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GENDER AND IDENTIFICATION IN PATRILINEAL AND PATRIARCHAL SOCIETIES
Case studies from southern Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT. The following collection of articles discusses the much debated categories of patrilineality and patriarchy. Arguing that patrilineal and patriarchal social organisations have disadvantages not only for women, but also for men, it aims to draw attention to the opportunities such organisations open up for women. Case studies from southern Ethiopia are used to add to the existing research by focusing on patrilineality and patriarchy in combination with questions of (gendered) identification. They show that instead of being limited by the patrilineal and patriarchal organisation of their societies, women overtly take agency and make use of the possibilities of multiple identification.

> Paternity, or the concept of social fatherhood,
> was undoubtedly an invention of women;
> men had to be taught that it also benefits them
> (Smedley 2004:227–228).

Patrilineality appears to have many advantages for men, especially when looking at processes of identification. In patrilineal and virilocal societies, identification through social and local relations seems to be more coherent for men than for women. While men can steadily build up solid identities, women carry the burden of readjusting theirs continuously, as is the case when they marry into a new patriline. But this is only the surface of patrilineal organisation. Analytical categories such as patrilineality and virilocality have been understood as giving a far too systematic view of societies that can depict women's realities and identities only inadequately (Abu-Lughod 1993:13–18). Moreover, notions of power, freedom or autonomy that are often discussed when looking at women's lives in patrilineal and patriarchal societies are connected to western ideals of individualism and democratisation (Smedley 2004:4), sometimes replacing a western male bias with a western feminist bias (Mohanty 2006). We define patriarchy literally as 'rule of men', bearing in mind that its more common understanding comes closer to Dorothy Hodgson's (2000a:6) description as a 'form of gender relation in which men exercise political, economic, social and cultural domination over women'.

Taking a closer look at patrilineal societies, one will also recognise the disadvantages such an organisation has for men, who, while valued for securing the continuity of the lineage, are less used to having to adapt to new places and conventions. Women, on the other hand, through their experience with patrilineality, have been trained to be

exposed to a change of social networks and localities and to be unwearied and flexible as a matter of fact. The present collection of articles aims to provide insights into the category of patrilineality by providing case studies from patrilineal societies in southern Ethiopia that show the flexible and particular interpretations and multiple identities that women create within and around the conceptual framework of patrilineality.

Patriarchy and patrilineality: a contested pair

The usefulness of categories such as patriarchy and patrilineality has been much debated (Hodgson 2000a). While in the present collection of articles we are mainly concerned with gendered identification in patrilineal societies, patriarchy also plays a prominent role when looking at gender divisions in southern Ethiopia. Yet, we do not intend to conflate patriarchy and patrilineality (see Abu Lughod 1993:20). The assumption of political domination of men over women in patriarchal societies often leads to two generalising and precipitous conclusions: first that pastoral women are subordinated,[1] and secondly that in patriarchal societies women are only able to exercise power informally (Lenz and Luig 1990:1). Hodgson's edited volume "Rethinking pastoralism in Africa" (2000b) was a milestone in the efforts to scrutinise these suppositions and discuss women's agency in pastoral societies. The articles presented here follow in the footsteps of this volume. Like it they question stereotypes about women in pastoral societies by providing perspectives and insights into women's choices such as the advantages the mobility of women through marriage can bring, the additional means of identification and loyalty women receive through integration into their husbands age-sets, and finally the flexible agency of women in domestic and political affairs. Most authors have lived and shared women's life courses in their field through several decades to find that women – female anthropologists included – are not a category defined by a common assumption of suppression, but individuals who are scrutinising the meaning of the very categories within which they are being described.

Patrilineality first and foremost describes people's descent through the male line. The descent line from father to son organises personal, social, ritual and economic heritage. While sometimes a connection is drawn between patrilineality and sedentarism, most nomadic societies are also patrilineal.[2] This shows that property is not necessarily bound to sedentarism: nomads often possess large livestock property and transfer this wealth through agnatic ties to their offspring. Whereas in patrilineal societies property, like cattle or fields, is predominantly owned by men, women are the ones who primar-

1 For a critique, see Hodgson (2000a:2–5).

2 According to Ruth Mace and Clare Janaki Holden (2003) there exists a correlation between cattle keeping and patrilineal organisation. The only exception – matrilineal pastoralists – on the African continent, are the Tuareg.

ily use these possessions and are responsible for the distribution of food like milk and grains (Smedley 2004:205). This plays an existentially significant role, which on a daily basis exceeds the actual ownership rights. Apart from property rights, in patrilineal societies power relationships or ritual positions may also be handed down the male line (Smedley 2004:196).

