children is still common practice. I asked Shada if these *mingi* children who were given away would not bring misfortune over Hamar, but he replied that this is not the case as these children are said to have become *gal* and as such they are not considered to be Hamar anymore (p. i., Shada 19.09.02).

Even though the women I talked to in Damabiti expressed a certain sorrow over infanticide, they nevertheless do not seem to consider giving their children away as an actual option. Lydall and Mohaupt informed me of a case in which a Bashada widow decided to give away her daughter, who, after having grown her second teeth, was said to be *mingi*. The elders from Argude where the woman lives therefore demanded that the girl should be killed. The mother, however, refused and gave her daughter away for adoption. The girl now lives in Addis Abeba with a French family (p. i., Lydall 04.10.04 and p.i., Mohaupt 16.01.05). Nonetheless, this is the only case known to me of a mother actually deciding to give away her child. The concept that these *mingi* children must be killed still appears to be deeply socially embedded, so that the mothers do not take any other option into consideration - or at least the women did not express their acceptance of this alternative any to me. Whether the women themselves believe that infanticide is the only justifiable measure that should be taken or whether they simply fear the social sanctions of the others is difficult to ascertain.

14.1. Signs of Ritual Impureness

The first answer I received when asking how the ritual impureness of a child postpartum becomes apparent was that a *mingi* infant grows its upper incisors, either milk teeth or the second set of teeth, before its lower incisors.²³⁶ Baldambe's account confirms:

"If a child gets its top teeth first, we Hamar say it is *mingi*. Such a child is thrown away into the bush. A child will be *mingi* if the mother does not observe her rituals." (Strecker/Lydall 1979b: 147)

²³⁵ Here: the people from the government. The term *gal* is normally by the Hamar in reference to any person who is Ethiopian, but not from the South.

²³⁶ Horra Surra from Arbore stated during the workshop discussions that the Arbore do not practice infanticide of children whose upper incisors have come out before the lower ones (Epple/Brüderlin, 2004: 109). Lago, a young bride from Arbore, however, did tell me in an informal conversation that in former times the Arbore considered such children ritually impure and drowned them in the Woito River. Nowadays this custom is replaced by a big ceremony and feast which is held instead, so that these children must not be killed anymore (p. i., Lago 07.10.02). The Kara also drown ritually impure children in the Omo River (Torgo in Epple/Brüderlin 2004: 63).

The order of teething is taken as a clear indicator for the infant's legitimacy or illegitimacy (p. i., Shada 17.09.02). The notion that children are considered to be abnormal or even ritually impure if their top incisors come out before the lower ones, is also documented by Raum. Among the Chaga the teething is a sign for the completeness of a child's person. Therefore much significance is laid upon the proper growth of the teeth. When the first teeth appear a special rite, called 'to take up the child', is performed by the paternal grandmother. This is "an additional attestation of the child's normality, for if its upper incisors appeared first, it would be killed" (Raum 1940: 296).

"Children with irregular growth of teeth are doomed, especially those who are already born with teeth or whose upper incisors cut through the gum before the lower (...) the infant is looked upon as a public danger..."
(Raum 1940: 88)

Hailanda and Almanda explain the Hamar custom:

Hailanda: If you break the taboos, the child's teeth will grow on top first. If you obey all the *gilos* [rituals] correctly, then the teeth will come out properly.

TB: I once heard that sometimes the mother files down the teeth of the child, if she sees that the top incisors are coming out before the lower ones have cut through, so that people won't notice that the child's teeth are growing wrongly.

Hailanda: Some people try this, but it does not work. If you file down the teeth it won't be good. A child who is *mingi* must be thrown into the bush. That is Hamar *dambi*, Hamar tradition.

TB: Where do you take these children?

Almanda: There is a place far away, where we take the child. We throw them down into a crevice. There it will be left to die.

TB: There is nothing you can do? You must kill your child if its teeth come out wrongly?

Almanda: That is our *dambi*, our tradition. It is *mingi*.

