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HISTORY OF EVENTS AND INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT

THE EXAMPLE OF THE BURJI-KONSO CLUSTER

Hermann Amborn

Recent historical research shows a tendency towards a “history from below”, that is, towards a history which is no longer dominated by the exclusive viewpoint of a literate elite. The rediscovery of popular culture in European history is – among other things – a consequence of the crisis which befell optimistic progressivism. Moreover, within this trend a new place value is assigned to the study of anthropology, especially historically oriented ethnology.¹ I would like to the discrepancy existing between what is obviously bound to enter into a general history of events and a history as it affects the people involved. Thus, I would like to bring to light what lies beneath the kind of facts one might usually find written in the history books and, in so doing, shall analyze the dynamics of internal development and relate them to the relevant historical events. And here I am concerned with recent history, namely the period during and after the conquest of southern Ethiopia by the northerners, and up to the present day. Even though there was no direct relationship between these two domains – pressure was always one-sided – the affected people’s reaction to the new reality was not merely passive. Rather, they gave their own collective feelings towards a continuous dialectical process which has now come to the surface in different socio-cultural patterns. While originally of a closely interlocked culture, the three South Ethiopian ethnic groups I shall present have each found their own way of solving the conflicts initiated by the same external event, namely the conquest.²

The first of the three groups referred to are the Konso. They are relatively well-documented in ethnographic literature.³ I have also spent some months of fieldwork among them.

The second are a number of culturally and linguistically closely related peoples whom I shall refer to with the term Dullay (a term generally adopted by linguists). Concerning these people I rely exclusively on personal observations.⁴

Thirdly, the Burji; a people who have been studied by the late professor Helmut Straube of Munich.⁵

You may know these peoples as belonging to the so-called Burji-Konso Group, a term coined by Enrico and Ernesta Cerulli to designate an area of cultural homogeneity.⁶ In order to avoid confusion I shall be using this term here – though it is not quite adequate.

The history of events in the area in question can be briefly outlined, for there is no great difference between what can be said about the above-mentioned groups and what is historically known about southern Ethiopia. We have our knowledge of historical events at the turn of the century through books and articles written by travellers, through the official Ethiopian chronicle of Gabre Selassie, and through the reports of certain British colonial officers, like Hodson.⁷

Early contact between the indigenous peoples and the northerners may be described as a “frontier situation”. Following Thompson and Lamar, I understand “frontier not as a boundary or line, but as a territory or zone of interpenetration between two previously distinct societies. The frontier ‘opens’ in a given zone when the first representatives of the intrusive society arrive; it ‘closes’ when a single political authority has established hegemony over the zone.”⁸ The frontier situation in the south was quite relaxed, as a proper frontier ought to have been. But here, there are two phases which one should distinguish: the first one is from 1897 up to about 1906; and the second, from about 1906 to the time of World War I.

The initial stages of the frontier situation were marked by sporadic raids carried out by soldiers, mainly after cattle. On the part of the central government, there was a keen interest to show the flag on the shores of Lake Turkana. Thus, the Abyssinian presence documented its claim to that region and tried to stop the advance of British colonial expansion.⁹

Within the first phase only a few military outposts were established. The most important was located in Gardulla, above today’s town of Gidole. The second phase was initiated by the

British pressuring the Abyssinian government to put its southern regions under tighter control in order to stop marauding soldiers and the so-called Tigre from crossing into their East African territories (what is now Kenya). For propaganda purposes the British contrasted their own well-organised and orderly colonial administration with the "chaotic control" of the Abyssinians.¹⁰ For this and other reasons, military colonists from the north were settled in these southern regions and great landowners established themselves on the confiscated land. Hence, in the course of a few years, a dense network of katamas spread over the country upon which the administration could rely. This enabled the hegemony of the central government over the south to be firmly established. The native population was at the conquerors' disposal as a compulsory labor force.

At this point, the frontier situation has to be viewed as being more closed.¹¹ Further events, such as stronger centralization under Haile Selassie, the Italian occupation, and the subsequent re-establishment of the Ethiopian administration are well-known, so I shall go on to describe how these events affected the subdued population.