Groups with matrilineal organisation are non-existent in southern Ethiopia. However, elements of matrilineal descent like the outstanding authority of the mother's brother are also important in the groups under study. Furthermore the patriline of the mother plays a role when refining possible marriage partners, specific inheritances, the transmission of herding labour, the naming of sons and succession to the chieftainship (Hodgson 2000a:7). The complementarity of patrilateral and matrilateral elements and its meaning are therefore inherent in our examples, but it is not a focus of this issue.

Gendered identification in patrilineal societies

Patrilineality is not only a principle whereby property rights are transmitted down the generations, it also emotionally binds agnatic relatives together over generations (Smedley 2004:227). While a mother-son tie is mostly a matter of fact arising through a mother's nurturing role, ties between men, especially between fathers and sons, have to be constructed differently. Audrey Smedley (2004) follows a very functionalist approach when explaining father-son ties. She depicts patrilineality as the major principle for binding fathers to their sons and argues that women are well aware of the importance of these ties and therefore promote and support a patrilineal ideology (Smedley 2004:227). Women condition not only the fathers of their children, but also their sons to 'grow up wanting to be fathers, to have sons, and to pass on something of their own identity and cultural knowledge to their sons' (2004:228). Smedley even goes so far to suggest that women may have created patrilineal values to make the fathers of their children feel responsible and care for their children. This is in stark contrast to the assumptions of Mechthild Reh and Gudrun Ludwar-Ene, who describe social rules in patrilineal and virilocal societies as developed by men in their own interests (1994:9).

Smedley's assumptions acquire sense, if one compares the identification of men in patrilineal societies with that of men in matrilineal societies. In patrilineal societies sons identify strongly with their fathers' descent, their residence and culture. To their mothers sons are connected through strong emotional bonds, but as their mothers come from another lineage and often another location, the maternal line most often seems to play a minor role in the identification of young men. Yet, it is necessary to bear in mind situations of transgression that are expressed in the importance of mother's brother and sister's son (Bloch and Sperber 2002). In matrilineal societies, men are the ones who come from outside and at first sight seem to have a 'weaker' position at the residence of their in-laws, where they live with their wives. According to Susanne Schröter husbands

among the matrilineal Ngada on the Indonesian island of Flores have fewer obligations, do not contribute much labour and are more mobile (1998:242). Their mobility does not foster building up a coherent identity bound to their habitat, but rather multiple identities based on mobility and flexibility. It would be worth reflecting on these findings as we do for women in patrilineal societies.

In patrilineal and virilocal societies women are the ones who are on the move, and their mobility is mainly connected to marriage. But, in the present collection of articles, we reflect anew on the seemingly 'weaker' position of women as the mobile partners. By marrying into a new family, often far away from their paternal home, women generate a number of useful techniques that are easily overlooked. They bind two formerly often unrelated families together and may, as a result, contribute to more peaceful relations between two groups. Some arranged marriages even follow the main purpose to secure peace (Thubauville 2010b, Gabbert 2010:170–181). Women not only carry their agnatic relations along with them to their new in-laws, they also bring much cultural knowledge with them. These skills may add to the local knowledge at their new home and can be helpful and exceptional at their new residence and lead to an exchange of cultural knowledge with their new family members (see Lydall in print).

The flip-side of women's mobility is the constant need for a reintegration into a new environment with all that this includes like building up new social ties and aquiring local knowledge. Women therefore are well experienced in redefining their social identities.

Southern Ethiopia from a female perspective

Apart from touching on theoretical aspects of identification in the patrilineal and patriarchal societies of southern Ethiopia, the present collection is intended to add women's voices to anthropological accounts of the societies under study. This aim necessarily positions the anthropologist within a feminist discourse. It is still the case that too many discussions in science as well as in the development sector are male biased and are carried out without involving or consulting women even in matters which mainly concern women, such as body modifications that are defined as 'harmful traditional practices' (HTPs).

