

**TRANSFORMING TRADITIONS:
THE DYNAMICS OF CULTURAL VARIATION
IN THE GAMO HIGHLANDS,
SOUTHWEST ETHIOPIA**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about cultural variation. Its ethnographic focus is the Gamo highlands of southwest Ethiopia, where there are two politico-ritual systems, one based on sacrifices and the other based on initiations. While the sacrificial system is remarkably homogeneous over the area, the initiatory system varies considerably. The central purpose of this work is to try to understand why these two systems exhibit such different degrees of variation in the same setting and among the same people.

After describing the structure of the two cultural systems as they exist in the late twentieth century, the thesis examines some of the politico-economic changes that have taken place in southern Ethiopia over the past few centuries, and considers how some of these external changes would have led to internal cultural change in the highlands. It suggests that external changes are manifested as strains on certain social relations, evidenced as either interpersonal conflicts or communal misfortune, and that people try to resolve these strains through discussions at assemblies. The particular organisation of the Gamo assemblies facilitates decisions that lead to incremental cultural change.

The thesis then argues that these incremental changes have various intended and unintended consequences in the different cultural systems. The 'linked chain' pattern of interconnections in the initiatory system leads to complex nonlinear behaviour such that small incremental changes produce dramatic structural transformation, while the 'Russian doll' pattern of interconnections in the sacrificial system leads to linear behaviour such that small changes have only small effects.

The thesis therefore concludes that, although change in both systems has been driven by the same politico-economic factors, the form of change has been different due to their different systemic organisation, leading the initiations to transform rather more than the sacrifices. It is for this reason, then, that they exhibit such different degrees of variation.

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GLOSSARY

A Note on Transcription of Gamo Terms

<i>ch', k', p', t'</i> and <i>ts'</i>	are all explosives (also in Amharic).
<i>d'</i>	is an implosive that has a sound between d and t.
<i>ʔ</i>	is a glottal stop.
<i>e</i>	at the end of a word is pronounced like the French <i>é</i> .

Gamo Terms

<i>Ade</i>	Father, owner, boss. Also used to refer to initiated men.
<i>Angisa</i>	Lineage head.
<i>Atuma</i>	Type of <i>halak'a</i> in some <i>deres</i> .
<i>Ayle</i>	Slave.
<i>Bacha</i>	Site where offerings to ancestors are made. Usually marked by one or more bamboo shoots.
<i>Bekesha baira</i>	Head of sub-lineage. ie. senior to four generations of patrilineal descendants.
<i>Bitane</i>	Type of <i>halak'a</i> in some <i>deres</i> .
<i>Dana</i>	Initiate in the large <i>dere</i> of Doko. Also name for different type of initiate in <i>deres</i> in the southern parts of the Gamo highlands.
<i>Degala</i>	Caste-like group of artisans who do not have full status in the <i>dere</i> . Mainly work as tanners and blacksmiths today.
<i>Dere</i>	Gamo community located on specific territory
<i>Demutsa</i>	Type of sacrificer.
<i>Dorane/Dortane</i>	Lower status initiate who is like the <i>halak'a</i> 's assistant. Probably had a more complicated role in the past.
<i>Dubusha</i>	Assembly place.

<i>D'ache</i>	Group of clans in the southern highlands. Probably descendants of conquering clans from the northern highlands.
<i>Ek'k'a</i>	Sacrificer; <i>dere</i> senior.
<i>Embere</i>	House without a centre-post
<i>Guyhatets</i>	Ceremony of togetherness which establishes formal relations between wife-givers and wife-takers.
<i>Halak'a</i>	Initiate in a small <i>dere</i> .
<i>Hudhugha</i>	Initiate in a medium-sized <i>dere</i> . Also name for different type of initiate in <i>deres</i> in the southern parts of the Gamo highlands.
<i>Gach'ino</i>	State in which one must rest, eat well and do no work. Women are <i>gach'ino</i> after marriage and childbirth, men are <i>gach'ino</i> after circumcision and during part of the <i>halak'a</i> initiations.
<i>Gamo</i>	Group of clans in the southern highlands. Probably indigenous clans that were conquered by clans from the north.
<i>Gatuma</i>	Stick given to <i>halak'as</i> in Doko Masho.
<i>Gazo</i>	Large bamboo poles erected in <i>halak'a's</i> compound.
<i>Gia</i>	Market.
<i>Gome</i>	Transgression of a traditional rule. Thought to lead to misfortune.
<i>Gufe</i>	Wooden walking stick.
<i>Gu?a</i>	Gift taken to father-in-law after wife has reached menopause and all <i>kumets</i> gifts have been taken.
<i>Horoso</i>	Ceremonial staff carried by <i>halak'as</i> and <i>ades</i> .
<i>K'ach'ina</i>	Men that have not been initiated as <i>halak'a</i> .
<i>Kallacha</i>	Metal phallus. Worn on the forehead during ritual occasions by <i>hudhugas</i> , <i>danas</i> and, in some <i>deres</i> , <i>ek'k'as</i> .
<i>Kawo</i>	Senior sacrificer in the <i>dere</i> . Ritual leader.
<i>Kets</i>	House with a centre-post.
<i>Korofine</i>	Clan head.

<i>Kumets</i>	Full, complete. Name given to gifts taken to certain people, particularly fathers-in-law.
<i>K'olla</i>	Private part of the house.
<i>Lashuma</i>	Stick given to <i>halak'as</i> in Doko Gembela.
<i>Lazantsa</i>	Intermediary in wedding negotiations and <i>halak'a</i> initiations.
<i>Maaga</i>	Type of initiate from <i>Gamo</i> clans in <i>deres</i> in the southern parts of the Gamo highlands.
<i>Maaka</i>	Type of sacrificer.
<i>Maggana</i>	Offerings made to the spirits.
<i>Mala</i>	Citizens in the <i>dere</i> . Not <i>mana</i> or <i>degala</i> .
<i>Mana</i>	Caste-like group of artisans who do not have full status in the <i>dere</i> . Work as potters.
<i>Mesqalla</i>	Gamo New Year Festival. Name derives from Amharic, <i>Mesqal</i> .
<i>Oluma</i>	A plant used for marking boundaries.
<i>Perso</i>	Wheat beer.
<i>P'o?ets</i>	Horn blown by <i>mala</i> .
<i>Sha?a</i>	Plot of farmland by the house.
<i>Sofo</i>	Public parade that marks a change of status.
<i>Ts'ade gars</i>	Lower side of the house, where offerings are made.
<i>Ts'omma</i>	General term for the artisan castes, <i>mana</i> and <i>degala</i> .
<i>U?e</i>	Intermediary in <i>halak'a</i> initiations in Doko Gembela. Also the name for small flies.
<i>Uts'uma</i>	<i>Stellaria Media</i> . A common grass that grows well anywhere.
<i>Woga</i>	Law, tradition. The right way to behave.
<i>Zahe</i>	Horn blown by <i>degala</i> .
<i>Zurra</i>	Neighbourhood work-group in which one man from each house must participate.

Amharic Terms

<i>Amole</i>	Salt bar used as currency in the past.
<i>Balabbat</i>	Administrative position in the Imperial government. Intermediary between the state and local communities. Position given to <i>kawos</i> in the Gamo highlands.
<i>Gebbar</i>	Tenant farmer who had to provide food and labour for Amhara settlers during the Imperial period.
<i>K'ebelle</i>	Peasants' Association, or local council.
<i>Neftenya</i>	Amhara soldier-settler who came to the Gamo highlands during the Imperial period.
<i>Zamach (Zamacha)</i>	Campaigners. Students who were sent to the countryside to teach Socialism, nationalise land, improve schools and clinics, and ban traditional practices at the beginning of the Derg period.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Problem

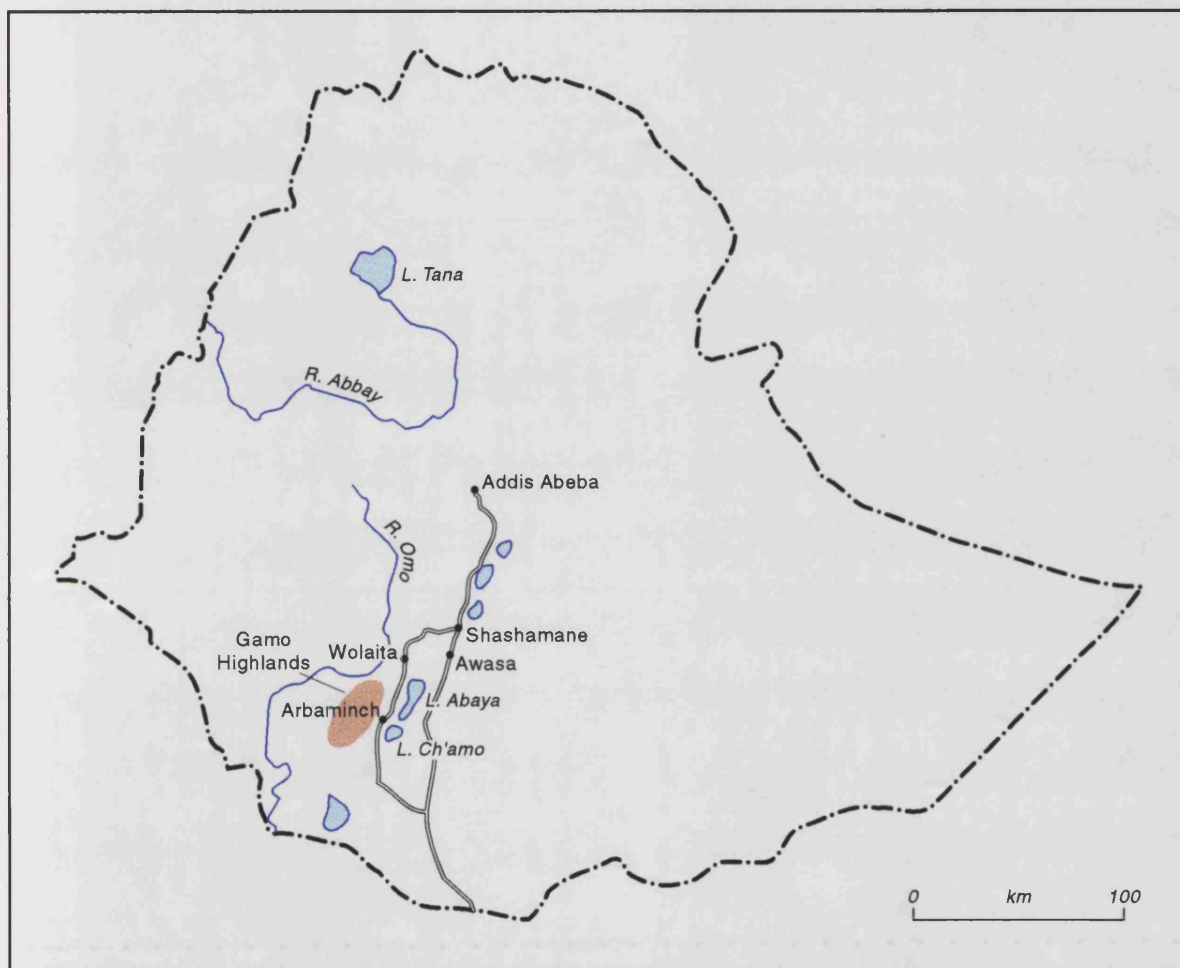
This thesis is about cultural variation. At its core lie two related questions. The first is more general: how should we analyse, understand and write about cultural phenomena that exist as a multitude of variations? Arguably most culture is like this. All cultures vary, and moreover all cultures contain an element of incoherence or mess. The traditional approach of ironing out both the variations and the mess makes for neat models and interpretations, but does it really give a satisfactory portrayal of cultures that are lively and lived in? On the other hand, giving up on culture altogether and focussing solely on the lives of particular individuals, or the meaning of certain events, results in an overly fragmented and disjointed picture that ultimately explains nothing. The challenge then, as I see it, is to find a way to write about culture that embraces variation, and accepts degrees of incoherence, but that also sees patterns, and accepts degrees of coherence. Intrinsic to such an endeavour is the location of cultural phenomena in both space and time, and a focus on both spatial variation and temporal transformation.

The second question is really a subset of the first. Accepting that all cultural phenomena vary, why do some vary in different ways and to different degrees? In other words, how are we to explain differential cultural variation? This question becomes even more complicated if the two cultural phenomena co-exist in the same society. To give an ethnographic grounding: why is it that in a remote part of southwest Ethiopia where there happen to be both sacrificial rituals and also initiation rituals, the form of the sacrificial rituals remains fairly constant across many communities, while the form of the initiation rituals varies phenomenally? It seems that variability may be an intrinsic aspect of cultural phenomena, and that by analysing variation we will not simply be representing our ethnography more faithfully, but we may also be going deeper into the actual workings of culture.