The events occurred as follows: At first, the Amhara plundered and ravaged large areas of Konso and Diraša; a few years later they returned to pillage, but this time they included the Burji country. They subjugated the people without any significant resistance. Only two Konso towns, which had dared to defend themselves, were completely destroyed. The conquered people soon came to feel the harsh demands of tribute. This experience led to an alliance of the not-yet-subdued tribes of the Dullay, who buried their internal animosities and so could face their all-too-powerful enemy who were armed with modern European weapons. It was only a short struggle. In a few days nearly the whole warrior age-set was wiped out. Town-like settlements, as they are still to be found in Konso, were sacked and destroyed and large parts of the country were depopulated due to famine and epidemics in the wake of war. The conquerors recruited the remaining population to compulsory labor, which is known in the south as *gabbar*. Together with the expropriation of the land, this *gabbar* system dissolved the autochthonous economic and social structure in the whole Burji-Konso cluster. For, after the conquest, all the land was confiscated and redistributed according to Amharic law and so the indigenous farmers were merely permitted to work on what had been their own land. They could almost have been turned away at any time, but this seldom happened since their labor was needed by the new landowners.¹² When the Italians invaded this region in 1936, they were welcomed as liberators by a large part of the population. The fact that the Italians did not abolish the compulsory labor for humanitarian reasons but for justification of their own imperialistic policy remained unknown to the population. The Burji even joined the Italians and engaged in the anti-guerrilla war, with heavy loss of life. In order to weaken the position of the Coptic Amhara, the Italians encouraged Islamic conversion. Due to this, combined with other influences, the Burji gave up their religion and turned to Islam.¹³ In 1941 Haile Selassie took over the Italian taxation system, which was just being set up. Although the taxes were fixed by the provincial authorities, they were always too high and, for most people, this resulted in a debt which could only be redressed by a grant of land to the provincial officers. The land reform of 1974 was viewed by the farmers as the re-establishing of their traditional rights. For them, it was more an external than an internal revolutionary novelty, since great landowners had never existed in their society in any case. This positive impression gained by North Ethiopians for the land reform was, however, diminished by some young revolutionaries who, with well-meaning idealism but a lack of willingness to view local culture as important, managed to succeed in abolishing the rather democratic *gada* system and religious dignities.

So much for the historical framework. Let us now proceed to the economic situation.

* * *

The original intimate cultural ties of the peoples of the Burji-Konso cluster can especially be recognized in certain relationships which their traditional economy has with the social structure. Its characteristics can be reconstructed as they were in the 19th century before northern conquest. For some regions such a reconstruction is not necessary, since the cultural situation to be described continued more or less unbroken up to the present time. The economic basis of the entire cluster – and this is particularly typical for these people – consisted of a highly in-

tensified, permanent field cultivation by means of terraces made of stone and irrigation operated through a complex system of canals, wooden pipes and reservoirs. They even take measures of soil conservation, to improve its texture, maintain and raise its degree of fertility. Fertilization is achieved with ash, dung and fecal manure and a mixed crop cultivation prevents soil exhaustion in the fields.

The fields are divided into several cultivation zones lying at different altitudes. Each of these was reserved for a certain crop, according to its needs for soil, climate and care. This again created an all-year-round working rhythm that increased productivity, for each crop in different zones had a different time of harvest. In an area with two annual rainy seasons, permitting two harvests in one year, the gathering of some ripe crops or fruit was possible nearly every month. Among the Burji, cultivation zones were laid out concentrically around the settlements, whereas in the Dullay area they consisted of different altitudinal zones on mountain sides. Here again, the crops were planted in adjustment to their needs of cultivative attention and environment. The spectrum of agricultural products ranged from *ensete* in the highlands to cotton in the lowlands. With this system of cultivation, the population could react to the fluctuating seasonal rainfall over a period of years. In years with little precipitation, agricultural activities were concentrated in the highlands and in times of heavy rains, the cultivation shifted to lower areas. With their intensified cultivation optimally adjusted to ecology and as long as their socio-economical system was still in balance, these people managed not only to secure their own subsistence, but also to supply their southern neighbouring pastoral tribes with agricultural products. The latter provided them with cattle, which (as suppliers of meat and dung) were highly esteemed by the mountain people.

The horticulture-like cultivation of fields is contextually linked with the pattern of settlement. This method of production necessitates much labor and a clear working system. All these requirements are reflected in the settlement pattern. In most cases it can be depicted as having stone walls or palisades, enclosing compact settlements of an urban character. These towns are divided into different wards, each having its own communal centres, such as threshing and meeting places. Its members perform economic, social and religious duties communally. Thus, the towns are not mere conglomerations incidentally formed by the terrain, but are made up of corporate units. Settlements of this type exist only sporadically in other parts of southern Ethiopia. Furthermore, these people are remarkable for the use of stone as a building material, which is an uncommon feature in traditional Africa. It is used for the construction of agricultural installations like terraces, reservoirs, canals, as well as paved lanes, stairways, meeting places, and town and house walls.¹⁴

Land tenure was handled in the following manner. Basically, it can be said that fields of zones nearby (inner zones) were for private use, whereas fields in the outer zones were communal property. Burji land tenure had already partly changed to private ownership. Among the Dullay, all land was nominally owned by a sacred chief as the religious head of the group. He had to sanction the distribution of land, by which act the recipient obtained a hereditary right of land use. Work on the fields, like clearing the undergrowth, preparing the soil and attending to the seeded land, was always done cooperatively so that, for any kind of work, regional groups of appropriate size were put together.