The correct teething is therefore seen as evidence that the child's parents followed every pre- and postnatal ritual. Nevertheless it is important to note that the child's teething is only seen as a sign and not as the cause for ritual impureness. I found it interesting, though, that the negative premise of upper incisors is also found in Baldambe's account on animals, which are considered to be *mingi* (see ch. 14.). I therefore asked Shada whether the notion that the first teeth of a child are supposed to cut through the lower gum has something to do with the negative reputation of the animals with upper incisors and respectively with the positive connotation of animals without upper incisors, such as cows and goats, which play such a vital role for subsistence in Hamar. Shada, however, did not confirm this supposition of mine (p. i., Shada 18.09.02)

15. Illegitimacy as Means of Social Control

In the search for an explanation why the custom of infanticide of children who are considered to either be *dakka* or *mingi* is so deeply embedded in the social ethos of Hamar, I found that the belief that these infants will bring misfortune over Hamar serves as synopsis of various different aspects. It is not sufficient to say, that it is Hamar *dambi*, Hamar

custom. There is more to it, as tradition and rituals are not a static entity. They must be cultivated and constantly re-approved by its enactors (Geertz 1973). In addition to that, rituals and their symbolic actions are used by individuals or interest groups as “subtle means to influence others and realize their interest in such a way that they shield themselves and others from social dangers associated with the pursuit of their interest” (Strecker 1988b: 208). To be able to fully understand the ritual procedures and implications of the parental pre-/postnatal rituals as well as the children’s confirmation rites it therefore must be asked what interest lies in the preservation of the custom in question and who is actually interested in conserving these rituals?

One of the dominant factors in maintaining the necessity for ritual legitimization of offspring is the dependence of the mother on her sons (p. i., Lydall 01.02.05). Whereas the daughters move to their husband’s homestead, the sons stay with their parents and later bring in their wives. Sons are therefore vitally important for the economic subsistence of the homestead and its inhabitants. As Hailanda points out:

“It is good to have many children. They [the males] herd the goats, guard the fields and put up the beehives. If your sons put up many beehives they bring you lots of honey. They collect goats and cattle. They slaughter goats which you, the mother, can eat” (Lydall/Head, F, 1990)

As previously stressed in ch. III., ch. IV. and ch.VI. it is the mother-in-law who performs most of the pre- and postnatal rites for the daughter-in-law as well as the confirmation rituals for the grandchildren. Without her help, her son and his wife may not legitimately procreate. By means of this important ritual position the mother has the power to control her son’s actions and bind him to stay with her and obey her words. The same notion is depicted by Raum on the Chaga:

“...it has become apparent why unauthorized production of offspring is such a terrible crime. It strikes the very root of parental authority. If filial disobedience were not punished through parental interference with procreation (...) most of the moral code could not be enforced. The parental control over the progeny of filial generation is the ultimate sanction in primitive conduct.”
(Raum 1940: 313)

It is therefore in the mother’s interest to promote “an ideology that sanctions these rituals” as these serve to confirm her “own indispensable role in their performance” (Lydall, without year.a: 19). The power the mother has over her sons is very well portrayed in Lydall’s film “Duka’s Dilemma” (Lydall/Strecker, F, 2001).

But not only is the mother interested in retaining control over her sons and daughters-in-law, but also the local people, especially the elders. It is in this context that the strong social control and influence others have over an individual in Hamar is mirrored, as Strecker also points out, “their [the Hamar’s] egalitarian ethic forces them to scrutinize each other carefully and constantly” (Strecker 1996: 425).

In ch.VI. I have already mentioned that it is necessary for the neighbors to take part in a child’s *gali* and *gore gilo*, as they call forth *barjo* for the child and therefore are essential for the child’s – and its yet unborn siblings’ – future well being. Do the local elders not approve of someone or somebody’s union, this person correspondingly is doomed to leave the area as the elders have the authority to reject their ritual support (Lydall, without year.a: 9).