Traditional practices as identity markers and harmful practices

HTPs are a heatedly debated topic on all constitutional levels in Ethiopia, as well as among many NGOs in the country.[3] In Ethiopia's cultural policy, Article 39.2, it is

[3] See Epple und Thubauville (2011), LaTosky (2006, 2012), Thubauville (2012), as well as the contributions by Echi Christina Gabbert and Valentina Peveri in this collection.

stated that 'traditional harmful practices should be eliminated step by step'.[4] Like the definition of 'harmful traditional practices' adopted by the UN (LaTosky 2012), the Ethiopian government understands such practices as closely related to women's health and gendered stereotypes that both decrease opportunities for women. For that reason, the Ethiopian government and NGOs have been trying to make groups change or abandon certain aspects of their gendered organisation and cultural identities through awareness-raising programs.[5] It is obvious that local ideas clash with international and national concepts of human rights (Epple and Thubauville 2012:163). Satisfactory agreements cannot always be reached, especially where core cultural values and concepts are concerned.

Women are often not sufficiently involved in decisions about their own practices. Instead local lists of HTPs are drawn up by administrators, who are mostly not only male, but also from other cultural backgrounds and therefore lack a thorough cultural knowledge. The usefulness of such lists has therefore to be viewed critically. From a female perspective, the following contributions by Echi Christina Gabbert and Valentina Peveri scrutinise the stereotypical depiction of two so-called HTPs that are widespread in Ethiopia's south: female circumcision and marriage by caption. The examples show that, when observed in detail, some practices may be supportive to let women express their agency and utilize their opportunities. But more than that, they show that young women, precisely those who are mostly to be affected by so-called HTPs, are too often not involved at all in awareness-raising programs. Instead of being given a voice, young women are expected to accept decisions that are made by the state and their elders. This might then lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications which can foster a dynamics of resistance that might turn out to be more harmful than the initially targeted practices, for example, when girls, as a result, practice secret and medically more dangerous self-circumcision.

Women's bodies as boundary markers

Several studies of southern Ethiopia have shown how women actively define their bodies as a means of identification by using different body decorations and undergoing body modifications.[6] The female circumcision, insertion of lip-plates and scarifications that are common in this area are more than passive sites of violence or aesthetic fashions (Thapan 1997:3). In this ethnically very diverse region, bodies are central identity markers that show ethnic belonging and identity (see also Schlee 2008:61–66). However, not only ethnic identity, but also gender identity is disclosed through the body. Especially

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4 Cultural policy, Objective 7 (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1997).

5 For the example of female circumcision, see Gabbert's contribution in this collection and LaTosky (in print).

6 Epple (in print), Gabbert (2012), LaTosky (2006), Peller (2002), Turton (2004)

when discussing the latter, attention has been drawn away from the body (Niranjana 1997:108), but actually this theme should be revisited. Female circumcision among the Arbore of southern Ethiopia, as well as the insertion of lip-plates among the Mursi, articulate female and cultural identity.[7] The lip-plate should therefore not be seen as a sign of a submissive status, but as an expression of female social adulthood and reproductive potential (Turton 2004:4). Female circumcision among the Arbore serves as an interethnic and personal identity maker, yet the debate about it has become symbolically loaded as an arena of resistance against paternalism, or in other words anti-circumcision efforts triggered resistance by girls towards actors who decide for them which cultural practice is right or wrong. Although both the government and local elders objected to a continuation of the tradition, young women insisted to be circumcised, even if this meant that circumcision is done secretly by unexperienced girls themselves. Therefore, the efforts to abandon circumcision had detrimental outcomes, a phenomenon also observed in other regions (e.g., Boyden *et al.* 2013:37–38). The female body seems still to be a meaningful site in the identification process. Conceptions of international human rights are often not compatible with cultural particularities – a global juridical problem that cannot easily be resolved. Our examples underline efforts to understand that not culture is 'the problem' when reviewing politics and law concerning female bodies, but rather generalizing definitions and action plans (Merry 2003, 2006). Efforts to integrate cultural conceptions acknowledge the flexible character of culture and the need for improved communication that has to involve not only the decision makers in a community, but especially the women and girls concerned. One step towards this understanding has been made recently, when in 2012 the UN special rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Farida Shaheed, introduced a report on cultural rights to the United Nations General Assembly with special reference to women:

> The report underlines the right of women to have access to, participate in and contribute to all aspects of cultural life. This encompasses their right to actively engage in identifying and interpreting cultural heritage and to decide which cultural traditions, values or practices are to be kept, reoriented, modified or discarded (Shaheed 2012:2).