The fundamental social order is formed by the generation group system, by persons of a common generation passing through certain ranks at a given time. Apart from that, unilineal descendants as well as territorial groups were significant. The generation group system is very similar to the *gada* system of the Oromo and for this reason I shall use here the term *gada*.

Due to their social importance, two ranks have to be specified. Most authors refer to the one as being 'warriors', whereas the other can be described as including 'men of knowledge'. The latter, or rather their elected representatives, constituted the highest political body of the tribe. They were responsible for the warriors who, as an executive organ, had duties on the frontier, police functions and even economic responsibilities. They controlled the terraces and irrigation system. In case of need, they recruited working gangs for the maintenance and construction of new agricultural or irrigational installations. Thus, they were in charge of duties lying beyond domestic productivity, which, however, they made possible. As far as their de-

mands for provisions were concerned, everyone had to comply. Hence, individually grown crops were distributed to a corporation which, by joint effort, created the conditions for their cultivation. A further redistribution of harvested goods took place during festivities that marked the transition of the various *gada* ranks.

Not directly integrated into this system, though linked with it, were certain lineage heads who exercised religious functions. Among the Dullay and, to a lesser degree, also among the Konso and Burji have appeared aspects of divine kingship, probably dating back to the 16th century, which connected up with beliefs concerning the lineage head. In the Dullay area, this development resulted in each of the different ethnic groups having one single lineage head succeeding as a sacred chief – moreover, it seems that having the sacred chief as a centre, a real micro-ethnogenesis has taken place. Their political influence, however, is limited by the *gada* system. Nevertheless, to a certain extent, they managed to transform their priestly function into political power.

Since I have elsewhere elaborated on the relationship of sacred chiefs to the *gada* system,¹⁵ I would just like to point out that, with the *gada* system and a pronounced sacred chiefdom already existing in traditional society, two systems met whose intentions were diametrically opposed. For, the *gada* system embraces the whole society, whereas the sacred chiefdom is oriented towards a hierarchical social order. Even though these opposing factors at times formed a functional unit, there still remained a social conflict to be resolved.

In Burji lineage priests did not gain political power. Elected military leaders here tried to obtain permanent chiefly power. But they could only hold it in times of crisis. Yet one of them – obviously in the face of the menace from the north – managed to partially dissolve the *gada* system, before the invasion of the North Ethiopian troops. The influence of the sacred chiefs of Konso in the first decades of this century remained totally limited to the sphere of religion. They were, however, highly respected as mediators between hostile towns.¹⁶

Decisive changes were brought about by the conquest under Menelik. Among the Dullay almost an entire *gada* rank – the warriors – had been wiped out, throwing the system off-balance. The newly installed *gabbar* service reduced the cooperative *gada* system in the whole area to absurdity. Consequently, there followed an essential shift in the proportion of power between the *gada* system and the sacred chiefdom in favour of the latter. Nevertheless, the disintegration of the *gada* system should not be viewed as a process determined only by external factors and therefore appearing to us as an abrupt event. In fact, there existed among some tribes of the Dullay attempts to continue with the *gada* system. Some offices still existed until recent times which formerly were connected with the *gada* system. In many cases they became hereditary. By the way, this development led to an increased emphasis on lineage relationships among the Dullay. In Konso the *gada* system could continue to exist in spite of all these problems. On the one hand, economical preconditions were responsible for this – I shall give more detail about this later – on the other hand, it appears that some persons managed to evade the *gabbar* service, either by being covered by fellow tribesmen in the compactly built urban settlements where strangers can hardly find their way, or by escaping temporarily to the lowlands.¹⁷

In the sphere of agriculture there occurred an upheaval with grave consequences. Here, too, the area of the Dullay was the worst affected. After the eclipse of the warrior rank, there was no corporation left to take care of the terraces, lanes and irrigation system. The latter especially soon deteriorated. A necessary precondition for a secured permanent cultivation was thus destroyed. Services for the conquerors, which had to be performed by each individual at irregular intervals of time, prevented the formation of new working gangs.