The influence of the locals on the individual's standing within the community is not only expressed by actually refusing to perform certain rituals, but also through the power of their accusations and demands. As I mentioned earlier, the Hamar say that one cannot conceal the ritual impureness of a child. Nonetheless, its own family normally does not articulate the allegation that a child is illegitimate or that its teeth grow wrongly, as they would probably attempt to conceal it. It is the neighbors and locals who most often make such accusations. It further appears, though, that families who are well respected and settled within a region and the local community are less affected by other people's assertions. Hence a woman who belongs to an influential family, is less affected by the charges made by others concerning her pregnancy and the question whether all her preconception rites have been completed. Married women of whom it is said that they are illegitimately pregnant are most often widows or women who belong to less influential or small families. Lydall elaborated on an example, which clearly demonstrates the communal influence on the individual: Gadi, the wife of Sago's father's half brother Tini was accused of not having performed her preconception rites before becoming pregnant again. The *donza* of the region demanded that she should kill her baby. Although Gadi at first refused to kill the newborn and said that she would go to the police, she later had to give in to the pressure exercised by the elders. The elders told her that if she did not obey to their word and if she went to tell the police, she would die, as she no longer would have a place to live. Gadi therefore was forced to kill her child. Lydall pointed out, though, that such an accusation would not have been openly spoken out if Sago had been better established in the region where he resides. Sago only came to live in Banna about ten years previously, after having been expelled from Bashada. His weak social position made him and his family vulnerable for external accusations. Sago's weakened position in itself, however, was not the only reason for these allegations (p. i., Lydall 04.10.04).

Often such an accusation is the result of negative occurrences such as, for example, continuous drought, plagues or interethnic conflicts. A couple of days before Tini and his wife were accused of having disregarded the preconception rites, several Mogudjj²³⁷ had killed some Bashada men. It appears that Gadi's child has been used as kind of scape-goat,²³⁸ as the men projected the reason for their country's misfortune onto the child's ritual impureness. By killing the infant the community disposed of its burden (p. i., Lydall 04.10.04).

The case previously described in ch. 14.1., for example, was of similar nature, as the mother whose child was accused of being *mingi* was a widow living by herself and therefore had no one who could protect her from these accusations. Argude had at that time also been plagued by drought, the harvest had failed and the people claimed, that this misfortune was caused by the child (p. i., Lydall 04.10.04). The cultural necessity to abort or to kill children considered to be *mingi*, therefore is not only a means to assert Hamar traditions, but moreover a *mingi* child also provides an explanation for misfortune while at the same time offering a solution for reconciliation: its disposure of said child.

As shown above, the cause for the child's proclaimed ritual impurity on the one hand derives from the necessity of the Hamar to maintain their tradition and social ethos so that these may function as a means to protect the social stability. The ritual norm serves to protect the people and their environment from harm and unpredictable occurrences.

²³⁷ See map 2.

²³⁸ Asboe elaborates the social function of scapegoats, identifying them as an "effective means of obtaining absolution from the moral impurities in the individual or the community. Noxious disease, failure of the crops, or some catastrophic event which have thrown the community into confusion, are the chief reasons assigned for employing the scape-goat as a vehicle for carrying off the moral rubbish and transferring it elsewhere" (Asboe 1936: 74).

On the other hand, the concept of illegitimacy is also used as a social strategy for individuals and for the community to control and access power over other individuals and their actions without causing offence.



fig. 27 *Anza*: Ali (left, without baby) and her cousin Haito (right) with a Bashada friend



fig. 28 Haito as bride



fig. 29 Biirinda's youngest daughter



fig. 30 Duka (left) daughter-in-law of Sagonda



fig. 31 Sagonda disputing with an elder, because her son has performed the *katchi gilo* for his child without her

VIII. Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to provide an approach to the question how a person comes to be socially and ritually incorporated into Hamar society. I thereby focused my research on the prenatal and postnatal phase of gestation, birth and early childhood, as the status of person is most fragile during this transitional period and therefore requires much social and ritual assertion. Through the detailed description of the single ritual steps a child must undergo – prenatal and postnatal – it became apparent, that the incorporation of a child in Hamar is a complex ritual and social process. I have further shown that this process involves manifold implications and different, yet interrelated, aspects – social, transcendental as well as ritual – which not only concern the child, but also affect the child's family and the community as whole.

The first rituals to be described in this paper are the preconception rites a couple must perform in order to seal and legitimize their union and reproduction. These rituals include premarital, marriage and bridal rituals, which are only performed once before the birth of the first child, but also the prenatal ritual of 'fetching the *binyere* water' and the *gungulo gilo*. The latter must be repeated before and after the birth of every child. These rites are intended to affirm and secure the child's legal descent, embedding the infant into its family and kin.