In this thesis I begin to address these questions by looking at cultural variation as it is manifest in the Gamo highlands of southwest Ethiopia. To adequately document variation over this whole area would require many years of fieldwork and more pages than there are in this thesis, so I limit myself primarily to a focus on the community of Doko and the variations that exist between and within its sub-communities. Instead of trying to provide a neat, synchronic picture of 'Doko culture', I aim to provide a more complex sketch of the workings of certain Gamo cultural phenomena through time, as seen in the particular locality of Doko. I thus try to bridge the divide between the general and the particular, between 'ideal types' and countless variants, by looking at mechanism. In a nutshell then, the purpose of this thesis is to try to understand the mechanisms that lead to the relative stability of sacrificial rituals, and the phenomenal variation of initiatory rituals, as found in the Gamo highlands of southwest Ethiopia.¹

After providing a sketch of the Gamo highlands and my experience of fieldwork there, the rest of this chapter will concentrate on setting up the theoretical framework which I will both use and explore throughout this thesis. First I will review the existing literature on the Gamo highlands, and then I will consider previous approaches to cultural variation. In order to try to understand differential cultural variation, I will then suggest that the perspective of complexity theory, borrowed from the natural sciences, might provide us with a useful way to bring together a number of disparate trends within anthropological theory and combine them with a systems approach, in order to explain why different cultural systems behave differently through time and across space. After outlining the basics of complexity theory and discussing how and why I think it will be useful in addressing the core issues that I have mapped out, this chapter closes with a brief overview of the general structure of the thesis.

¹ Cultural variation is extremely difficult to measure or quantify. However, it is nonetheless clear when certain phenomena vary significantly more than others. The ethnography in chapters three and four will bring this out clearly.



Map 1: The Gamo Highlands in Ethiopia



View over the Gamo Highlands.



Harvest Time in Doko.



Men Farming with a Work Group.



Woman Grinding Grain.

1.2 The Gamo Highlands

Rising up from the west of Lakes Abaya and Ch'amo in Ethiopia's Southwest (see map 1), the Gamo highlands reach altitudes of over 3,000m, and are home to approximately 700,000 people (Population and Housing Census 1994:14). The cultivation of cereals forms the basis of subsistence, with barley and wheat being most important in the higher altitudes, and maize and sorghum more important on the lower slopes. *Enset*² is also central to subsistence, and other crops include peas, beans, potatoes and cabbage. Manure is essential for successful agriculture, and thus cattle and small-stock are kept by most farmers. Men hoe the land using the two-pronged hoe (*ts'oile*), and often farm in together in work groups.

Throughout the highlands people live in scattered settlements and are organised into many different communities or *dere*. Each *dere* has its own sacrificers (*ek'k'a*), its own initiates (*halak'a*), and its own assemblies and assembly places (*dubusha*). The dual system of the sacrificers on the one hand, and the initiations on the other, is a key feature of Gamo communities. Both construct power relations, or relations of seniority, within communities, but they do it in rather different ways. Sacrificial seniority is ascribed and is largely based on genealogical seniority according to primogeniture. Seniors sacrifice for their juniors at all levels of society: lineage heads for their lineage members, clan heads for their clan members, and community, or *dere*, sacrificers for their *dere*. The senior sacrificer of a *dere* is generally known as *kawo*, and, although he is more a symbolic figurehead than a political leader, this term has sometimes been translated as 'king'. In contrast, initiatory seniority is achieved and is essentially open to anyone. Men are initiated, with their wives or mothers, through a series of rituals that can span

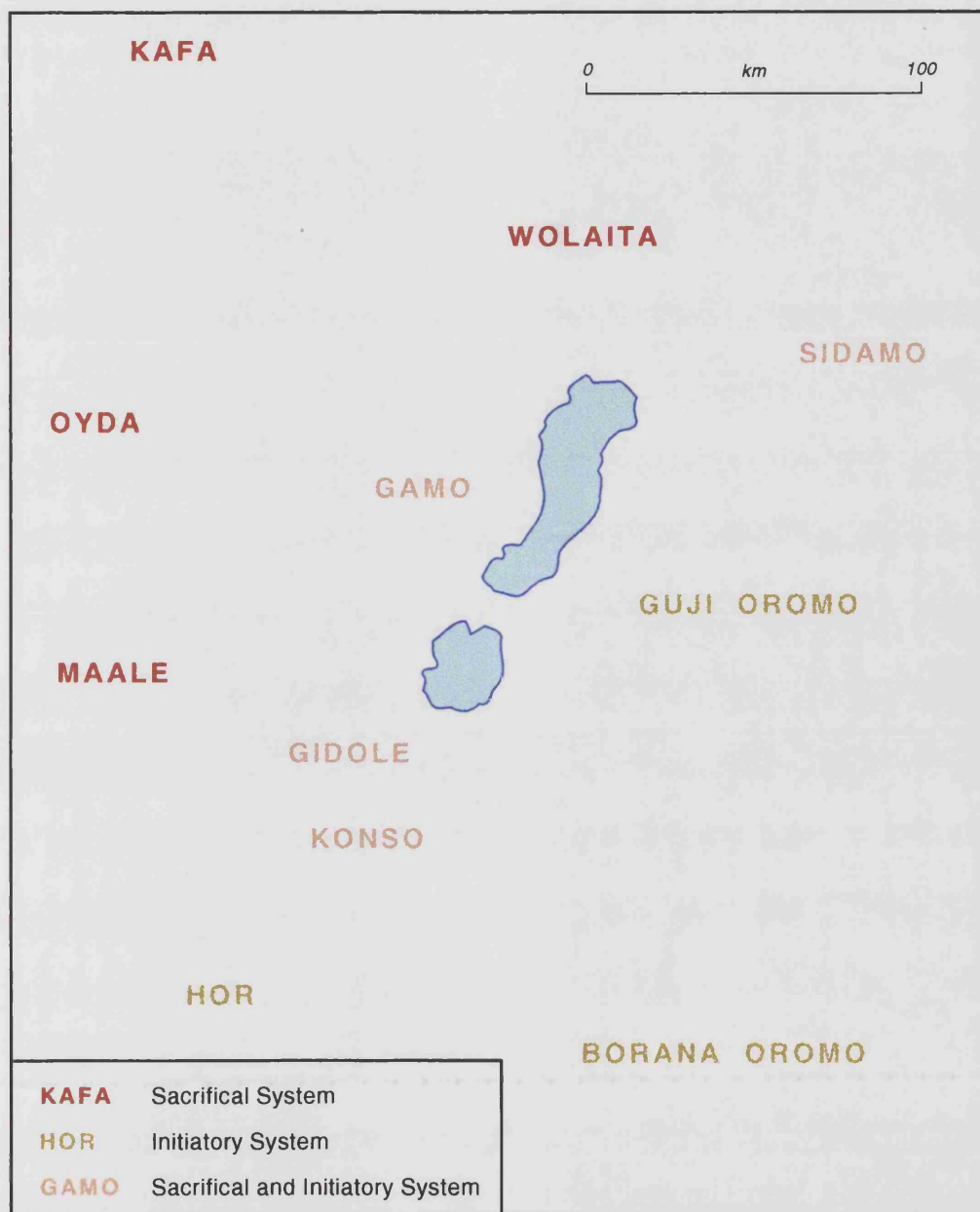
² *Ensete venticosum*, the 'false banana'. Differing from ordinary banana plants in terms of the form of the pseudostem, seed, embryo and chromosome number of the fruit, enset takes three to six years to build up a sufficient store of carbohydrates to be utilized as food. During that time it requires large amounts of manure or it will exhaust the soil. Despite this disadvantage, enset will support a greater density of population than cereal grains, has higher caloric yields per land unit, and is far more drought resistant (Hamer 1986:217-8).

between two months and two years, and include a series of feasts, for which the initiate must accumulate large amounts of resources. During this time they are in a ritually fertile state where they are thought to bring fertility and well-being to the *dere*. Thus like the sacrificers, initiates are considered responsible for the *dere*'s well-being, and initiation is not a purely personal change of status. It is, though, also a change of status, and after initiation a man is considered to be a *dere ade*, or *dere* father, and he can take a more active role in community politics and discussions at the assemblies. Throughout the Gamo highlands these two systems of seniority co-exist in all the different *deres*, but while the form of the sacrificial system is fairly homogeneous, the form of the initiatory system varies from *dere* to *dere*.

The Gamo people speak an Omoto language, which is a part of the wider Omotic language family. To locate the Gamo highlands in the wider cultural and linguistic context of southwest Ethiopia, it is relevant to note that there is a distribution of sacrificial systems and initiatory systems such that North and West of the Gamo highlands we find chiefdoms and kingdoms of predominantly Omotic language speakers where the sacrificial system has been developed more fully, and to the South and East we find societies of Cushitic language speakers with generation grading systems based on organised series of initiations³ (see map 2). Although clearly part of the Omotic language grouping, the Gamo highlands seem to lie at the area of overlap between the two cultural systems. They appear to give approximately equal emphasis to both systems, and develop neither to its logical extreme. It is this coexistence of two identifiably different cultural sub-systems within the fabric of Gamo culture that provides us with our object of study.

The Gamo highlands lie in a fairly remote part of Ethiopia, some 500km southwest of Addis Abeba. They are located in what was formerly Gamo-Gofa *awraja* (province), and is now, with some boundary changes, North Omo Zone. The administrative centre

³ Many, but not all, of the societies with generation grading systems also have a very weak form of sacrificial system. However, I have only considered societies to have both systems if both of them are significantly developed and important in cultural life.



Map 2: Distribution of Sacrificial and Initiatory Systems in Southwest Ethiopia

of this zone, and the locus of most connections between this area and the central government of Ethiopia, is the town of Arba Minch. Founded near the southern shores of lake Abaya in the late 1960s, Arba Minch is a small town with a population of some 40,000 people (Population and Housing Census 1994:109). Two dirt roads climb the 1,500m up from hot and dusty Arba Minch into the cool and damp highlands. One road leads to the tiny 'town' of Gerese in the southern part of the highlands, and the other leads to the slightly larger town of Chench⁴ in the north. Between these two points are a myriad of footpaths that weave over mountain peaks, across rivers and around the few remaining patches of forest to connect up the many Gamo communities. These paths are frequently walked as people travel between the weekly markets, either as traders, buying butter, or thread, or plastic jugs in one market and selling them for five pence more in another, or simply as customers looking for some coffee or a little extra milk. They are also walked by people going to ritual gatherings in distant communities, mainly to Orthodox churches for pilgrimages on some of the saints' days, but also for more traditional rituals, consultations with diviners and attendance at assemblies discussing inter-*dere* affairs. They are, however, rarely traversed by government officials, police, or development workers, who for the most part hover on the margins of Gamo highland life.

This is not to suggest that the Gamo highlands represent some isolated, pristine traditional society. Far from it. They have been a part of Ethiopia's complex history since at least the fifteenth century, when they were tributaries to the northern Abyssinian empire, and have been affected by regional politics since well before the area was incorporated into the nation state at the end of the nineteenth century. Their relation with the Abyssinian empire is testified to by the fifteenth century Orthodox churches⁵ found in the *deres* of Birbira, Dorze and Ele, and many Gamo people, particularly in the northern parts of the highlands, are today nominally Orthodox Christians. More recently,

⁴ Populations 2,500 and 5,800 respectively (Population and Housing Census 1994:107-8).

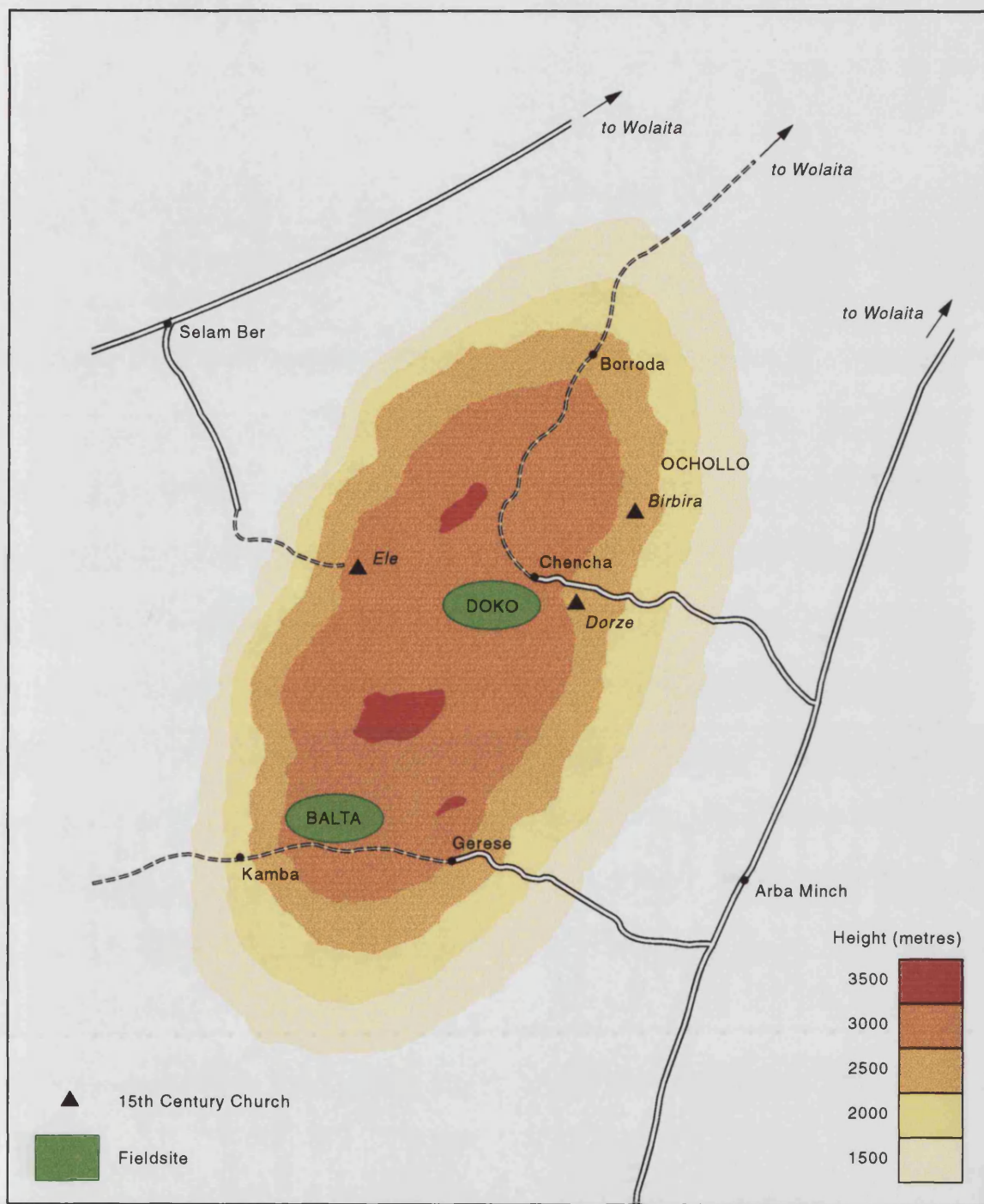
⁵ Orthodox refers here to the Ethiopian Orthodox church, which dates back to about the fourth century in northern Ethiopia.

the revolution of 1974, the coup in 1991, and the arrival of Protestant missionaries in the latter half of this century, have all impinged on Gamo life and transformed it in many and unexpected ways. This brief outline serves only as a taster of the fuller account given in the next chapter.