In addition to these factors, which had already resulted in the decline of communal activities, the introduction of money economy and the imposition of a head tax, enforcing the cultivation of cash crops, had further destructive consequences. Crop surplus had been traded since early times, but only in order to get additional goods. The new cash crop to be planted was *teff*, a cereal most popular with North Ethiopians. The cultivation of *teff* not only led to an adaptation to a new kind of grain, it also required a totally different method of production, which is contrary to the traditional hoe cultivation. The yield of *teff* per square unit is far lower than that of the original crop grown on terraced fields. It therefore became necessary to shift from

intensive hoe cultivation – which enabled a large number of farmers to gain high yields on small fields by collaborating corporatively – to extensive plough cultivation, with few people working mostly individually on large fields in order to get the amount of yield needed to make ends meet. The subsequent transition to plough cultivation did not only mean the use of different working implements, but rather a complete change in the system of production! In the meantime, this change caused further negligence and hence a further deterioration of the terraces, a situation worsened by erosion during the rainy seasons, which in turn reduced available farm land. To make things even worse, the farmers no longer took much care of soil improvement, for their ambiguous legal situation as to their land rights made them uncertain whether they could harvest what they planted. The outcome of this, in the period between 1900 and the land reform, was irreparable damage caused to their agriculture.

While the entire socio-economic complex degenerated, oriented as it was towards cooperation and connected with the *gada* system, the sacred chiefs among various peoples of the Burji-Konso cluster – especially the Dullay – succeeded in consolidating their political authority. A number of them gained a substantial increase in power by being appointed *balabats* by the administration. Markakis and other authors have already extensively analyzed the role of the *balabats* in southern Ethiopia.¹⁸ It only remains to be said that the inherited and thus stable office of the sacred chiefs was integrated into the hierarchical order of the Ethiopian Empire with less complications than would have been the case with the temporarily elected *gada* leaders.

Considering the above-mentioned factors, it becomes clear that the decline of the *gada* system is not a result of a general cultural disintegration, but that those historically conditioned factors which were set off by the contradictions of the traditional society itself sparked off a vicious circle that brought it to an inevitable end. In Konso this process was less pronounced. How is this to be explained? Firstly, it has to be pointed out that the Konso warriors – as well as the Burji – did not suffer such a heavy loss as was the case among the Dullay. A further important factor was that at least some part of the land was of no great interest to the northerners. The steep terraced slopes of Konso were not suited for the cultivation of *teff*, and neither could the plough be used there. This and the relatively low altitude of many farms kept away the petty *naftaññas* and the great landowners as well, for the *naftaññas* feared the hot and already partially malaria-infested zones and the great landowners, who normally lived in the cities of the north, could not expect a worthwhile yield of cash crops from the small terraced fields. The situation differed on the plateau farms, where the common colonizing practices were used. Hence in 1974 nearly all the land suited for plough cultivation was in the possession of former government officials. On land left to the Konso they kept their traditional method of production, for in their experience it was the optimal way of farming. And along with this, the basic conditions of the *gada* system also continued to exist, that is to say, they were able to preserve their mode of production in a trunk area, with just a few alterations. Furthermore, a solution was also found to the demands of tribute and, later on, taxation without overstraining the traditional way of production: cultivation of cotton and weaving, already in existence since pre-Amharic times, were intensified. Like other peoples, the Konso had to submit to the *gabbar* service, but they built a wall of silence against the conquerors. Cultural adaptations to the northerners hardly occurred. There was an absolute separation between the indigenous population and the new arrivals. This situation prevailed, more or less, with all the other peoples of the Burji-Konso cluster. A more intensive change could only be seen in the Dullay area, but not before the Italian occupation. Since that time a far-reaching assimilation of the former conquerors has been taking place there.

How strictly observed is the line of separation between the *katama* population and the autochthonous people, I could personally witness as late as 1974, when I met a 10th grade student, born, grown up and living in the *katama* of Gidole (which is the administrative centre of an *awraja*) but whose ancestors came from the north, who had not once in his life been in the autochthonous area beginning just outside the *katama*. It was not that he abhorred travelling, he had already been in civilized Addis Ababa – and he was by no means the only case.

Let us return to Konso: there lineage priests, both in the past and up to very recent times,

had only a few possibilities to gain political influence. Not only did the *gada* system keep them at bay, but it also engaged them in its service by assigning them to ceremonial duties during *gada* ceremonies. But there were more essential reasons to prevent the separate development of political power: the structure of this society is characterized by counteracting any tendency within any individual group to gain dominance. The kinship system, territorial groups ('city wards'), the *gada* system and, with it, all offices of political and religious affairs were linked to each other to such a degree that they kept themselves in due balance. This means that a person can belong to all these systems at the same time. Moreover, he can even hold office in different systems, though he is controlled by different groups with each member representing distinct interests. The same kind of structure is reflected in the relationships between the urban settlements. Konso society as a whole is not focused towards a centre, but is formed by various alliances and animosities between different autonomous towns. Hallpike has shown that, for example, the town A is an ally of town C, but is on bad terms with town B, whereas C and B enjoy friendly relations.¹⁹ Though there is a certain fragmentation of these oppositions, preventing the dominance of one or the other town, they nevertheless constitute a community at the same time, since not one of them can exist in isolation.