The *gungulo gilo* further entails another very important aspect for the child: It is through this rite, that a child is endowed with *barjo* and therefore is considered to become *edi*, a human being and person. My research has variously shown, that being *edi* is the decisive factor for a child's social becoming and acceptance. A child who has not ritually received *barjo* is considered to be a non-person: it is *mingi*, ritually impure, or *dakka*, dirt. As such it is said to be a threat to its family, society, and to the well being of the country. In order to protect the group from such a threat Hamar custom consequently demands the disposal of such a child, either through abortion or infanticide. It thereby becomes apparent that being *edi*, a bearer of *barjo*, is the transcendental prerequisite for a child's existence, its birth and social position in society. In ch. IV. I have shown how this concept also mirrors in the culture specific dealings with 'unusual births', for example, babies with congenital disabilities, as each legitimately born child – even if physically or mentally handicapped – is considered to be *edi*, as long as all the prenatal rites have been performed correctly.

The description of the postpartum period exemplifies that this is the time in which the social incorporation and protection of the baby is ritually emphasized. The mother and the newborn are kept in postpartum seclusion for at least a month in order to reinforce not only their physical strengths, but also their reciprocal bond. Additionally, during this time the mother is supposed to obey certain restrictions and taboos, which are meant to protect her and the child from external malevolence. However, this is also the time in which the newborn is introduced into its family as well as local community. The first postnatal rite that clearly emphasizes the newborn's introduction into its kin and wider community is the 'coming out of the house' ritual, during which the child is repeatedly taken out of the house and brought back by its senior sister. The Hamar say, that this rite 'opens the way' of the child and the mother, as only now they are allowed to leave the house.

The social incorporation of the child finds its climax in the *gali gilo*, the 'name-giving' ritual, and the *gore gilo*, the 'tying on of bands' ritual. These rites are usually performed in sequence during the first couple of years of a child's life. The *gali gilo*, as well as the *gore gilo*, must collectively be performed by members of the child's own family and the local elders. The social incorporation of the child is thereby ritually emphasized by naming the

infant and by collectively calling forth *barjo* on its behalf. Thus, the child's future well-being and journey through life is blessed. At the same time, however, these rites serve to reaffirm the infant's interdependence to its kin and community, as they are the ones who reconfirm the child's legitimacy and personhood, by reassuring and renewing its *barjo*.

It is only after all these pre-/postnatal rites have been completed and after it has been assured that they have been performed correctly, that the infant is considered to be fully incorporated and a member of Hamar society with all the social, ritual, as well as transcendental, prerequisites to grow up and to become an adult.

Moreover, in this working paper I have described that the full complexity and extent of the incorporation process of a child only becomes apparent by additionally taking the implications these rites have for others into consideration. I have thereby exemplified, that these rites not only socially incorporate the child, but that they further make it become an intrinsic part of the ritual – as well as transcendental – 'corpus' of Hamar society. These rites serve as measure to establish ritual and social interdependence between generations as well as between the individual and society. They therefore can be understood to be a culturally 'constructed' bond between the child and the whole.

I have elaborated this aspect in my work by describing the direct and indirect ritual and social implications of children's incorporation for others. As these implications are manifold, though, I here will only give a brief outline:

The *dotin gilo* exemplifies, that a man and a woman are vitally dependant on their children in order to be able to attain the status of full adults. Legal reproduction, however, is not only crucial for the social status of a man and a woman, but also for their transcendental state. A man, who dies without fathering a legitimate male child is not given a proper burial and as such, he postmortem is banned from becoming an ancestral spirit and therefore does not enter the transcendental realm.

The children's rites further have a binding as well as protective connotation for siblings. For example, is a child's *gali gilo* and *gore gilo* said to be performed for the present child, but also for its yet unborn siblings, as these rituals serve to prevent – prenatally and postnatally – both children from becoming *mingi*, ritually impure.

The preservation of these rites not only benefits the children and their family, but moreover is of communal interest to society. The Hamar say, that these rituals must be performed, as otherwise irremediable misfortune will spread over the country. My research has shown, however, that this transcendental concept rather originates in the necessity to ensure that the Hamar social ethos and structure is guarded and respected and that the interdependence of the individual and the society is preserved.