1.3 Fieldwork

My research in the Gamo highlands was carried out between September 1995 and June 1997. During most of that time I lived in the *dere* of Doko, a few kilometres outside Chenchä town (see map 3). I had the privilege to live with a wonderful family in the part of Doko known as Masho. This family opened up their house and their lives to me, and in doing so permitted my (partial) integration into their community. Beyond this, individual family members often played important roles in my research. The head of the house, Shagire, a respected elder with a wicked sense of humour, often accompanied me when I conducted interviews, and explained my strange interests and even more bizarre way with words to those less well acquainted with me. His son, Wale, an intelligent man in his thirties, sometimes played a similar role but, as a Protestant, was more interested in introducing me to Protestant activities and points of view.

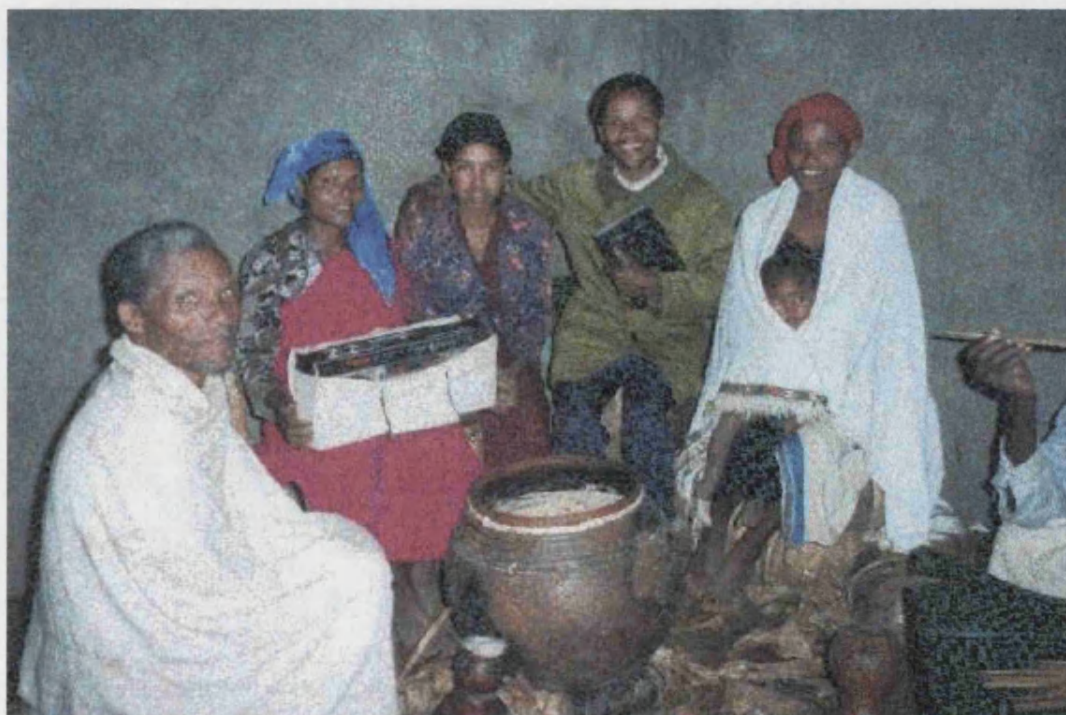
Most of the time, however, I worked with an assistant. Since my assistants had a propensity to get jobs or college places outside the highlands shortly after they started working with me, (for which, I must admit, I can take no credit) I ended up working with three different people over the years. One was a bright school-leaver from the *dere* of Chenchä, who helped me when I became interested in affairs in that area, and the other two were school teachers from Doko. Working with three different people turned out to be advantageous, as I could benefit from three different sets of insights, family connections and communal affiliations. For the most part, these assistants simply accompanied me when I carried out formal interviews, which I generally taped, provided a secure point of reference for interviewees who were not sure how far to trust me, and occasionally explained what I was trying to ask when my use of the Gamo language breached the bounds of normal comprehensibility.



Map 3: Doko in the Gamo Highlands



Almaz (centre) preparing Grain, with Wale's Modern House in the Background.



Shagire (left), Wale (holding Bible), and other Family Members at a Feast.

This phase of my fieldwork, with its formal and semi-formal interviews, was, however, towards the end. Initially I spent a lot of time trying to learn the language, and just hanging out with people as they performed their day-to-day tasks. Living with a family made this much easier, as I had family life thrust on me every day from dawn until sometime after midnight. As my language proficiency increased, and my practical knowledge of how to 'be' improved, I was able to learn much more quickly through informal chats, gossip and local affairs. I attended numerous assemblies, marriages, funerals, and even a birth, and I was present for a full cycle of annual rituals. As my focus became more clear, and the areas in which I would require more detail became apparent, I shifted increasingly to a method of formal or semi-formal interviews, and wore out my hiking boots as I walked far and wide through Doko attending local variants of the same ritual in different sub-communities.

The remarkable cultural variation throughout the highlands, however, became apparent to me before I even moved into Doko. My introduction to the highlands took the form of a ten day hike, zigzagging over the mountains from Gerese to Chench⁶. I was ostensibly getting a feel for the area, and trying to find a suitable community in which to base myself (or which would have me...). But as I went from community to community, eagerly trying to ask my first questions and to get a 'rough idea' of how things worked, it became frustratingly clear that things were different, just a little bit different, everywhere. And when all these little bits were put together, the difference between Gerese and Chench, say, was such that it was pretty impossible to generalise about 'Gamo'. At this early stage, however, I thought that this might just be a product of my ignorance and stupidity, and that when I had been around longer everything would fall into place.

After this trip, then, I chose my fieldsite. Not Doko initially, but a community further south in the highlands, called Balta. Here I spent my first few months, again living with a family. This family lived near the market place, and allowed traders from other *deres* to stay in a small hut that they had built behind their main family house. I lived in this

⁶ My guide on this first trip was Tadesse Wolde, to whom I owe great thanks.

small hut, with about fourteen young women thread traders, who came from Dorze, in the northern part of the highlands (bordering Doko, as it happens). Thus again, cultural variation was thrust upon me, as the Dorze women told me that just about everything, from language to house style to marriage ritual, was different in Dorze.

But it was when, for various reasons, I moved from Balta to Doko, that it really became clear that the ‘problem’ of cultural variation could not be ignored, but was somehow central to Gamo life. Sure enough, pretty much everything was different in Doko. In Balta marriage was forbidden with members of one’s father’s clan and one’s mother’s clan, but in Doko one could marry from one’s mother’s clan without problem; initiates in Balta were called either *maaga* or *hudhugha*, depending on whether they came from *Gamo* clans or *D’ache* clans, while in Doko all equivalent initiates were called *halak’a*, and there was no division into *Gamo* and *D’ache* clans; in Balta men could be seen carrying manure to the fields, but the sexual division of labour in Doko prescribed that women should do this. And so on and so on. I seemed to have almost to start again from scratch when I reached Doko, because I could not assume that anything that I had learnt in Balta would be applicable there. To talk of ‘Gamo culture’, then, seemed somewhat strange, although there certainly was a certain ‘Gamo-ness’ about things.

I made three further walking trips over the highlands, and thus briefly visited the vast majority of Gamo *deres*. I became more and more intrigued by the patterns of variations, but also more and more aware that the detail required to fully map out the variations was astronomical. At the same time I was beginning to realize that even in Doko there was plenty of variation. As I will explain more fully in the next chapter, the *dere* of Doko sub-divides into two smaller *deres*, called Doko Masho and Doko Gembela, and these *deres* in turn sub-divide into eight and nine even smaller *deres*, respectively. And each *dere*, at whatever scale, does things a little differently. Thus men in Dambo (one of the smaller *deres* in Doko Masho), for example, can be initiated before they are married, but men in Kale (one of the smaller *deres* in Doko Gembela) cannot be initiated until after they are married and their wife has reached menopause. Alongside this variation, though, there is a continuity that makes the variations stand out, and which made the

task of mapping them seem less daunting. Agriculture, marriages and much else are carried out more or less the same way, and where there are differences, they seemed smaller and more graspable. Thus it seemed that the limited area of Doko would provide a good testing ground to look at the workings of cultural variation.

However, the nature of individual fieldwork imposed certain limitations on this kind of study. Much as I walked all over Doko, I could not be in two places at once. Thus it was impossible to witness all the different variants of the same ritual, since many of them took place at the same time. Furthermore, the sub-communities in the parts of Doko that were somewhat distant from where I lived (particularly those in Doko Gembela, while I lived in Doko Masho) arranged their dates and timings at assemblies at which I was rarely present. Since people knew me less well in Doko Gembela they often did not think to let me know when these assemblies were taking place, and since my family and most of my closest relationships were with people in Doko Masho, I was less connected up with Doko Gembela happenings through day to day life. If I missed an assembly in Doko Masho I would no doubt hear about it from my family and neighbours as they discussed it in the evening, but if I missed an assembly in Doko Gembela then it was much harder to find out what was going on. If key friends in Doko Gembela were uncontactable for some reason (maybe they had gone to market, or to a funeral, or were busy farming distant fields), then it was easy for me to miss important events there. Thus even when rituals were not taking place on the same day, it was often difficult to be sufficiently 'in the know' to get to them.

The result of these limitations is that I was not able to witness first hand all the variant forms of ritual on which I base my analysis. Although much of my data is derived from personal observation, some of it is based on accounts given by informants in interview situations: "Tell me how you make *halak'as* in your *dere*." While this is clearly not as satisfactory, I was able to go into quite a lot of detail by actually discussing variation with these informants. Thus after I had taken down what the informant first said, I could then build up details by asking questions like: "In Yoiria I saw the *halak'a's* wife wearing a red feather on her head at the *Mesqalla* celebration. Do you do this in Eleze

too?" In this way I both convinced people that it was worthwhile talking to me, since I already knew something and was not an entirely ignorant young female (as they were wont to assume), and at the same time managed to get detailed accounts of ritual events that I did not attend. On some occasions I was able to further develop this by sending one of my assistants to witness the ritual and write up notes about it. Thus, although I did my best to get around these fieldwork limitations, the problems of comparative ethnography, discussed for example by Barth (1987:19-20), are to some extent present even when making comparisons between different parts of one's own ethnographic data. By keeping my ethnographic research focussed and small-scale, I hope to have avoided any serious distortions deriving from these problems.

1.4 Previous Studies of the Gamo Highlands

The first mention of the Gamo highlands is found in a fifteenth century Amharic text of a song of glory to King Yeshaq (1412-1427), leader of the northern Abyssinian empire, in which they are cited as a tributary people (Guidi 1889, Huntingford 1989:94). In the sixteenth century they are again mentioned once or twice by European travellers and Ethiopian historians, but unfortunately there is virtually no information about life in the highlands in any of these texts (Bahrey 1593, in Beckingham and Huntingford 1954; Basset 1897; Crawford 1958; Beckingham and Huntingford 1961).

The next mention of the Gamo highlands is then found much later, in some of the travel and expedition literature from around the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries (Darragon 1898, Vannutelli and Citerni 1899, Hodson 1927, Azais and Chambard 1931). For the most part these accounts contain little of ethnographic interest and their authors stayed in the highlands for only a few days, if they set foot in the area at all. Towards the middle of the twentieth century more scientific expeditions, with a particularly geographical bent, made forays into the highlands. These resulted in a few short articles about agriculture (Forster 1969), markets (Jackson 1971) and flora and fauna (Scott 1952). The area is also described a little in Cerulli's volume of the *Ethnographic Survey of Africa* (1956), but the first real ethnographic study in the Gamo

highlands was Straube's study of Dorze (Straube 1957, 1963). This study focussed on political organisation, particularly on the duality between sacrificers and initiations. However, due to Straube's diffusionist approach, which was characteristic of the Frobenius Institute to which he was affiliated, there is much that is questionable in his work, not least the assumption that the sacrificial system came to the area from the 'more civilised' North.