Originally, there was also in Burji a stabilization through linked social institutions, which were probably less marked, however, at the time of conquest. A disengagement occurred during the above-mentioned changes in agriculture, additionally intensified by private farming and individual trade activities. For reasons of their geographical location, the Burji had already been involved with long-distance trade. More than the Konso and Dullay, the Burji formed a buttress of peasantry against the areas of their cattle-herding neighbours in the south, east and southwest. In order to avoid the *gabbar* service many Burji made use of their trade connections (which reached, among other places, far into the area of the Borana) by moving from one trade partner to the other. Though this was actually a flight, they made the best of the situation and expanded their trade connections even further, especially when more and more Burji followed this example, leading to the founding of outposts.²⁰

Today, the majority of the Burji live in Kenya. Marsabit became their new centre, from which they play a major part in North Kenyan trade. Nevertheless, their traditional country is still their cultural and spiritual centre. Therefore, certain dignitaries are not supposed to leave the Burji homeland. The increase in trading activities since the turn of the century resulted in the accumulation of wealth by individuals. This wealth could not be invested in agriculture as, due to the limited size of their territory, further agricultural expansion was not possible. The relationship between individual and private property began to encroach upon the relationship between the individual and the community. The most advanced examples of this destabilization of cooperative communities were those traders who were very often away for months at a time. With the changing economic conditions the *gada* system also lost its importance. There was a brief period of revival during the time of the Italian occupation, but without the necessary economic base, and for reasons of increased individualism, as well as the loss of its ritual function after the conversion to Islam, the *gada* system was divested of its most important support and ceased to exist.

So far I have not shown a very bright picture of the societies discussed. We must keep in mind that the traditional culture was not only transformed under the pressure of political and economic necessities, but disappeared to a large extent. Yet these ethnic groups did not sink to a level of declassed and cultureless people, not did they helplessly adapt to another culture. Against all adversities, they continued with their own creativity. The traditional culture was strong enough to react in a versatile way to new conditions. They were able to be selective about choosing new cultural elements by activating the latent components of their own cultures. And in spite of their political defeat, they were aware of their superior knowledge of the existing conditions of life as compared with that of the newcomers. They knew all about ecology, about working methods and the relationship they had with the cosmos, and from this self-confidence developed a more or less conscious attitude of opposition. Their self-confidence, however, was continually subjected to strain, owing to the incompatibilities between their culture and that of the conquerors — incompatibilities which had indeed the characteristics of

class antagonism. But this tension, as experienced every day, was at the same time an essential condition for any new perspective to be derived from the learning processes out of which a new culture was to be shaped; they needed to weigh intellectually the contradictions between the old and the new culture.^{2 1}

Acculturation seems to have gained most ground among the Dullay. They did not attempt to open new terrain by migration as did the Burji, but neither could they maintain their old structures. Yet, in fact, it is the Dullay who have been assimilating the northerners over the past forty years. In Konso I did not encounter any so-called Amhara capable of speaking the Konso language, whereas most northerners living in the Dullay area cannot be distinguished from the indigenous population of today, neither by language, nor by their way of life. The Dullay yielded to their oppressors with cunning and wit, thus always finding a loophole to maintain their position and identity. This kind of behaviour is mirrored in numerous fables which have a dispute between the small but sly and the powerful but clumsy animals as their theme.^{2 2}

The Konso resisted any external influences more vigorously. They succeeded in doing so by closing their ranks. This seems to be due to the fact that, at the time of their subjugation by the northerners, the interweaving of socio-political institutions had already been well developed. In the heartland and in the marginal areas, where external influences were clearly more intensive, different ways of life could be observed. Being aware of this and drawn into a permanent struggle with the politically dominant culture, the Konso sharpened a collective confidence in their own values. Nonetheless, changes did occur and the balance of their values was shaken.^{2 3}

The Burji reacted to the political events by migration, attempting thus to retain their individual, as well as their collective, identity. But under these conditions of exile came the beginning of an extreme transformation of their traditional culture. To view the situation from a different angle: due to their external sources of economic prosperity, a reconstruction of their society took place that now adequately meets the requirements of a modern African state. But they equally share the fate of so many other Africans: a feeling of not belonging, always in search of a lost identity.