These lines stress that the puzzle of transnational law, especially the combination of human rights, gendered violence and women's rights is an ongoing and unresolved challenge.

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7 On female circumcision, see Gabbert (2012:77–79) and Peller (2002). On lip-plates, see LaTosky (2006).

Gender and identification in southern Ethiopia: an overview

The discussions in this collection of articles build on and take further the arguments of the literature on gendered identification in the patrilineal societies of southern Ethiopia. Beginning in the 1980s, many male and female researchers have been inspired by Jean Lydall's work on Hamar women.[8] As a consequence quite a few scholars took up research on women and gender issues. In 2002, for instance, Echi Gabbert and Susanne Epple, students of Jean Lydall and Ivo Strecker, organised a workshop on "The pride and social worthiness of women in South Omo, Ethiopia" at the South Omo Research Center in Jinka, bringing together women from eight ethnic groups in South Omo to discuss women's issues on a comparative basis (Epple and Brüderlin 2004). Several student assistants took part in the workshop, two of whom later made contributions to women's studies in southern Ethiopia.[9]

One of Lydall's (1980) first articles concerns the role of widows. Among the Hamar, women marry in their teens, while the initiation and marriage of men is often delayed into their thirties. This, and the fact that the Hamar practice polygyny, leads to a high number of widowed women, who are not allowed to marry again. Widows are the heads of their households and are free to choose or reject a new partner. However, such a partner is also free to leave any time: the children she bears are not his, nor the livestock which she has collected. Widows may suffer from not having living husbands to support them in their economic activities or to represent their interests in the public sphere. In another paper, Lydall (1994) tackles the topic of wife-beating among the Hamar. Women told her that they approved of wife-beating as long as the wife provoked her husband into beating her. Lydall gives a voice to the women, who explained wife-beating as a way of overcoming estrangement between spouses, an attempt of old men to prevent their young brides from taking lovers, or a possibility for a woman to make her weak husband look strong in public. Hamar women and girls also demand beatings on the occasion of a kinsman's initiation. They do so in order to acquire scars which prove how much they love their kinsman, who in turn cannot deny their relationship or refuse help in the future. In a later article, Lydall (2005) added some interesting points about the lives of widows. Because of the great age difference between husbands and wives due to the delayed marriage of men, most husbands are very elderly or even deceased when their sons finally marry. Women therefore usually wield great authority over their adult sons, their daughters-in law and their livestock, backing this up through ritual control and the threat of cursing.

The topic of widows among the Hamar was picked up by Susanne Epple (2006), who made similar observations among the neighbouring Bashada. She found that, af-

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8 For a complete bibliography of Lydall and a retrospect on her still continuing research among Hamar women, see Lydall and Strecker (2011).

9 See Elfmann (2005) and Thubauville (2010a, 2012).

ter the deaths of their husbands, widows established new social relationships through which they gained respect and self-esteem. In an ethnographic account of the Bashada, Epple (2010) describes in detail gendered differences at each life stage and shows the advantages women gain from being affiliated to the age-groups of their husbands.[10]

Gabbert, in her research among the Arbore, approaches male and female perspectives as complementary and inextricably intertwined (2012:3). In 2008, she discussed the relationship between music and identification to reflect on positive and negative male and female role models in Arbore. In 2012, she described in detail the significant roles women in Arbore play in supporting war and building peace. She analysed situations in which women support their husbands to fight and together become 'couples in arms'. In the course of the astonishing and successful transformation of the Arbore into a peaceful group in the last decade, women have reflectively redefined their roles to become innovative advocates of peace. The women were among the first to abandon war-supporting practices, to raise their sons to an understanding of peace and to build sustainable visions of peace (Gabbert 2012:154–157, 166–167).