The most important ethnographic studies of the Gamo highlands were carried out by four anthropologists in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Dan Sperber worked in Dorze, Judy Olmstead moved between Dorze and Dita, Marc Abeles stayed in Ochollo, and Jacques Bureau traversed the highlands and attempted to write about 'Gamo'. Much of this work focussed on the sacrificers and initiations, which are clearly the most striking features of Gamo cultural life, and aimed to explain their contrasting logics and to describe them as either antagonistic or complementary systems (Sperber 1973; Halperin and Olmstead 1976; Bureau 1981; Abeles 1978, 1981, 1983, 1985). There have also been publications on how the sacrificial system was changed when the Gamo highlands were incorporated into the Ethiopian state and the most senior sacrificer, or *kawo*, of each *dere* became involved in the national political system as *balabbat* (Bureau 1978); and on how warfare was endemic in the nineteenth century, both within the Gamo highlands, and between Gamo communities and non-Gamo communities, such as Guji and Wolaita (Olmstead 1973; Abeles 1977, 1981). A little has also been written about traditional beliefs, including those of the revolutionary prophet, Essa Ditha, who preached early this century, and the early impact of Protestantism somewhat later (Abeles nd); and about the system of taboo, or *gome*, involved in the traditional management of misfortune (Sperber 1980). More recently, Jacques Bureau has published a collection of Gamo folktales (Bureau 1994). Judy Olmstead adds to our knowledge about women, discussing the influences of economy and social structure on female fertility (1974a), looking at women's work (1975), and providing a lively portrait of a woman political leader, or *balabbat* (1997).

The substantive content of these works will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but it is relevant to note here that none of them address the issue of cultural variation. In fact, their approaches specifically avoid variation, and thus implicitly see it as a problem which must be gotten around in order to look at ‘Gamo culture’, as opposed to being a key feature of Gamo cultural life⁷. Abeles and Sperber each choose to focus on one small locality and to produce an internally coherent account of that community. Such an approach bypasses variation altogether, and ignores the nagging problem of what is the validity of an analysis that works for one community, but not for the ever-so-slightly different one next door? Bureau, in contrast, seeks to find some underlying themes that are common to all the different communities and to thus write a generalised account of the Gamo highlands. This approach thus also seeks to bypass variation, and in doing so is forced into such generalisations that very little can be said at all. One can write about the general themes of initiation, for instance, but say very little about how initiations are done, because they are done differently everywhere⁸. In this thesis I seek to overcome this division into the general and the particular, and to argue that ‘Gamo culture’ cannot be adequately understood without taking variation into account.

None of these ethnographic studies deal with the community of Doko, and given the degree of cultural variation in the area it certainly cannot be assumed that everything described in Dorze or Ochollo, say, will be applicable in Doko. The only study of Doko to date is that carried out by ethno-archaeologist Daniel Cartledge (Cartledge 1995). However this study focuses on indigenous sustainable resource management, and the

⁷ However, according to Dan Sperber (pers. comm.), the phenomenal cultural variation was noted by all of these researchers, and they had discussed the possibility of a joint project to investigate it further. But the revolution of 1974 and the subsequent period under the military government curtailed all research for the next fifteen to twenty years, and thus the project never happened.

⁸ Olmstead’s approach varies. In her thesis she contrasts the two *deres* of Dorze and Dita, but only in as much that many Dorze men were migrant weavers, while most Dita men were farmers. She does not attempt to compare their symbolic or cultural systems. In other publications she writes more generally about the Gamo highlands.

one chapter on ethnography suffers from many shortcomings. Doko, then, is something of an unknown, and this thesis thus also seeks to make a small contribution to the widening of Ethiopian ethnography. My main concern, however, is to get to grips with cultural variation.

1.5 Approaches to Cultural Variation

Although there have been very many studies of cultural variation, there have been only a small number that specifically address the questions posed in this thesis. Relatively few studies consider local variability within one community or one ethnic group, and, to my knowledge, there have been no studies at all that deal with the issue of differential cultural variation. Thus in this section I will review a fairly broad selection of approaches to cultural variation⁹, and I will then try to distill from these works an approach which might help to explain the differential cultural variation found in the Gamo highlands.

I will focus on several important themes as they are manifest in these studies. One theme is causality, and where it is seen to lie; and a second theme is different formulations of the notion of 'structure' and how it is considered to relate to individual agency. These themes are central to the study of cultural variation, because looking at cultural variation implies some notion of 'culture' or 'structure' that is varying, and, in the more dynamic approaches at least, requires some ideas about how such structures are generated and how they change. Thus looking at cultural variation takes us straight to the heart of the anthropological and sociological enterprise.

A third theme that will be highlighted is the notion of 'transformation'. Most studies of cultural variation assert, implicitly or explicitly, that cultural variants are transformations of each other. What is meant by this varies enormously, from referring to abstract logical analyses of form to positing historical or evolutionary trajectories. The

⁹ This selection, though, is by no means exhaustive.

particular notion of transformation that is used relates, of course, to the particular notion of 'structure' guiding the study. And the mechanisms posited for these transformations relate inherently to both this and to the model of causality that is employed. Although the mechanisms for transformation have rarely been dealt with in any depth, they are central to an understanding of cultural variation that is located in time as well as in space.

1.5.1 Approaches derived from the Functionalist Tradition

One approach to the study of cultural variation has been to try to elucidate causal variables that determine the form of different cultural variants. These variables in turn are generally seen to be driven by one particular independent variable which forms the base of the structural system. Within this broad functionalist framework, various independent variables have been suggested, most frequently either various elements of social organisation, such as property transmission or residence patterns, or environmental factors such as ecology or the technology of production.

Studies of cultural variation in the structural-functionalist framework (eg. Nadel 1955, Goody 1962) posit some aspect of social organisation as the independent variable and then try to correlate changes in other variables with changes in this base variable. Jack Goody explains the position clearly:

[we must proceed by] comparing the standardised modes of acting in the two communities, in order to see where the differences lie. Having established the covariations, we have then to try to determine which are the dependent, which the independent variables. (Goody 1962:8).

In his study of mortuary rituals among the LoDagaa of northern Ghana, Goody establishes correlations between a number of variables, including form of mortuary ritual, form of kinship organisation and the nature of father-son relations. He then suggests that the independent variable, which is thought to drive all the other variations, is in fact the system of inheritance. Among the LoWiili all property is transmitted

agnatically, whereas among the LoDagaba immovable property is transmitted agnatically while movable property is inherited by uterine kin. So, for example, tense father-son relations are 'caused' among the LoWiili by the fact that the son is dependent on his father for his inheritance, and more relaxed father-son relations among the LoDagaba are 'caused' by the fact that the son is not so dependent on his father because much of his inheritance will come from his mother's brother. It follows then that one variant is a transformation of the other: start with the LoWiili variant and change the inheritance pattern and you will end up with something very similar to the LoDagaba variant. Goody in fact suggests that this is what happens in LoWiili/LoDagaba border areas where, through intermarriage, sons of LoWiili men and LoDagaba women can choose to inherit either from their father or from their mother's brother. If, for whatever reasons, they choose to inherit from their mother's family then changes in the way they propitiate the ancestors and hold their mortuary rites etc will soon follow.

Despite the many subtleties of Goody's work, a major shortcoming is the lack of discussion of mechanism. Most of the work concentrates on drawing up structural correlations, and the issues of causality and the direction of change are only addressed briefly in the final discussion of borderland youths. Goody's problem with causality is essentially that he wants to give structure causal efficacy, but because he also believes that structure is not a 'thing' that 'exists' he can find no way to ground his intuitions about change in any actual social mechanisms. Although Goody tackles this problem again in later works, it is not one that he successfully overcomes. In *Production and Reproduction* (1976), for example, he uses the statistical tools of linkage and path analysis to try to determine the direction of causality between a set of correlations regarding plough agriculture and diverging devolution. His use of these statistical tools is an interesting attempt "to get a little beyond the circularity of structural-functionalism and the much simpler unilineal, single-factor hypotheses that dog so much work in the social sciences" (ibid:37), but ultimately it tells us little about the micro-mechanisms of change and how it actually takes place on the ground.

The materialist approaches of ecological anthropology, cultural materialism and cultural ecology see cultures as adaptive solutions to environmental givens (eg. Steward 1955; Sahlins 1958; Sahlins and Service 1960; Rapaport 1968, 1979; Harris 1979, 1980). They differ in the degree to which they acknowledge the importance of technology and the organisation of production (Thin 1996:186) and in the extent to which they include other societies as part of the 'environment', but they all share a view of causality that considers the material 'base' (or 'infrastructure') to determine the cultural 'superstructure'. In other words, they consider 'culture' in functionalist terms, as a coherent whole that adapts to its environment, much as a biological organism adapts to its environment. Within these approaches there are two related avenues of exploration. One seeks to understand culture as a homeostatic system that keeps its population in balance with its environment through negative feedback loops (eg. Rappaport 1967), and the other seeks to understand the evolution of culture in response to changing environmental conditions. The latter view lends itself to the development of explanations of large scale cultural evolution and the smaller scales of change which result in cultural variation, or what Sahlins and Service distinguish as general and specific evolution. I will not dwell on general evolution, with its propensity to rank cultures into different developmental stages (see eg. Service 1963, Fried 1967), but will consider in more detail how a cultural ecologist would approach cultural variation.

Perhaps the best example of such a study is Sahlins' comparative look at social stratification in Polynesia (Sahlins 1958). In this early work Sahlins explicitly states as his topic of investigation the "adaptive variation in culture" (ibid:ix). He looks at a number of Polynesian societies and attempts to understand gross variations in the form and degree of their social stratification as functional adaptations to different ecological and technological conditions. His causal model starts from environmental conditions and then extends to considerations of the organisation of production and exchange, then to social stratification, and finally, rather weakly, to vague extrapolations to other elements of cultural and ritual life. He writes:

Degree of stratification is directly related to surplus output of food producers. The greater the technological efficiency and surplus production,

the greater will be the frequency and scope of [food] distribution [centred around chiefs]... Increase in scope, frequency and complexity of distribution implies increasing status differentiation between distributor and producer. This differentiation will be manifest in other economic processes besides distribution, and in sociopolitical and ceremonial life. Thereby the hypothesis: other factors being constant, the degree of stratification varies directly with productivity (Sahlins 1958:5).

Through a fairly detailed look at fourteen Polynesian societies and their environments, Sahlins shows that this hypothesized correlation more or less holds. However, by simply comparing static, idealised structures he is unable to show that it is anything more than a correlation. By ignoring mechanism or process, or any real consideration of history, he is, like Goody, unable to prove his suggested causality, beyond stating it. His analysis is devoid of subjects or agents, and thus causal mechanisms are implicitly considered to work at the level of 'structure', wherever this may be. As in many other models in ecological anthropology, 'the system' is imbued with causal efficacy while there is no adequate discussion of the ontological status of such a system. The causal model that results is as a consequence either teleological or down right mystical.

If, for the sake of argument, we were to accept his model of causality, then the explanation of cultural variation that we are left with is essentially linear and evolutionist. The basic cultural structure is elaborated to a greater or lesser extent according to the amount of surplus available. Implicit in this argument is the idea of reversibility: if one of the less stratified societies were to become more productive then they would evolve into a form like that of the more stratified societies existing in its vicinity, and if one of these more stratified societies were somehow to become less productive they would devolve into a form like their less stratified neighbours. In a later publication Sahlins expands his set of factors which might cause devolution to include greedy chiefs, status rivalry and other non-environmental factors (Sahlins 1963:297-300), but the essentially linear nature of his model remains the same. There is no room in this model for structural transformation, or what we might call nonlinear change.

Leach's study of variation in political systems in highland Burma suffers a similar problem (Leach 1981 [1954]). Although purporting to be a model of 'structural change' and 'historical transformation', it is in reality a linear model which sees variants of Kachin ideology forever oscillating between two fixed points. The stumbling block for Leach is his analytical separation of the 'system on the ground' from the 'system of ideas'. By this analytical twist Leach can ignore the spiralling effects brought about because, on the ground, "the facts at the end of the cycle are quite different from the facts at the beginning of the cycle" (ibid:xiii), and instead concentrate on the supposed cyclical oscillation of the 'system of ideas'. By ironing out these on-the-ground differences, he implies that they have no causal power to interact with the system of ideas and, perhaps, transform it. Instead they can only drive the system into more (*gumsa*) or less (*gumlao*) hierarchical form, while the system itself is untransformable.

Leach's model is thus linear for different reasons than Sahlins' (1958) model. Sahlins' model is linear because it is essentially uncausal. Productivity determines all. Whenever there is more than one causal variable the rest are 'held constant' so that the linear variations with one variable can be seen. But Leach's model ostensibly embraces multicausality, as he looks at the causal effects of ecology, political history and the actions of individuals (Leach 1981 [1954]:228-63). However, by rendering the system of ideas off-limits to any effects of these factors, and yet imbuing these ideas with causal power over the actions of individuals, Leach short-circuits the multicausal model of complex interactions between different factors, and effectively ends up with a linear model.

There are, I think, two major reasons for the weaknesses in Leach's model which are pertinent to this discussion. One is that Leach was arguing against the functional holism that was common at the time, and exemplified, for example, by Sahlins' (1958) book. However, he does not fully manage to step out of this framework, for although he insists that the system 'on the ground' is full of incoherencies, he still feels the need to posit a 'system of ideas' that is a coherent whole. The other reason for the incoherence of Leach's own model is that he is ultimately unsure whether to place causality in the realm

of structure or in the realm of individuals. On the one hand he sees the structural contradictions between the *mayu-dama* marriage system and both *gumlao* and Shan ideology as driving 'structural change', and yet on the other hand he states that "every individual of a society, each in his own interest, endeavours to exploit the situation as he perceives it and in so doing the collectivity of individuals alters the structure of the society itself" (ibid:8). Leach is thus acutely aware of the ontological problems of seeing structure as causal, and is trying to incorporate a more ontologically sound individualist view into what is essentially a structural account. While this is an important step, Leach does not quite succeed in combining these two approaches and his model of causality is consequently somewhat unclear. The tension between individualist and collectivist approaches is central to much anthropological and sociological theory, and the resolution of this tension will be a central theme in my discussion below. But before that I will look at another study of cultural variation which, while working in the same broad framework as Sahlins (1958) and Leach (1981 [1954]), attempts to address the issue of nonlinear change.