These transformations of former cultures did not happen by accident; on the contrary, they prove the flexible ability of adaptation to a changing set of socio-economic conditions by the use of the manifold potentials inherent in traditional cultures. Furthermore, such transformations show the internal dynamics of traditional cultures; indeed, the various ethnic groups reacted differently, but in any case they reacted culture-adequately, responding to the kind of external pressures their respective culture had to endure, and by actualizing those cultural elements more to the fore at a time, they furnished the traditional structures with new contents. Hence there was no accidental animation. In the pool of existing cultural elements there is a large choice of which elements should be taken out, actualized and transformed. This choice very much depends upon the historical situation (for example, the emphasis on trade among the Burji at a given point in time). All three of the discussed societies followed a general logical path, but they show three distinct solutions to the ultimately similar problem.

However, these new cultures can in no way be described as harmonious and integrated; you may even wonder how they can function at all. But is it not the privilege of the elite to have a harmonic *Weltanschauung*? Is it not a necessity for the hegemonial culture to be harmonic, whereas the strength of the culture of the oppressed lies in its very openness?

History from below, joined with an anthropology from within, can show the complexity of the processes without stating them to be arbitrary. A history of events would merely establish a sequence of epochs, like frontier situation, *gabbar* system, Italian occupation, etc., and only notice in the social realm that a more or less intense acculturation to the higher (that is 'literate') culture had taken place. Such a point of view would make the Konso, cited here as the most stable people, seem the most backward. But that might well fit better to our own treasured way of looking at history.

NOTES

1. In the 18th century, Johann Gottfried HERDER already advocated an individualising historical approach to cultural philosophy, an approach which was also at the heart of his

anthropological thinking, in that he considered the monographic description of peoples in the course of their history as a precondition for the kind of universal history to which he aspired (see even his early *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769*, in Herder's *Werke*. Hrsg.v. Heinrich Düntzer. 24 Theil, Berlin 1869-1879). For any people showing a specific character – what he was going to term *Nationalcharakter* – has the distinction of a specific culture: culture, however, according to HERDER is essentially a process, both in the development of the individual and of the whole people. From this imminent dynamic the denomination *Volk* (people) gains a new concrete significance; ethnic life, ethnic identity are being discovered as a historical force, the antitype of which HERDER comes to see in the state. Cultural productions and creations are, as defined by HERDER, concretes of a specific *Volksgeist* (ethnic spirit) in which the very essence or, in a modern term, the ethnicity of a people manifests itself (cf. *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit. 1784-1791*, Darmstadt 1966).

It is true, the after-effect of HERDER's ideas is less to be found in a historical universalism or relativism, than with the seizing and mythication of his concept of ethnic spirit by the Romantic movement – *Volk* as an ideological vehicle – and with the contractions of nationalist thought which perverted HERDER's idea of nation (“one people”) by means of political coercion. Also contrary in the end to HERDER's relativising approach, was the unlimited progressivism of the evolutionists, who transformed their universalistic claim into a kind of overall formula for the development of mankind, equally neglecting the value of single cultures and grown ethnicities. Not until recently, and initiated by historians, did the force and significance of ethnic popular culture also become the subject of reflection for ethnologists and folklorists of some European countries. Compare the inspiring article by N. SCHINDLER, “Spuren in die Geschichte der ‘anderen’ Zivilisation. Probleme und Perspektiven einer historischen Volkstumsforschung” in: R. VAN DÜLMEN & N. SCHINDLER (Hrsg.), *Volkskultur* (Frankfurt 1984).

In this respect, the work of social historian Edward P. THOMPSON has to be seen as substantial: in his eyes, customs and traditions are not mere survivals of the past, but gain their significance through their intrinsic cultural values. At least since his book *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) he clearly espouses a history ‘from below’ and not ‘of below’. To this effect, he is critically arguing the necessity of a connection between anthropology/ethnology and history, by showing its limitations (E. P. THOMPSON, “Folklore, Anthropology and Social History”, *The Indian Historical Review* [1977] 3, pp.247-266). His cognitive approach, which makes the demand for the opening up of past layers of consciousness, is akin to that of the anthropologist Clifford GEERTZ, who discusses the possibilities and pitfalls of an actor-oriented view. For GEERTZ, “the aim (of ethnology) is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics” (C. GEERTZ, “Thick Descriptions: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” in: C. GEERTZ (ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures* [New York 1973], p.28). I also want to refer to representatives of the French ‘Nouvelle Histoire’, among others, J. LE GOFF and E. LE ROY LADURIE.