Another group of researchers was mainly concerned with female bodies as markers of identity and boundary-making. David Turton (2004) became the first researcher to devote an article to women's lip-plates among the Mursi. He stresses the significance of this bodily modification for identity purposes, as, according to him, women who do not have pierced and stretched lips, might be mistaken for a member of a neighbouring ethnic group. He therefore sees the lip-plates, like other bodily modifications, 'as a bridge between the biological and social selves' (Turton 2004:4). The campaigns to eradicate lip-plates that Turton could already observe at the turn of the millennium are described in detail by Shauna LaTosky (2006, 2012), who focuses on women's perspectives and voices. She shows that these campaigns send conflicting and also confusing messages. They seem rather to be a paternalistic prohibition than an example of gender justice, as the views of the girls and women are, according to her, not taken into consideration at all. The findings of LaTosky are based on her detailed account of the lives of Mursi women in which she also discusses ideas of well-being and the rhetorical power of women (LaTosky 2010). Besides these discussions of women among the Mursi, Annette Peller (2002) gives us an insight into another form of bodily modification: female circumcision among the Arbore. While being critical of the practice and also discussing possible reformative measures, she states that circumcision is a normative behaviour that serves two purposes which are both formative of identity: to distinguish oneself from women of neighbouring groups, and to show social affiliation within one's own group.

Following more classical debates about gender in social anthropology are the contributions of other researchers. Toru Sagawa (2006) questions the applicability of the public-private dichotomy using the example of the space of coffee drinking among the

[10] See also the contribution by Epple in this collection.

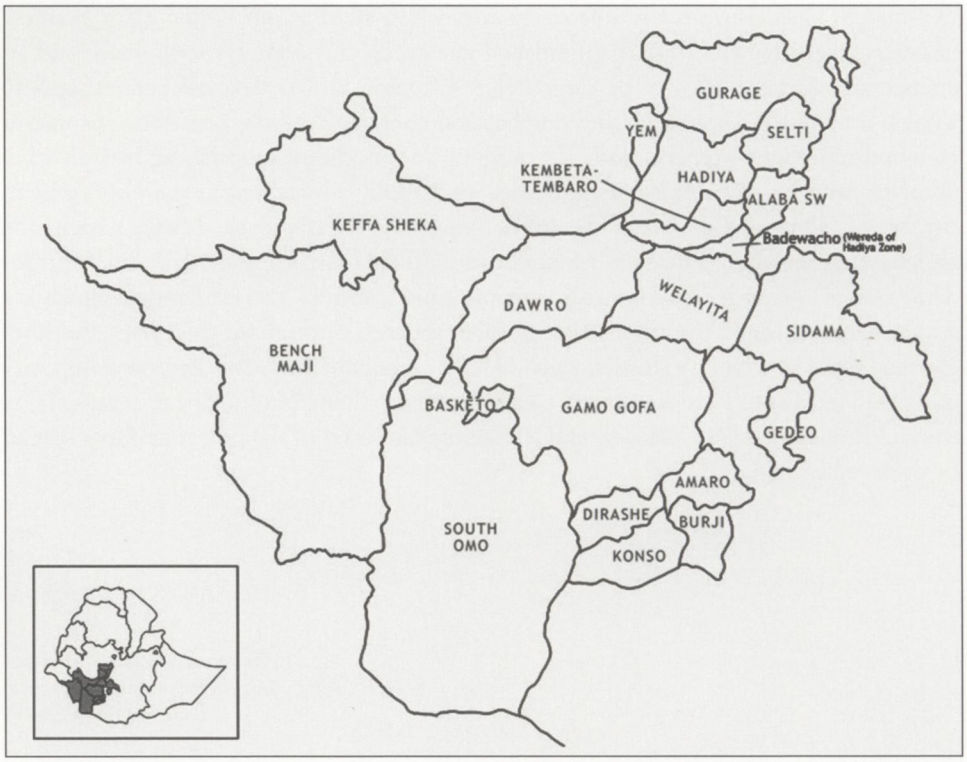
Dassanech. He describes the role of women when sharing out coffee as of political importance as they entertain distinguished guests, bless the society with peace and affluence and conduct rites of passage. Peggy Elfmann (2005) devoted her research to women among the Dassanech and emphasized control they have over food resources. Her findings about women's body decorations and modifications also tie in with what other researchers say about female bodies and bodily adornment as markers of identity. Sophia Thubauville (2010a) describes female agency among the Maale, which girls already express when participating in choosing their marriage partners. They further demonstrate agency by playing with their multiple identities and affiliations, which are strengthened through the rituals that women undergo throughout their lives. Another classical topic in women's studies touched on by Thubauville is the supposed impurity of women in Maale. This does not necessarily repress them, but it helps to escape tiring work in times of bodily weakness and is a steady reminder of the power and fear spread by their reproductive ability.