Daryl Feil's study of cultural variation in the Papua New Guinea highlands is explicitly evolutionist and he seeks to use archaeological evidence about the prehistoric past in order to understand synchronic variations in the present (Feil 1987). Feil differs from Sahlins in that, although he considers the "facts of production", by which he means both environmental and technological factors and the social relations of production, as providing the "ultimate logic" in understanding cultural evolution, he also tries to incorporate the perspective that "social, cultural and material factors are mutually reinforcing" (ibid:5). In other words, he eschews unicausal determinism and seeks to embrace multicausality (ibid:8). However, like Leach, he does not succeed in modelling multicausality in a consistent manner.

Feil's argument is as follows: because of different ecological conditions, societies in the western highlands practised settled agriculture way back into the prehistoric past, while those in the eastern highlands relied on hunting and gathering until much more recently. The prevalent swamp conditions in the West provided the right conditions for the

intensification of taro production, leading to surplus yields. This surplus was then invested in pigs, which were then increasingly domesticated, and people began to use them in exchange contexts in return for labour, women, prestige or power. When the sweet potato arrived in this area centuries later it led to the further intensification of production and was “taken in stride by an agricultural complex already geared to surplus production” (ibid:8), thus expanding the exchange networks and leading to the form of western highland society we find today. In contrast, however, the eastern highland societies were in a rather different position when the sweet potato arrived. Still living mainly by hunting and gathering with only a little agriculture, these societies were not “already geared to surplus production”, and thus reacted differently to the sweet potato. Intensified production followed, but because they were not used to domesticating pigs and because they had not developed the exchange logic that allowed pigs to be exchanged for women or power, they developed down a different evolutionary path from the western highland societies. Therefore, Feil argues, the different social and economic formations found today in the eastern and western highlands can be explained by this early divergent development.

Feil, thus, attempts to model multicausality with his discussion of the different effects the sweet potato had in different places. Rather than considering a unicausal determinism, according to which the sweet potato leads to intensification and this in turn leads to a particular social organisation, he takes into account the different social and cultural factors which would influence the effect which the sweet potato would have. Thus his model shows a sensitivity to initial conditions, whereby the same input can lead to very different results due to small differences at its point of entry.

But where his model falls down, in a similar way to Leach’s model, is in his inconsistent position regarding the changeability of cultural ideas. Feil argues that in the western highlands intensified production (of taro) ‘led to’ the domestication of pigs and the development of a particular exchange logic which guided marriage, politics and much else, as if the causality here is self-evident: if people have surplus they will exchange it for other things and manipulate these exchanges to gain power. But for some reason, when it comes to the eastern highlands intensified production (of sweet potato) does not

'lead to' the domestication of pigs, the development of new exchange contexts, the exchange of pigs for women, and so on. Feil does not explain why the changed 'facts of production' do not lead to changed ideas in this context, but instead explains the different results of these same 'facts of production' (ie. intensification) in terms of the different ideas. Thus be it with taro or sweet potato, and be it at different times, it is not clear why intensification of production 'leads to' new ideas in the West, but not in the East. Thus his model fails to model multicausality adequately, and in effect he explains the difference between eastern and western highland societies by arguing that the base guides the superstructure in the West, whereas the superstructure guides the base in the East! What is needed is a model that can incorporate both perspectives, a model of transformation that is truly recursive. I will return to this point below, but first I must outline another set of approaches to cultural variation, those that take their inspiration from Levi-Strauss and structuralism.

1.5.2 Approaches derived from the Structuralist Tradition

For Levi-Strauss, studying cultural variation is fundamental to any study of culture. Whether looking at kinship organisation or myth (1963, 1994[1964], 1969, 1981 [1971]), his works proceed not by generalisation into 'ideal types', but by the explication of numerous variants, of which no one is more 'true' than any other. He is interested in the way different versions of a cultural element represent transformations of its basic structure. Thus he looks for underlying patterns which form the 'structure' of all variants, and at the same time seeks to understand the logic by which all the variants differ.

Levi-Strauss's conception of 'structure' is thus radically different from that of the structural-functionalists. He does not see structure as the holistic, organically functioning backbone of society, but rather as the logical patterning of principles existing behind surface variations in cultural elements. This structure is 'deep', and can only be uncovered by the study of surface variation. Furthermore, it never forms coherent wholes, but is a matter of continual communication and modification (Bloch 1996:535).

His notion of 'transformation' is also more complicated. He considers that myths, for example, are genetic, as well as formal, transformations of other myths (Sperber 1985:84). By this he means that when a myth-teller recounts a myth he is transforming a myth that he himself heard earlier - transforming the version that he heard by forgetting bits, adding new elements, changing the order, and so on. This is genetic transformation, transformation in its genesis. Formal transformation, which is the notion of transformation more commonly associated with structuralism, refers to the processes of opposition, inversion, symmetry, substitution and permutation by which different variants can be logically related to each other (D'Anglure 1996:335). Since it is difficult to follow the actual genetic transformations which myths undergo in their telling and re-telling, he suggests that it is possible to try to reconstruct this history by taking "formal transformations between related myths as hypothetical models for genetic transformations" (Sperber 1985:84). Thus although Levi-Strauss's study of myth is for the most part synchronic, much of his causality lies in the realm of history, as he sees one variant generating another through time.

But Levi-Strauss's causality is more multifaceted than this. At the most fundamental level he sees the underlying structures of myths, all myths, as being determined in some way by, or as being constrained within the limits of, the structure of the human brain (Bloch 1996:535). In this way his approach differs markedly from the functionalist approaches discussed above, which only consider external factors to have any causal power. Even more importantly, the biologically and psychologically constituted individual has a role in Levi-Strauss's structuralism, even if this role is not elaborated in much of his, or other subsequent, structural analyses.

And, of course, Levi-Strauss does not reject the causality of external factors. Rather he sees these as the factors important in explaining local variations, which, although constrained by the brain's propensity for order, binary oppositions, etc, are effectively driven by external conditions, in interaction with the previous form of the myth. Thus he writes,

Each version of the myth, then, shows the influence of a two-fold determinism: one strand links it to a succession of previous versions or to a set of foreign versions, while the other operates as it were transversally, through the constraints arising from the infrastructure which necessitates the modification of some particular element, with the result that the system undergoes reorganisation in order to adapt these differences to necessities of an external kind (Levi-Strauss 1981 [1971]:628).

The mechanisms by which this multifaceted causality work are never discussed, and in many ways his position is similar to that of Leach. While providing a mainly structural analysis, he nods his head in the direction of an individualist ontology by claiming that the way in which myths actually transform is by their telling and re-telling by certain individuals. However, he does not resolve this analytic tension and focuses for the most part on structure, leaving causality as a problem to be solved by others. Near the beginning of the first volume of his magnum opus on Native American myth he states the case plainly:

By demonstrating that myths from widely divergent sources can be seen objectively as a set, it presents history with a problem and invites it to set about finding a solution. I have defined such a set, and I hope I have supplied proof of it being a set. It is the business of ethnographers, historians and archaeologists to explain how and why it exists (Levi-Strauss 1994 [1964]:8).

Many anthropologists working in the structuralist tradition have followed this path, and thus stuck to formal analyses of variation which are ahistorical and non-causal. Thus, to cite but one example, Nur Yalman provides a formal analysis of Sri Lankan and South Indian kinship systems, showing how they are all variations of one underlying structure (Yalman 1967).

Another branch of Levi-Strauss's intellectual descendants, however, have sought to ground such formal analysis of structure and variation in the external world, by trying to look at the causal effects of politics, ecology and what have you, as they transform

structures through history (eg. Sahlins 1985, Piot 1995). These efforts differ from Leach's model in that external factors are considered not just to drive structure into greater or lesser elaborations of its basic form, but to actually transform it. In this way the short-circuit between the external world and symbolic ideas that doomed Leach's model to linearity is opened out, and these historical structuralist models take on a non-linear nature. In other words, they try to model the recursive way in which the external environment affects structure, and in turn how structure affects the form of interaction with the external environment. Structure and history become analytically inseparable.

Thus Sahlins, to cite a well known example, suggests in his later work that external events, such as the arrival of Captain Cook in Hawaii, are initially understood through local cultural structures and then transform these structures, as cultural categories take on new meanings and connotations in the new context. And Piot suggests that the symbolic structure of Kabre society in Togo both influenced the way in which large numbers of immigrants were absorbed in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, and in turn was itself transformed by these politico-historical events. The innovation in these models is that causality is not seen as unidirectional, and the insights of both Marx and Weber are brought together to understand cultural change. In this way they attempt to transcend the distinction between materialist and idealist approaches, and between structure and history. Thus Sahlins' notion of the 'structure of the conjuncture' focusses on neither 'structure' nor 'history', but compounds the two to focus on the "practical realization of the cultural categories in a specific historical context, as expressed in the interested action of the historic agents" (Sahlins 1985:xiv).

The form of this redefinition of theoretical categories is homologous to that proposed by both Bourdieu and Giddens as they seek to theorise social action by focussing on neither the individual nor society, but on social practices ordered across time and space (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1976, 1984). The approach they share focusses on the motives and strategies of social agents as they organise their action within the constraints of the 'habitus', or the sets of 'rules and resources' available to them, and thus seeks to ground structure in the ontological reality of the individual. This model is also recursive in that

just as the rules and resources, to use Giddens' terminology, are drawn upon in the production of social action, so are they continually reproduced by this action.

In theory, seeing 'structure' as sets of rules and resources that are continually being reproduced opens up a way to look at structural change from a generative, rather than a formal, point of view. However, Giddens is remarkably conservative when it comes to the notion of change, and for the most part he stresses how the unintended consequences of social action "systematically feed back to be the unacknowledged conditions of further action" (Giddens 1984:8). Thus by writing in English I am unintentionally furthering the reproduction of the English language. This notion of feedback, then, has some continuity with the negative feedback of the homeostatic systems of the functionalists: feedback promotes stability. But in the basis of Giddens' formulation there is the possibility that the unintended consequences of action could in fact destabilise, or transform, structure. The causal loops followed in such a scenario would produce positive, not negative, feedback, as change would build upon change. Modified in this way, the practice theory approach provides another way to analyse cultural variation.

Bruce Knaft uses such an approach to great effect in his book on south coast New Guinea cultures (Knaft 1993). His version of practice theory embraces change and transformation, and, in contrast to Sahlins' formulation, does not require the influence of foreign forces or events to set change into motion. Rather, the unintended consequences of some actions will "act as irritants" and lead to structures "self-transforming from the inside as they respond dialectically to their own prior actualisations" (ibid:11,14). Sociomaterial factors in the external, or nonsymbolic, world feed into this recursive process, offering both constraints and opportunities for development in certain directions. Knaft puts it thus,

Cultural orientation responds to a history that it guides but does not totally determine; history engages not only in metaphors and mythical realities, but the constraints and opportunities of a nonsymbolic world. Symbolic formations develop in reaction to and in appropriation of these results - the

existential results of their own actualization. These repercussions selectively reinforce, irritate, and confound cultural impetus; in the process, they stimulate further symbolic elaboration. As cultural orientations elaborate, they grow prominently in the fault lines, cleavages, and potentials of the symbolic formations in place. Because the local interface between culture and practice is both recursive and generative, it produces remarkable differences among cultural areas that nonetheless retain striking larger similarities (ibid:208).

Knaft goes further than the other practice theorists in explicitly acknowledging the unpredictability and nonlinearity that transformation through such recursive processes generates, and stresses the sensitivity to initial conditions whereby very similar forms can diverge quickly into strikingly different cultural variants. However, although making a passing reference to chaos theory (ibid:226), he does not consider whether there are ways to better model this complex recursive process. He appears to give symbolic and nonsymbolic factors the same ontological status, and thus sees both as causally efficacious. However, because his scale of analysis is large - encompassing the many cultures of south coast New Guinea - he does not attempt to theorize the micro-mechanisms that actually bring about the transformational change that he describes.

1.5.3 Approaches derived from the Transactionalist Tradition

The final group of theoretical approaches to cultural variation that I will discuss here address themselves particularly to these issues. Focussing on the genetic transformations that occur during cultural transmission, these approaches may also be considered as the intellectual descendants of the less well-known strand of Levi-Strauss's thought, although they also draw on transactionalism, Darwinism and psychology. These approaches (eg. Dawkins 1982, Barth 1987, Sperber 1996) differ from those described above in that they do not see culture as some over-arching whole, but rather as being made up of units that are continually communicated between individuals. They have a firmly materialist ontology and give little or no analytic weight to the shadowy notion of structure. Instead they seek to explain macro-phenomena in terms of the cumulative

effects of micro-phenomena, rather than in terms of other macro-phenomena (Sperber 1996:2). Thus rather than try to explain religion, say, in terms of economic structure, these approaches would seek to explain the distribution of religious ideas in a given population in terms of their mode of transmission.