The approach of my thesis reveals that the constructed net of social and ritual interrelations of children's incorporation rites is based on the Hamar notion that a child is not a singular social entity, but that a child, an *edi*, rather is conceived to be a social, as well as transcendental part of the whole.



fig. 32 Some of the members of my host family

Appendix

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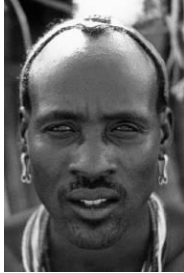
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Interview partners

The information given to me in interviews or informal conversations has been marked with the abbreviation 'p. i.' (personal information) and the date in the text. The information below is based on 2002.



Shada Alma

Married to Eilanda
3 children
age ~42



Almanda Alma

widow of Shada's brother
Haila, now lives with Shar-
dumbe, Shada's junior
brother
3 children
age ~30



Hailanda Alma

Married to Alma, mother of
Shada
8 children
age ~60



Haito Alma

Shada's junior sister, moved
to her husband in 2002
no children
age ~20



Sagonda

Widow, mother-in-law of
Duka and sister of Hailanda
age ~60
[photo: Christina Gabbert
2002]



Duka Aike

married to Sago, born in
Dambaiti as daughter of
Baldambe, now lives in
Banna
6 children
age ~40



Aikande Aike

Married to Tsasi Aike, son
of Baldambe
2 children
age ~30

List of Photos

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Glossary of Context Related Hamar Words

ada	to birth
äla	to call
aizi	animal's skin, also used for leather skirt
ako	grandmother
ami	female breast; field
anamo	agemate
angi	male
ank'assi	bee
anza	unmarried girl
apo	mouth
arda	to enter; to move in with the husband
arpi	moon
assili	red ochre
ata	to conceive
ayo	elected spokesman
baiti	river bed
bajje	the 'butter man'; the man who performs the sitting ritual
baraza	special plant, said to be barjo
barjo	well being; fortune
barjo äla	to call forth barjo
barjo goin	path blessed with barjo; vagina
baski	lover
baasalla	calabash bowl for scooping water
bel	bondfriend
binyere	the married women's neckband, made from dik-dik skin
binyere-ma	first wife
bitta	lit. the first; ritual leader
bodi	butter; richness
boko	initiate's ritual club
buno	coffee
chaki	evil power; person possessing evil eye
daa	clay pot
dambi	custom, tradition
dele	homestead
dobi	rain; women's menstruation
donza	male elder
dotin gilo	the 'sitting ritual'
duki	funeral
gali	special plant used in various rituals
gilo	ritual
gudili	'land priest'
edi	human, person
eyke	grandfather
gal	Ethiopians who do not come from the South
gari nabi	name given to the initiate after his initiation
garro	special calf after which the initiate is named
gembala	name of tree; fertility
gesho	husband
geshono	wife

gilo	ritual
goiti	path
gol	married woman
gore	stripes of bark
gungulo	calabash to scoop liquates
gurda	village
imba	father
inda	mother
k'achi	women's cape
kais	taboo
k'alchi	women's cowrie belt
k'ambi	widow
karamb'a	calabash coffee bowl
kemo	marriage
kibu	cowrie shell
kurri	honey
koli	ritual staff
kolosho	piece of broken gourd
koisi	calabash
k'uli	goat
ma	female
mago	namesake
marid	uninitiated boy
mari ma	second wife
masha	to slaughter
maeshi	ancestral spirit
maz	initiated man who has not yet married
mente	twins; halves
mingi	ritually impure
misha	elder sister
nabi	name
nagaya	wish for well being
nano	daughter
nasa	son
nasi	child
nasiinda nabi	'child's mother name', given to women after her marriage
ono	house
osh	public meeting
patsima	to spit when blessing
pe	country
pisi	afterbirth/umbilical cord
shala	loft
shekini	beads
sherka	calabash bowl
shorda	cleansing ritual
shurta	to rub
tamara	to learn
tirre	women's headdress
tisha	fresh grain
tsangaza	potential marriage partner

uka	to pierce; to press something out of something; used in reference to abortion
ukuli	donkey; initiate
uta	bride, who moved in with her husband
waki	cow; cattle
whuta	a ritual impure child not yet born
wupha	gossip
zarsi	local elders
zombi	blood; women's menstruation