Contributions: from the obvious to the concealed

> [T]he moral of the stories is that
> things are and are not what they seem
> (Abu Lughod 1993:19).

As is evident from the literature mentioned above, case studies from southern Ethiopia can contribute significantly to the discussion of gendered identification in patrilineal and patriarchal societies. Through the wide range of research by women about women, we learn about the flexibility of identification processes. Especially the long-term relations between anthropologists and their informants and friends open the space for looking beyond the concepts, to consider and reconsider stereotypes, to acknowledge changing and multiple identification processes and to bring to the surface various lived realities.

The articles collected here are meant to add to the existing research by focusing on patrilineality and patriarchy in combination with questions of identification. The contributors have selected different writing formats, some more descriptive and theoretical, some more experimental, to provide a diversity of women's voices while approaching the topic from different angles. All articles have in common that they show an unexpected side to the lived realities of women in patrilineal groups of southern Ethiopia. Instead of being limited by the patrilineal and patriarchal organisation of their societies, women overtly take agency and make use of the possibilities of multiple identification. All examples show that women's interpretations of their place within a seemingly male oriented structure are flexible and problem oriented and can – depending on the situation – oppose and complement actions of their male counterparts.



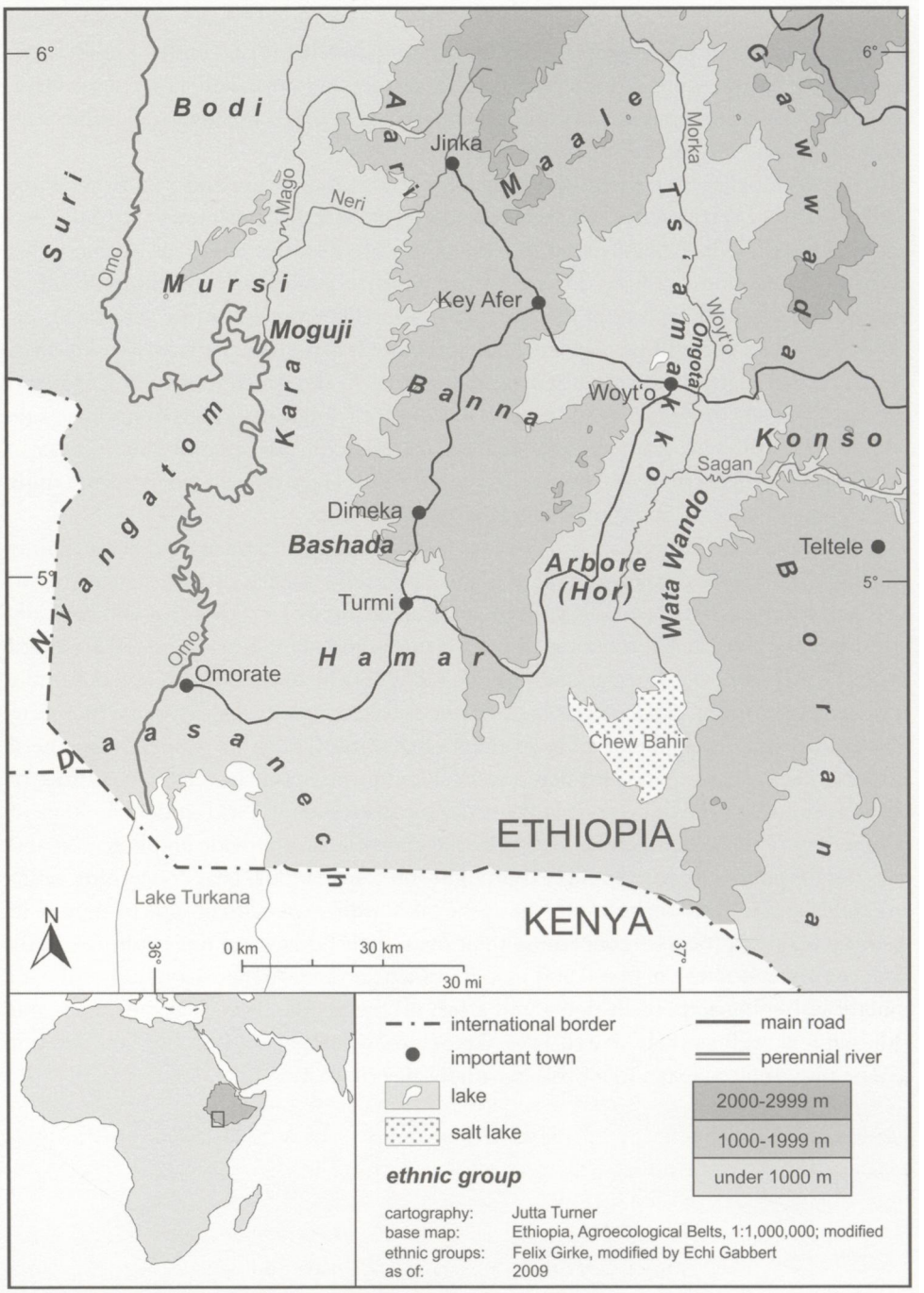
Administrative zones of Ethiopia's Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR)[11]