These approaches, then, do not carve up the world into 'individuals' and 'societies' in the manner of much anthropological theory, but their way of getting around this dualism is rather different from that proposed by the various forms of practice theory discussed above. Instead of talking about social practice, these approaches have as their basic unit of analysis cultural elements - memes (Dawkins), representations (Sperber) or ideas (Barth) - and their transmission. Thus for Sperber, for example, there is no separate domain of culture in opposition to the individual, but rather there are representations that are more or less cultural, as they are more or less widely distributed among a population (Sperber 1996:49). These approaches, then, focus their analysis on communication or transmission.

One major difference between the theorists grouped together here, however, is the way in which they consider cultural transmission to occur. Dawkins has perhaps the simplest model. He calls his cultural units 'memes', as a cultural analogue to genes, and suggests that, like genes, memes are mostly replicated through transmission. Only occasionally will mutations occur, and these mutant memes then compete with other memes so that the fittest survive. In this way natural selection is considered to guide the gradual evolution of culture. Sperber strongly critiques the meme model and argues that cultural transmission is far more complicated. He suggests that cultural transmission consists of the complicated process whereby an individual creates a public representation from an individual mental representation, and then a second individual creates a new mental representation from this public representation. Environmental factors influence this process, for example in providing opportunities for the public representation to be spoken or written, as do psychological factors, such as the memory and mood of the individuals, and the relevance of the content of this particular representation to the other representations they have stored in their minds. Thus transmission of representations is

rarely simple replication, but is instead transformation, influenced by the cognitive capacities of the human brain.

Barth (1987) differs from both Dawkins and Sperber in that he is not seeking to explain 'culture' in general, but is rather seeking to explain a particular instance of cultural variation in inner New Guinea, and this ethnographic groundedness influences his model of cultural transmission. For although, like Sperber, he sees continual transformation occurring as ideas oscillate between public and private versions, he considers that the organisation of these communicative events themselves influence the degree to which transformation or replication occur. Thus for Barth, it is the organisation of Mountain Ok initiations - that they take place only every ten years, that they are shrouded in secrecy and only one ritual leader is thought to know how to conduct them properly, and that people may also attend the initiations of neighbouring communities - that provides the opportunities for their continual transformation, through the individual creativity of the ritual leader. If they were organised some other way, perhaps if they took place annually, or if the knowledge were open to all, then they would transform in quite different ways and to quite different degrees. Where Barth is rather weaker is in his modelling of the individual creativity which can be either stimulated or constrained by the organisation of communicative events. He does not ground his speculations in any rigorous understanding of the human mind, but instead suggests that the creativity of the ritual leaders result in an unintentional symbolic drift, as the incremental changes in the fan of connotations of symbols, in the saliency of their various meta-levels, and in the scope of certain cosmological schemata add up over time (Barth 1987:31).

These three models of cultural transmission, by Dawkins, Sperber and Barth, are based on different models of the psychologically constituted individual. This basic difference also relates to the way in which they each address the issue of cultural stability and coherence. Dawkins, with little model of psychology at all, leaves the issue unaddressed and implies simply that replication leads to stabilisation and coherence. Barth's model of cultural transmission looks as though it ought to lead to random transformations in different cultural ideas such that the set of cultural ideas has little coherence at any one

time. Although he thinks that the coherent cultures of many functionalist and interpretive anthropologists are much exaggerated, he has no way to explain the degree of coherence that is present in Mountain Ok, both within and between communities. Instead he posits “some kind of longer-term criteria of consistency” that seem to operate, and leaves this open as a challenge for further research (Barth 1987:54).

Sperber’s more rigorous understanding of the human mind leads him to a better-formulated position on cultural coherence. Like Barth, he argues against the coherent wholes of functionalist and interpretive anthropology, and like Barth, his model of cultural transmission ought to lead to cultural incoherence. But, unlike Barth, he finds the solution in the cognitive capacities of the mind:

[transformation] occurs not in a random fashion, but in the direction of contents that require lesser mental effort and provide greater cognitive effects. This tendency to optimize the effect-effort ratio - and therefore the relevance of the representations transmitted... - drives the progressive transformation of representations within a given society towards contents that are relevant in the context of one another (Sperber 1996:53, emphasis in the original).

Thus, in contrast to the models of systems integration found in more structurally-based approaches to culture, Sperber offers an explanation of the degree of cultural coherence not in terms of the structural relation between different elements of culture, but in terms of the brain’s orientation to certain types of understanding and its tendency to increase relevance.

When it comes to causality, these approaches again differ markedly from the other approaches discussed in this chapter. Both Barth and Sperber are looking for the mechanisms of cultural transformation, and, although they conceive of them a little differently, they both locate them in the workings of the human mind and in the mechanisms of transmission of ideas or representations between human minds. Although Barth’s model emphasizes some social organisational features which are

perhaps under-emphasized in Sperber's formulation, it is Sperber's model that deals with causality in a more rigorous way. Whereas Barth's discussion of inter-individual transmission focuses solely on social organisational and psychological factors¹⁰, Sperber's repeated stress that causal factors are both psychological and environmental (eg. *ibid*:28,84) opens up his model to causal influences from all areas, including history, politics, ecology, technology, etc., as they cause particular inputs to particular human minds. And of course, these psychological and environmental factors are themselves affected by the distribution of representations, so that feedback loops result in a causality that is not multi-linear, but recursive (*ibid*:84). Like the practice theorists, Sperber considers causality to be complex, but unlike them, he thinks that this complexity cannot be modelled without taking the cognitive structure of the human brain into account.

The important shortcoming in these generative approaches, for the purposes of this discussion, is, however, their almost total loss of any notion of culture as a system, whether open or closed, simple or complex. Sperber's location of causality in either psychological or environmental (mind-internal or mind-external) factors, whilst encompassing everything, leaves us with a model of brains in the environment that downplays the significance of the structural interactions between different cultural elements. Barth's explanation of the variation in Mountain Ok ritual does take into account some social organisational factors, such as the frequency of the ritual, but it also avoids any discussion of the actual structure of the ritual, and thus implicitly considers it irrelevant for its own transformation. In other words, whatever structure the ritual has, it will, according to his argument, transform in the way he describes, because the nature of the transformation is caused only by the psychological and social organisational factors he discusses, and not by the structure of the ritual itself. This approach, then, offers us no way to explain why different cultural elements vary in different ways, and to different degrees, in the same cultural setting. Whilst ontologically rigorous, the

¹⁰ However, in a later publication Barth writes "all social acts are ecologically embedded... The social and ecological cannot, with respect to the forms of social events and institutions, be treated as separate systems" (Barth 1992:20).

downplaying of structural factors thus severely limits the usefulness of these approaches in explaining certain features of socio-cultural life.

1.5.4 Synthesis and Discussion

So where does this leave us? It seems that, although they start from very different positions, the different theoretical trajectories that I have sketched appear to be converging. Despite some significant differences, not least about the role of the mind, and some differences of focus, for example on micro-interactions or macro-transformations, there are a number of agreements between the more recent approaches that are worth spelling out. Most importantly, there is a common realization that in order to describe and explain cultural transformation we need a causal model that is multifaceted and recursive. Such a model will be nonlinear, will be sensitive to initial conditions, and will have both negative and positive feedback loops. It is also widely agreed that the basis of such a model will neither be the individual nor society, but some theoretical formulation that includes both. And finally, it is also held that the systems being modelled, if they are systems at all, are open.

For the purpose of this thesis, however, such a model must also address the issue of differential cultural variation. This has not been the concern of any of the writers discussed above, but is an important issue that leads us to consider cultural variation in a particularly careful way. The fact that two politico-ritual systems can exhibit different degrees of variation in the same setting and amongst the same people suggests that cultural variation cannot be explained without taking into account the systemic organisation of the particular cultural phenomenon that is varying. If two cultural phenomena vary to different degrees in a situation where all other factors, such as environment, history, rules of property transmission etc, are the same, then it is only the different organisation of the cultural phenomena themselves that can explain their different behaviour through time and across space. In order to try to explain differential cultural variation, then, we need to include a focus on the nature and influence of systemic organisation. Thus it seems that some kind of systems approach may be the

final ingredient in the synthesis of approaches that I am trying to develop in order to understand differential cultural variation in the Gamo highlands.

Systems theory has a long history in anthropology (Rodin *et al* 1978, Vincent 1986), and in social theory more generally (eg. Buckley 1967). Earlier versions based on cybernetics or population dynamics were criticised for their false realism, their reification of 'culture' or 'structure', and the nature of their 'mysterious' causality, while later versions based on probability theory, game theory or path analysis were considered too mathematical for most anthropologists. However, there is currently a new type of systems theory which overcomes these problems. This approach focuses on the dynamics of nonlinear systems, and is known as complexity theory. In the following section I will outline the conceptual basis of complexity theory and discuss how it might offer a useful perspective to the problem addressed in this thesis.

1.6 Complexity Theory

Complexity theory is not an easily definable 'theory', it is rather an approach. It was developed in the natural sciences, particularly in thermodynamics (see Prigogine and Stengers 1984), to describe the behaviour of nonlinear dynamical systems which functioned in ways that could not be explained by reductionist Newtonian science. It focuses on the different ways in which systems are organised, and on how this affects the way that they change or transform. Whereas linear systems are "characterised by stable relationships between variables [and] respond to changes in their parameters, or to external 'shocks', in a smooth and proportionate manner" (Elliott and Kiel 1996:5), nonlinear systems behave rather differently.

Nonlinear systems reveal dynamical behaviour such that the relationships between variables are unstable. Furthermore, changes in these relationships are subject to positive feedback in which changes are amplified, breaking up existing structures and behaviour and creating unexpected outcomes in the generation of new structures and behaviour. These changes may result in new forms of equilibrium; novel forms of increasing complexity; or even temporal behaviour that appears random and devoid of order (ibid:1).

Such nonlinear systems are called complex systems, where ‘complex’ is being used in a technical sense, and does not simply mean ‘complicated’. A television is complicated, but it is not complex. Complex systems have a number of characteristics, the most important of which can be considered here (see Cilliers 1998:3-7). Firstly, complex systems are open systems that interact with their environment, and they are historical systems, such that not only do they evolve (irreversibly) through time, but their past influences their present behaviour. Secondly, they consist of a large number of elements which are in dynamic interaction. This interaction can be physical or communicative, but any one element must influence, and be influenced by, several other elements. The variety of these interactions, the way the system is organised, generates outcomes not linearly related to initial conditions (Mihata 1997:31). This is mainly achieved through feedback loops, both positive (amplifying) and negative (dampening). The technical term for this kind of feedback is ‘recurrency’ (Cilliers 1998:4). And thirdly, complex systems have a structure which is an emergent, and not an aggregative, property (Thomas 1997:55). Each element in the system is ignorant of the behaviour of the system as a whole, and behaves only in response to the limited information available to it locally. Out of these micro-interactions, a macro-pattern, or structure, emerges, and this structure cannot be understood or predicted from the behaviour or properties of the component elements alone (Mihata 1997:31). In other words, the system is holistic, meaning that it cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts. However, this complex holism is different from the conventional holism of functionalism and cybernetics which Price has called ‘reduction to the whole’ (Price 1997:10), because it pays attention to micro-interactions as well as structural properties. According to this holism, “a complex system is not constituted merely by the sum of its components, but also by the intricate relationships between those components” (Cilliers 1998:2, emphasis in original). There is no reduction to either the micro or the macro.

On an abstract level, then, complexity theory seems to incorporate many of the insights of the anthropologists discussed above. What it adds, though, is a more analytical view of types of systemic change and a more integrated synthesis of their various perspectives. In particular, it offers a way to synthesize the more structural approaches of Knauff and Sahlins with the more generative approaches of Barth and Sperber. Its focus on both micro-interactions and macro-structures suggests that both are important and non-reducible. Thus it opens a way to understand cultural variation in terms of both the micro-interactions between persons, while at the same time considering the way that cultural elements interact with each other in a structural manner. Most importantly, its insights about the way that the organisation of a system affects its behaviour seem to offer a way to explain why different cultural phenomena transform in different ways in the same cultural setting.

In the rest of the thesis I continue to explore this suggestion by presenting and analysing my ethnographic data according to the general theoretical perspective being sketched here. I use complexity theory as a way to synthesize and improve on the approaches of other anthropologists, and not in a formal or mathematical way.¹¹ A more formal project, while interesting, is beyond the scope of this thesis. My hope is that the general perspective of complexity theory will lead me to uncover particular connections and causal influences, and to thus answer the central question raised in this thesis: what are the mechanisms that lead to the relative stability of sacrificial rituals and the transformatory flux of initiatory rituals in the Gamo highlands of southwest Ethiopia?

¹¹ Although it is only in recent years that the complicated matter of complexity has been rendered intelligible to a lay audience (eg. Prigogine and Stengers 1984, Lewin 1993), there have already been several attempts to apply its perspectives to the social sciences (eg. Kiel and Elliott 1996; Eve, Horsfall and Lee 1997; Byrne 1998; Cilliers 1998). For the most part, these attempts have either been theoretical and abstract, or quantitative and statistical. My focus, however, is primarily ethnographic, and my aim is to use the general perspective of complexity theory in order to try to make sense of the complicated ethnographic situation in the Gamo highlands.

1.7 The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into two sections and eight chapters:

Chapter One (Introduction) has introduced the Gamo highlands, reviewed the ethnographic literature on the highlands and the theoretical literature on cultural variation, and introduced the theoretical approach of this study.

Part I: System and History

This section contains three chapters looking at the Gamo highlands as they appeared to me during fieldwork. It presents an account of Doko life as it was between 1995 and 1997, contextualised in the recent history of the twentieth century.