2. As to the following comments on southern Ethiopia, let me here refer to – and this not only because of the geographical neighbourhood – BLACKHURST's research on the problem of ethnicity as exemplified by the antagonism of subdued Oromo (esp. Tulama and Arsi)/dominant Amhara. H. BLACKHURST, “Ethnicity in Southern Ethiopia: The General and the Particular”, *Africa* (1980) 50, pp.55-65.
3. The Konso have been known since the turn-of-the-century travellers' accounts. The most detailed monograph was written by C. R. HALLPIKE, *The Konso of Ethiopia* (Oxford 1972).

4. Fieldwork was carried out in 1973-74 (together with Gunter MINKER) and again in 1980-81. Cf. H. AMBORN, "Wandlungen im sozio-ökonomischen Gefüge der Bevölkerungsgruppen im Gardulla-Dobase-Horst in Südäthiopien", *Paideuma* (1976) 22, pp.151-161, and H. AMBORN, G. MINKER & H. J. SASSE, *Das Dullay* (Berlin 1980).
5. H. STRAUBE, *Die Burdji* (Ms compiled after his fieldwork in 1956).
H. STRAUBE, Feldjournal: Burji (unpublished field journal, 1973-74).
H. J. SASSE & H. STRAUBE, "Kultur und Sprache der Burji in Südäthiopien. Ein Abriss" in W. MÖHLIG *et al.* (eds.), *Zur Sprachgeschichte und Ethnohistorie in Afrika* (Berlin 1977), pp.239-266.
In Autumn 1981 I also stayed for a short period with the Burji in Marsabit, Kenya.
6. While for Enrico CERULLI, a linguistic typology besides a cultural one was primarily important, Ernesta CERULLI uses the denomination Burji-Konso Group for purposes of ethnographic classification. Enrico CERULLI, *Ethiopia Occidentale* (Roma 1933), p.181; Ernesta CERULLI, "Peoples of South-West Ethiopia and Its Borderland", *Ethnographic Survey of Africa*, North Eastern Africa, Part III (London 1956), pp.51.
7. A survey of early travellers is to be found in J. BUREAU, "Les voyageurs européens dans le Sud-Ouest Ethiopien (1890-1910)", *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* (LXII, 1975), pp.594-618. Guèbrè Selassié, *Chronique du régime de Ménélik II. Roi des Rois d'Ethiopie*, Vol.II (Paris 1931); A. W. HODSON, *Seven Years in Southern Abyssinia* (London 1927); J. BARBER, *Imperial Frontier. A Study of Relations Between the British and the Pastoral Tribes of N. E. Uganda* (Nairobi 1968).
8. H. LAMAR and L. THOMPSON, *The Frontier in History* (New Haven and London 1981), p.7.
9. The years of 1897-98 saw particular efforts by the British, French and Abyssinians to assert their claims in the area of Lake Turkana. Special mention should be made of the Englishmen CAVENDISH and AUSTIN, the Frenchman MARCHAND and, among the Ethiopians, HAPTE GEORGIS and WOLDE GEORGIS. Accompanied by the Frenchman DARRAGON, HAPTE GEORGIS passed through Konso and the Dullay region in 1897.
G. MONTANDON, *Au pays Ghimirra* (Neuchâtel)1913), p. 267.
M. L. DARRAGON, "Le Sidama, l'Amara, le Konso, etc". *Comptes Rendus de Séances de la Société de Géographie . . .* (1898), pp.137-140.
10. H. S. H. CAVENDISH, "Through Somaliland and Around and South of Lake Rudolf", *Geographical Journal* (1898) 11, 4, p.373.
HODSON, *op. cit.*, esp. ch.10, 11, 16.
For a factual description and analysis of the conditions in colonial frontier situations see J. H. BODLEY who has compiled staggering cases in point. J. H. BODLEY, *Victims of Progress* (Menlo Park *et al.* 1975), pp.23-42.
11. I am inclined to speak of a *latent* frontier situation even for the two decades after World War I because, as will be shown below, the traditional culture including its political institutions still figured prominently, at least regionally.
12. Generally for South Ethiopia, cf. J. MARKAKIS, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Policy* (Oxford 1974), p. 108.
13. Archivio Storico del Ministero Africa Italiana: Posizione 181. Italian support of Islamization suited the Burji trend of rejecting assimilation into the dominant culture. KNUTSON, on making similar observations with the Arsi, defined this Islamization process as a

“boundary-maintaining mechanism”, since they could not achieve their ethnic identity in the traditional way.

K. E. KNUTSON, “Dichotomization and Integration: Aspects of Inter-ethnic Relations in Southern Ethiopia” in F. BARTH (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Bergen 1969) p.93.