Thubauville disproves the preconception that the redefinition of women's identity over the course of their lives brings them disadvantages only. In fact, women utilise their multiple identities to profit from a broad social and local knowledge derived from their moving between different lineages.

Like Thubauville's article, Epple's contribution on the transfer of men's age-sets into the women's world shows that women extend relationships and loyalties through marriage. Among the Bashada women belong not only to their husband's patriline, but also to his age-set, and the new relationship between a wife and her husband's age-mates creates a new network for them. The additional relationships, however, not only provide support, but also demand commitment and do not offer women opportunities to counter the rather patriarchal structures.

In five short accounts of marriage, pragmatism, love, motherhood, patriarchy, polygyny, schooling, circumcision, resistance, and finally war- and peacemaking, Gabbert

11 See www.mursi.org/maps.



Ethnic Groups of Ethiopia's South Omo Zone

pictures the diversity of women's agency in Arbore while reflecting on her own role as a western female anthropologist in the field. While drawing on examples, Gabbert describes how Arbore women, rather than acting secretly in informal niches, complement, confront, support and outwit their male counterparts in brave, creative and visible ways both within and beyond ethnic boundaries.

Peveri touches on the sensitive topic of marriage by caption and tries to show the realities behind this practice which is considered as harmful, both internationally and within Ethiopia. She explains, on the basis of the life histories of Hadiya women, that marriage by caption can have different, even totally contradictory meanings. While it may involve a brutal capture at the expense of unwilling women, it can also be an organised flight by two willing partners and most cases is a mixture of these two extremes. Peveri further elaborates what is a common finding in the contributions of Epple and Gabbert, namely that marriage is seen as a 'project of solidarity in striving to live side by side', very different from western ideals of marriage for passion and love. Agency in choosing a partner is in most cases equally low for girls and boys when parents or family and clan elders decide about their marriage arrangements.

Today people in southern Ethiopia are facing many new challenges that are mainly related to the country's transformation plans. Especially large-scale infrastructure projects and commercial investment projects result in changing land uses that will radically transform the subsistence economy of both farmers and (agro-)pastoralists of southern Ethiopia. All these transformations strongly influence the life of women and culturally specific gender roles. Most articles in the present collection only briefly touch on recent innovations and developments. The examples firstly underline that women in southern Ethiopia always played and still play a critical and creative role in the lived realities of patrilineal and patriarchal frameworks different from stereotypical understandings of domination of men over women. Secondly the contributions provide ample reason and material for policy-makers to reflect thoroughly on transnational laws concerning women's rights and to consider carefully the agency that women need to be able to express in decision-making processes concerning their lives, their bodies and their cultures. Only time can show how the national and global influences that are increasingly entering all spheres of life in southern Ethiopia will affect all the people there – women, men and children – as well as their shared lives. Therefore, when generating rules and laws, it will be important to listen to all voices without discrimination.

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