Chapter Two (The Gamo Highlands in the Twentieth Century) provides a fuller account of the Gamo highlands, discussing twentieth century history, and providing a broad ethnographic background from which the more central parts of this thesis can build.

Chapter Three (The Sacrificial System) discusses sacrificial seniority in Doko, in all its manifestations. It presents diachronic snapshots of the sacrificial system before and after the revolution, in the 1960s and 1990s. The rather limited spatial variation exhibited by the sacrifices is considered, as are the seemingly anomalous sacrificers who do not appear to be part of the general system.

Chapter Four (The Initiatory System) focuses on the system of initiations in Doko. After discussing the initiatory system in general, and considering how it interacts with the sacrificial system, a particular version of the initiations is discussed in detail. The remarkable spatial variation exhibited by the initiations is then shown by briefly describing versions from all over Doko.

Part II: Systemic History

This section contains three chapters which look at history, process and transformation. The scale moves from a consideration of macro regional history to the micro

mechanisms of local transformation. The large scale analysis (chapter five) provides the context for the smaller transformations discussed in minute detail. And conversely, the small scale analysis (chapters six and seven) suggests the mechanisms by which the larger transformations would have taken place.

Chapter Five (War, Trade and Regional History) opens out the discussion in both time and space. Using a combination of historical sources from elsewhere in southern Ethiopia, an analysis of local myths and oral histories, and a careful consideration of comparative ethnography, it presents a regional systems analysis spanning over five centuries. The impact of warfare and conquest, and of changing patterns of long distance trade, are particularly shown to have influenced cultural change and transformation in the Gamo highlands.

Chapter Six (Assemblies and Incremental Cultural Change) begins to consider the micro-mechanisms through which such macro change might have taken place. Focussing back on one small community, it discusses how changes in external environmental conditions result in internal cultural change. It considers how the effects of external change are manifested in interpersonal relations and how changing tensions in these relations come to be discussed at local assemblies. By looking at the organisation of these assemblies, it suggests how these tensions are resolved through communal decisions which lead to incremental cultural change.

Chapter Seven (Linear and Nonlinear Change) attempts to explain why the micro-mechanisms discussed in chapter six affect the sacrificial system and the initiatory system in different ways, leading to the different patterns of variations discussed in chapters three and four. It seeks to explain this difference in terms of the systemic organisation of the different rituals themselves, arguing that the sacrificial system exhibits linear change, while the initiatory system exhibits nonlinear change, resulting in frequent structural transformation.

Chapter Eight (Conclusion) summarises the argument and brings it all together. The ethnographic and theoretical contributions of this thesis are reviewed, and some suggestions are made regarding further research.

PART I - SYSTEM AND HISTORY

CHAPTER TWO: THE GAMO HIGHLANDS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

2.1 Introduction

A brief sketch of the Gamo highlands was provided in the previous chapter, and in this chapter the area will be introduced in more detail. This not only provides the context for the discussions of the rest of the thesis, but is also an interesting picture of culture in history in its own right. After discussing what is known of the Gamo highlands in the nineteenth century, I will describe the major events of the twentieth century, as they were experienced in this area. These include macro-political events, such as the incorporation of the area into the nation state of Ethiopia at the end of the nineteenth century, and more specific local events, such as the revisionist cult started by the Gamo prophet known as Essa. Drawing primarily on the research of my predecessors in the field, I try to present twentieth century Gamo life as the lively, innovative flux that it is. But there are, of course, also continuities. And in the latter part of this chapter I describe houses and marriage in Doko, both to show that not everything is in continual flux, and also to provide some important background ethnography for the following chapters.

2.2 The Gamo Highlands in the Nineteenth Century

According to oral histories collected by anthropologists in the 1960s and 70s, people in the Gamo highlands in the nineteenth century belonged to exogamous patrilineal clans and lived in forty or so separate communities, called *dere*. These *deres* were small, autonomous political units, and there was no overall Gamo polity which united these people. Each *dere* had a senior sacrificer, or *kawo*, who sacrificed for the well-being of the *dere* as a whole. And each *dere* carried out their own initiations to the title of *halak'a*. These initiates, during their ritually active time, served as dignitaries in the

local assemblies, and played an important role in local politics (Abeles 1981:39, Olmstead 1973:226). Thus both the sacrificial system and the initiatory system were central features in nineteenth century Gamo life.¹

The population of any one *dere* was divided into three separate categories: citizens (*mala*), artisans (*ts'omma*) and slaves (*ayle*)². Only *mala* could own land and it was they who were considered to constitute the *dere*. All *dere* sacrificers and initiates came from the *mala*. In some *deres* the *ts'omma* organised their own initiations, but where they did they were considered to be mere imitation by the *mala* majority, and were not taken seriously. *Ts'omma* consisted of *mana*, who worked as potters, and *degala*, who worked as tanners. Other artisan work was carried out by *mala* without stigma. Rope-making, basket-weaving and house-building were carried out by any *mala*, and metalwork was carried out by special *mala* families. Although metalwork was surrounded by an aura of mystery, blacksmiths were not considered to be impure, in the way that potters and tanners were.³

Warfare between the *deres* was endemic. War was usually precipitated by disputes over stolen livestock, a runaway wife, or ownership of pasture lying between two *deres*. Often these disputes could be settled by discussions between the elders of the two *deres*, but if not then they would go to war. Nineteenth century Gamo warfare, though, was

¹ Although they talk generally of the Gamo highlands, it should be noted that both Abeles and Olmstead actually worked in the northern part of the highlands, in Ochollo, and Dorze and Dita respectively. It is thus somewhat questionable to generalize from their data from this area to the highlands in general. When I refer to 'the highlands' in this chapter I thus mean the northern parts of the highlands. I will open out the discussion to include the southern highlands in chapter five.

² Abeles and Olmstead include slaves in the category of *ts'omma*, but my data clearly indicates that *ts'omma* and *ayle* are distinct categories.

³ Again I differ from Abeles and Olmstead. They claim that blacksmiths were part of the *ts'omma* group. It seems though that this is an anachronism. In the late twentieth century metalwork is done by *degala*, and *degala* indeed belong to the *ts'omma* group. But my research indicates that in the nineteenth century *degala* were solely tanners, and metalwork was carried out by certain *mala* families (for a detailed discussion see Freeman nd).

highly regulated. There were certain allocated war grounds, and the two *deres* would agree a date and site, and meet there in the morning for battle. In the evening both sides would return home, and then they would fight again the next day. Men who succeeded in killing an enemy in battle, and bringing home his penis as proof, were given great honour and took a special title, *wod'iras* in Dorze, *wor?ats* in Doko⁴. If neither side could gain the upper hand in battle, then a peace treaty, or *ch'ako*, would be sworn. In each *dere* there were hereditary offices⁵ for people who officiated at these treaties, and dealt with inter-*dere* affairs in general (Abeles 1981:42, Olmstead 1973:226-7).

If, however, one *dere* succeeded in gaining the upper hand, then the defeated *dere* became its vassal. According to Judy Olmstead there were two kinds of vassal *dere*: one kind owed the dominant *dere* support in future wars, and was known as either child *dere* (*yelo dere*) or spear *dere* (*tora dere*); while the other kind owed agricultural labour, and was known as either wife *dere* (*mach'o dere*) or slave *dere* (*ayle dere*)⁶. Citizens of *mach'o deres* remained living at home, but they had to work for specific individuals in the dominant *dere* as well. Olmstead writes that “the victorious warriors would race through the conquered *dere*, pillaging and claiming households as their own” (Olmstead 1973:227). She does not tell us, however, why certain *deres* became child *deres* and others wife *deres*, and which type was most common.

The precise interrelationships between the dominant and the defeated *deres* are unclear, but it seems that the defeated *dere* could be absorbed as a district of the dominant *dere*. In this case the *kawo* of the dominant *dere* superceded the *kawo* of the defeated *dere*, who was relegated to being a simple district sacrificer. The defeated *dere*, though, would maintain its own assemblies, and would continue to make its own initiates. Such defeated *deres* could, however, win back their autonomy through war. In such cases,

⁴ Both versions derive from the verb *wod'o*, to kill.

⁵ They were known as *kare* in Doko, *ogets* in Chenchu and *ogade* in Balta. Such titles derive either from *kare*, outside, or *oge*, road.

⁶ I was unable to reproduce this finding in Doko, but this may well be because of people's unwillingness to talk about war at this time.

then, warfare would take part between different districts/*deres* of one larger *dere*. The result would often involve the separation of the two *deres*, and the elevation of the district sacrificer to *kawo* of the new autonomous *dere* (Abeles 1981:42).

Thus we can imagine there was a constant change in the organisation of *deres* at any one time. A small *dere* might be autonomous at one time, part of one larger *dere* at another time, and part of a different larger *dere* after that, and so on. In this way federations of *deres* were constantly expanding and fragmenting as small *deres* were conquered and then regained their independence, and then were conquered by other *deres* in a dynamic process of interaction between the *deres*. A *dere* that had previously been autonomous simply became part of a larger political unit, while its own internal structure was essentially unchanged. *Deres* became part of other *deres*, and thus the concept of *dere* developed a multi-scalar nature. What I mean by multi-scalar will become more clear when I look at the actual organisation of one particular *dere*, but it essentially means that a *dere* is a community that has its own sacrificer, makes its own initiates and has its own assembly place, and that given these three elements, it does not matter what scale it exists on, or whether or not it is part of another *dere*.

Olmstead has considered the possibility that this ritualised warfare acted as a means of population control in the densely inhabited highlands, and has argued that there were also other population-limiting devices in the nineteenth century, such as the practice of female infanticide. This may or may not have been the case, but the express aim of warfare was to gain control of economic resources. The particular economic resource in question was not land, but labour (1973:229-30). Because of the clay soils in the highlands, agriculture is incredibly labour-intensive. In order that aerobic bacteria necessary for successful plant growth can grow on the exposed surfaces, fields must be turned over several times before planting can begin; manure must be added to the soil to increase its permeability and nutrient content; terraces must be built on steep slopes, and so on (ibid:228). Thus no matter how much land men owned, labour was the critical factor in production, and at this time many men owned more land than they could work on their own. The existence of communal work groups and share-cropping practices

(*t'e?o*) provided one kind of solution to this problem, but the appropriation of slave labour through warfare was an altogether more appealing option. Thus Olmstead writes,

The *dere* successful in war could transfer the labor power of subjugated *dere* to their own fields, increasing local production and making it possible for local men to assume titles through feasting. As a technique for increasing production, the capture of adult labor is an efficient device in situations of population pressure on resources (ibid:230).

She here implies that the motivation for increased production was the initiatory system. Men wanted to produce surplus grain so that they could afford the feasts necessary to become *halak'a*. This scenario seems extremely plausible, and it is interesting then that nineteenth century warfare seems to have been driven by the initiatory system.

Little is known about the form and functioning of the sacrificial system at this time, although it is thought that it was more important then than it is in the twentieth century. Most of the researchers believe that *dere kawos* had more power in the nineteenth century, and that they played an important, if not dominant, role in local politics (Abeles 1978:297, Bureau 1981:122). This, then, is what we know about the Gamo highlands at the close of the nineteenth century.

2.3 Incorporation into the Nation State of Ethiopia

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the northern Abyssinian empire came out of a period of decline, and began to nurture expansionist ideas. Under Emperor Menelik I the northern empire started a series of campaigns to expand its influence southwards. Starting with the defeat of Gurage in 1875, Menelik's troops moved southwards, conquering the local peoples and incorporating them into what was to become the nation state of Ethiopia. Some groups submitted peacefully and quickly agreed to pay tribute, while others resisted and were subsequently conquered and pillaged (Donham 1985:32). In 1894 Menelik's troops reached the kingdom of Wolaita, just north of the Gamo highlands. The Wolaita king, *kawo* Tona, was determined to resist Menelik, and there

followed one of the bloodiest battles in the whole of this period. An eye witness reports, “One had the feeling of watching some kind of infernal hunting where human beings rather than animals served as game” (Vanderheyem 1896:181, cited in Bahru 1991:65). Witnessing such a massacre, the peoples of the Gamo highlands submitted quickly to Menelik’s advances in 1897. However, when the northerners tried to possess Gamo land and exact tribute there was some resistance. They did not manage to alienate much Gamo land, and instead they stayed in well-defended military camps, or *ketema*. They did, however, succeed in imposing a local tax on the people, which although unpopular, was indeed paid as a kind of tribute (Bureau 1981:32). Thus began a period of dramatic change in the Gamo highlands.

2.4 The Imperial Era (1897-1973)

2.4.1 Political Changes

Menelik’s administration of the southwest relied on a network of garrison towns, manned by northern soldiers (Donham 1985:33), and in the Gamo highlands the small town of Chenchä was built on land taken from Dorze, Doko and *dere* Chenchä to serve as the administrative centre in that area, while smaller towns, such as Ezzo, Gulta, Gereše, Baza and Kamba were founded as local administrative outposts elsewhere in the highlands. For the most part the Amhara⁷ northerners stayed in the town and the Gamo villagers stayed in the countryside. There was little mixing of the people, and the Gamo initially avoided the Amhara markets, their court and their Orthodox church rituals (Bureau 1981:34).