14. AMBORN *et al.*, *op. cit.*, ch.1.3; C. R. HALLPIKE, “Konso Agriculture”, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* (1970) 8, pp.31-43; W. KULS, *Beiträge zur Kulturgeographie der süd-äthiopischen Seenregion* (Frankfurt 1958), pp.8-9; SASSE & STRAUBE, *op. cit.*, p.240; H. STRAUBE worked out the concept of the so-called *agrарischer Intensivierungskomplex* (complex of intensified agriculture) in South Ethiopia, which he associated both functionally and historically with other East African examples. H. STRAUBE, “Der agrарische Intensivierungskomplex in Nordost-Afrika”, *Paideuma* (1967) 8, pp.198-222. In his recent article, John SUTTON commented on the frequently uncritical and inflationary use of the term ‘intensive’ in connection with specific modes of African agriculture (J. E. SUTTON, “Irrigation and Soil-Conservation in African Agricultural History”, *Journal of African History* [1984] 25, pp.25-41). Moreover, he could plausibly show that some of the exemplary sites hitherto known as typical of intensification are only local specializations of a more extensive agricultural practice. Konso terrace-use also gives the impression of a relatively extensive agricultural practice (Konso is not among SUTTON’s negative examples), since, for instance, not all of the Konso terraces are worked on permanently nowadays. But this cannot be seen (as it may be in Inyanga) as an extensive use over time. Firstly, Konso has not yet reached the former density of population it had prior to the Amharic annexation (as can be concluded from aerial photographs showing old settlement sites and from oral information I received) and secondly, the terraces have always been used in accordance with climatic conditions. In years of scarce rainfall relatively few cultivated terraces will be found, and these are near the towns and on valley-bottom plots. After a normal rainy season, however, nearly all the available terraces can be seen being tilled. With regard to Konso (and ultimately the whole Burji-Konso cluster) I consider the term ‘intensive’ to be adequate. The intensification here is based on a long-drawn historical process that affected the formation of a complex socio-political and socio-economic system whose important political institutions can be proved by genealogies to date back to the 16th century at least. According to oral tradition, the applied agricultural methods would be even older than the 16th century, but archaeological evidence for this has still to be obtained.
15. AMBORN (1976), *op. cit.*
16. HALLPIKE (1972), *op. cit.*, p.43; A. JENSEN, *Im Lande des Gada* (Stuttgart 1936), p.387.
17. The lowlands, shunned by the North Ethiopians until the fifties, were favoured as a refugee area. This applies less to the Burji who frequently feuded with the Guji down there.
18. MARKAKIS, *op. cit.*, p.155; U. BRAUKÄMPER, *Geschichte der Hadiya* (Wiesbaden 1980), p.316.
19. HALLPIKE (1972), *op. cit.*, p.52. What is supporting social complexity and allowing a flexible reaction to new events is the loose organization of a number of social institutions. Herbert S. LEWIS has pointed out the “capacity of voluntary associations”, “the use and re-use in different combinations, of certain general principles, for organizing interaction”. H. S. LEWIS, “Neighbors, Friends, and Kinsmen: Principles of Social Organization

Among the Cushitic-Speaking Peoples of Ethiopia” in *Proceedings of the First United States Conference on Ethiopian Studies 1973* (H. G. MARCUS, ed.), Chicago 1975, pp.193-207 (quotation p.204).

20. The problem of the Burji migration, it is true, has more levels to be reckoned with. One has to take into account that Burji lost its importance as a trading centre at least temporarily after the turn of the century (today the market of Burji is of scarcely more than local significance). The much evoked, so-called *Pax Amharica* certainly did nothing to encourage intertribal contact. On the contrary, the economic decline (as a consequence of conquest) was followed by an overall insecurity in the frontier area, resulting in the reduction of the old long-distance trade (via Lugh) with the Somali, at least for a time. This problem will be treated in detail in a forthcoming book of mine on the subject of artisans and merchants. One more problem waiting for a closer analysis: to what extent did merchants, who with lesser trading profits had to look for another economic activity, contribute to the scarcity of land which, in turn, would have favoured emigration?
21. Psychological effects of the military and political impotence deriving from colonisation must not be underestimated.
As with most ethnic groups of southern Ethiopia, there is a specific esteem of masculinity among the Burji-Konso peoples, linked to a distinct warrior ethic, which is marked by the so-called *Töterwesen* (the ritual slaying of enemies and big animals). The frustration over the fact that the Amhara proved to be superior warriors has not been digested until now. The high esteem of the hero in traditional culture led to a sometimes evident respect for the Amhara, even though Amharic culture as a whole was being rejected.
22. H. AMBORN, “Toritte alladi – Überlieferungen aus dem Dullay”, *Trickster* (1982) 9/10, pp.30-36.
23. The psychological tensions the Konso have to endure come to the fore during drinking bouts, when aggressions are set free which often have a fatal outcome. Also cf. note 21.