The northern governors had to rely on indirect rule through local leaders, whom they appointed to the position of *balabbat*. In the southern Ethiopian communities that had submitted peacefully to Menelik, the kings were made *balabbat*, while in those that had

⁷ Many of the *neftenya* in this area were in fact Oromo. However, since they spoke Amharic and were part of the national administration they were generally referred to as Amhara by the local Gamo people (Tadesse Wolde, pers comm.).

resisted, such as Wolaita, the highest ranks of the indigenous political hierarchy were eliminated and lower level offices were incorporated into the administrative hierarchy (Donham 1985:34). The communities of the Gamo highlands had submitted peacefully, and thus the *dere kawos* were appointed as *balabbats*, intermediaries between their people and the state, whose tasks included collecting tribute and settling disputes. The appointment of *kawos* as *balabbats* had two major consequences. On the one hand it confirmed the traditional legitimacy of the *kawo*, and on the other it transformed the role of the *kawo* so that he took on certain responsibilities and privileges associated with the national government (Bureau 1978:279). The *kawo* was awarded quasi-ownership of all *dere* land, and he could exact corvee labour from his *dere* 'subjects' (Abeles 1981:61, Bureau 1978:282). He also became a juridical official and was in charge of the local police in the *dere*. All criminal cases were to be brought to the new courts, but first they were heard by the *balabbat*. The Ochollo *balabbat* had a local jail built next to his house (Abeles 1981:62). Many *balabbats* enjoyed their new privileges, and they started to copy Amhara dress and language as they made the most of their transformed political role.

The system of *balabbat* landowners and peasant tenants was a northern Ethiopian system, and it required massive reorientation of traditional systems throughout southern Ethiopia (Donham 1986:39). The role of the Gamo *kawo* was radically altered from senior sacrificer to political leader, and the role of the average Gamo man was transformed from land-owner to tenant farmer. Such a system was not accepted easily, and had to be imposed by force. Amhara soldiers settled in the highlands and, armed with rifles, enforced the new administration. These soldier-settlers were known as *neftenya*, and they had to be fed and supported by the local farmers (Donham 1979:36). Each *neftenya* was appointed a number of Gamo families as his *gebbar*, who had to provide him with food and services while he was stationed in the area. This system was extremely exploitative, and this must have been a very difficult time for the Gamo people.

After Menelik's death in 1913 the national government of Ethiopia went through a period of weak leadership and power struggles at the centre. During this period, up until

the Italian occupation in 1936, provincial leaders gained considerable power as the vacuum at the centre was not filled by a strong leader. Many Amhara moved to the south and became *neftenya*, settlers. If they were connected to the administration in any way they were appointed *gebbbar* when they arrived in their new area. Thus the weight of Amhara settlers on the communities of southern Ethiopia was extremely heavy during this period, and the exploitation reached such a level that there was some open rebellion (Donham 1979:36). During this period the *balabbats* were less powerful, as their immediate superiors, the provincial governors, were imposing their rule very strongly.

This period came to an end with the short interlude of Italian occupation from 1936 to 1941. The Italians abolished the *gebbbar* system and gave much more freedom to the people of southern Ethiopia (Bureau 1981:35, Donham 1979:37). They set about building some infrastructure in the south, most importantly a network of roads. In the Gamo highlands one or two basic mud roads were cleared, and the Italians made themselves popular by paying for local labour, rather than demanding it corvee-style (Bureau 1981:36). Although their presence was relatively brief, and the development they planned did not reach fruition, the simple roads built at this time are still used today. It is not clear what happened to the *kawos* and *halak'as* during this time, but traditional warfare, that had been abolished by the Amhara, flourished again during these few years (ibid:36).

In 1941 the Italian occupation came to an end, and emperor Haile-Selassie returned to the throne. For the next thirty odd years he ruled Ethiopia with a firm hand, becoming increasingly autocratic and megalomaniac in the latter years. With a strong, centralised government, the provincial governors lost considerable power, and with their immediate superiors relatively uninfluential, the *balabbats* gained more control during this time (Donham 1979:39). This was even though the administrative system was modernized and bureaucratized in these years, and the official role of the *balabbats* was substantially reduced (Bureau 1978:283). The *gebbbar* system was not reintroduced, and tribute and corvee labour were replaced by taxes that went to the central administration. The *balabbat* had the job of collecting taxes, and this was a period characterized by

corruption and exploitation, as many *balabbats* took bribes, appropriated land, and generally abused their power (Abeles 1981:62, Bureau 1978:283).

The powerful and exploitative character of the *balabbat* contrasted strongly with the previous sacred role of the *kawo*. Tensions mounted as the people of the highlands could see that their *kawos* were not behaving as they ought to. During this period a solution was found by separating the role of *balabbat* from that of *kawo*. In most *deres* the role of *kawo* continued to be inherited agnatically, while the role of *balabbat* was often given to younger brothers, to uterine kin or to wives. In Bonke, for example, the roles of *kawo* and *balabbat* were dissociated after only one generation, as the eldest son of the *kawo-balabbat* became *kawo* and the second son became *balabbat*. In Ganta the dissociation took place after two generations of *kawo-balabbats*, when the sister of the *kawo* was made *balabbat* (Bureau 1978:285). In other *deres* the dissociation took place after three or more generations, and it was not unusual for a woman to take on the role of *balabbat*. These women were often strong characters, and despite the contradictions surrounding women leaders in the predominantly male arena of Gamo politics, they frequently managed to exert considerable influence (Olmstead 1997). Doko was perhaps a little unusual in that it was one of the few *deres* where the roles of *kawo* and *balabbat* were not dissociated, and where in fact the *kawo-balabbat* was not too exploitative and was much respected. This, though, was the exception that proved the rule, and by the 1970s most Gamo highlanders were extremely resentful of their *balabbats*.

2.4.2 Religious Changes

The Imperial period was thus marked by much turbulent change in the lives of the people of the Gamo highlands. Particularly, there was a massive decrease in their freedom and autonomy, and a new degree of exploitation that had been unknown in their recent past. It is not surprising then that people aimed to make sense of the new situation and to alleviate its ills through the medium of religion. And with the opening of the area to new peoples and its connection with the broader Ethiopian state, there were a number of external influences and new religions that were important during this time

2.4.2.1 Orthodox Christianity

First of all, the Amhara settlers brought with them Orthodox Christianity. Although not entirely new to the area, as attested by the fifteenth century churches in the northern highlands mentioned in the previous chapter, Orthodox practice was fairly negligible in the nineteenth century, except perhaps in the immediate vicinity of the old churches. But with the arrival of the *neftenya*, the Orthodox religion took on new life in the highlands. Although there was much initial hostility to the Amhara and their religion, the images and the ceremony of the church soon began to attract attention (Abeles nd:193). And it also became clear that involvement in the Orthodox church was a good way to gain influence with the Amhara. Since Orthodoxy did not interfere much with traditional practices, many people nominally became Orthodox while continuing to participate in sacrifices and initiations. During the latter part of this period many new Orthodox churches were built, including one in Dambo in Doko Masho.

In the 1940s the date of the Gamo *Mesqalla* celebration in the northern highlands was brought into line with Orthodox *Mesqal*, in September⁸. Before that different *deres* celebrated at different times. Doko, for example, used to celebrate *Mesqalla* in November. Despite the name, Gamo *Mesqalla* has remained an essentially Gamo celebration, and further south in the highlands many *deres* continued to hold their *Mesqalla* celebrations at different times until much later.⁹

⁸ *Mesqalla* is the Gamo New Year, and is the most celebrated day of the year. The word '*Mesqalla*' derives from the Amharic '*Mesqal*', which literally means 'cross', and is the name of a major festival in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Other than the name, Gamo *Mesqalla* has little to do with Orthodox *Mesqal*, although the shared name testifies to the historical Amhara/Orthodox influence in the highlands.

⁹ Balta only changed from celebrating *Mesqalla* in June during the Derg period. Other *deres*, such as Sorba, Haringa and Ch'oye, continue to hold their *Mesqalla* in November, even today.

2.4.2.2 *Essa Woga*

At the turn of the century, soon after the Amhara had arrived, an indigenous religious movement started up. Its leader was a man from the *dere* of Zad'a, called Essa Ditha (Abeles nd:189, Olmstead 1973:229, Sperber 1973:218). Essa walked over the highlands preaching his new tradition, to become known as *Essa woga*, in contrast to the old tradition, or *beni woga*¹⁰. The central point of Essa's teaching was the abolition of sacrifices and sacrificers. He taught that offerings should not be made to the spirits, and that only God should be honoured. Instead of the hierarchical arrangement by which seniors sacrificed for their juniors on all levels of society, each man should, on his own, make offerings of honey directly to God. Essa exhorted the Gamo people to stop respecting their *kawos*, and to cut their hair¹¹ and treat them as regular people. In Doko I was told that Essa had also instigated a number of fast days, and that he told people to slaughter and eat animals, because more animals would magically come. Thus Essa's revisionary movement can be seen as a kind of cult of resistance against the Amhara and the new powers of the *kawo-balabbat*. And like many such cults it had a messianic element to it. Essa promised that soon a new *kawo* would come from the earth, accompanied by a goat, and bring about a new and fair social order (Abeles nd:189).

It is worth noting that while Essa strongly attacked the sacrificial system, he actually encouraged the initiatory system. People in Ochollo recall him saying "Next to the house of God are those of the *halak'as*" (ibid:189). And the rest of Gamo tradition was taken as given; thus the form of marriages, singing, dancing, funerals, and so on were unaffected by *Essa woga*.

¹⁰ *Woga* is the name of traditional law, or the right way to live. It is *dere woga*, for example, to perform sacrifices and make initiates. It is also *woga* to respect your elders.

¹¹ Traditionally the *kawo*'s hair was not cut, and was a symbol of his fertility. See chapter three for more details.

Essa's teaching was remarkably popular at first, and it seems to have been adopted all over the Gamo highlands. In Dorze it was popular in peripheral areas, although it was avoided in the area of Amara where the *kawo* lived (Sperber 1973:218). It was unanimously adopted in Ochollo, and contemporary elders in Doko recall that the whole *dere* followed Essa, with the exception of just one man. For three years Doko did not perform any sacrifices, and juniors slaughtered animals without the permission of their seniors. People fasted on Fridays, and made offerings of honey in their own homes. However, a few years of bad harvest followed, and people began to doubt the efficacy of Essa's *woga*. The new *kawo* had not come, and the *dere* had problems. Essa had been arrested, and was in prison in Addis Abeba (Abeles nd:189). The people of Doko sent an assignment of *halak'as* to an important diviner in Dorze Amara and asked what they should do. The diviner told them to return to *beni woga*, and most people in Doko did as he said. The sacrificial system was reintroduced, and the *kawos* returned to their former positions. The same happened in Ochollo, and in most of the Gamo *deres*. This turnaround seems to have remarkably smooth, and as Abeles writes, "the ritual organisation had definitely been shaken up, but its foundation remained solid" (ibid:190).

Not everyone, though, returned to the practices exactly as they had been done before. A number of people in Doko, and throughout the highlands, continued to refuse to ask their seniors to sacrifice for them. And instead of returning to the traditional offerings of barley porridge to the spirits, they continued with the simple offerings of honey to God. Although these people continued to practice a form of *Essa woga*, they partook in all aspects of communal life that were not associated with the sacrificial system, and thus were not seen as a terribly disruptive element. Such followers of *Essa woga* are still going strong in the 1990s.

2.4.2.3 Protestant Christianity

Although Essa's revisionist cult had proven unsustainable, the tensions that it had addressed, particularly the inequality and exploitation that was increasingly felt to be

characteristic of the sacrificial system, remained active in Gamo life. In fact they became more and more extreme in the 1920s and 30s, as discussed above. And it was in this situation that the first Protestant missionaries arrived in the highlands.

The first white missionaries came with the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), an organisation of non-demoninational fundamental Christian evangelists (Fargher 1988), and visited parts of the Gamo highlands in the 1930s. They went to Ochollo and addressed its inhabitants in the assembly place. According to one story, the missionaries exhorted the assembly to believe in Jesus Christ, and ridiculed traditional practices. Having heard of Essa, the missionaries threw a leaf into the air and let it fall to the ground, and then said, "If honey falls to the earth like the leaf, how could God consume it? Do you also believe that God drinks the blood of your sacrificial animals?" When the people of Ochollo heard the strangers speak these words they refused to listen to them any longer, and chased them away (Abeles nd:191).

The introduction of Protestant Christianity in the neighbouring area of Wolaita went rather more smoothly. Although initially hostile to the attacks on their tradition, the people of Wolaita soon found meaning in the Protestant teachings. Perhaps because their traditional system had long been more hierarchical and exploitative, they quickly embraced the more individualistic and egalitarian teachings of the Protestants. When the foreign missionaries were forced to leave after the Italian occupation, local converts continued evangelizing with renewed zest and rigour, and within a few years the vast majority of Wolaita people had become 'believers'. The rapid spread of the Protestant faith in Wolaita surprised even the SIM missionaries when they returned some years later, and was taken as a great miracle (Davis 1966).

The conversion of Wolaita had its repercussions in the Gamo highlands. In the 1940s a respected man from Ochollo went to Wolaita, and was there converted to Protestantism. This man, *halak'a* Gembo, then returned to Ochollo, accompanied by two Wolaita 'believers', and began to try to evangelize his own people. Much of the 1940s and 50s in Ochollo were characterized by a religious war between Gembo and the

Protestants, and the *balabbat* and the Orthodox. Individuals converted to one religion, and then changed their minds and converted to the other (Abeles nd:191-2). While the Orthodox could continue participating in sacrifices and initiations, the Protestants had to give up most aspects of their tradition. Not only could they not participate in sacrifices and initiations, but neither could they have more than one wife, join in the singing and dancing at celebrations, or drink alcohol. Protestant faith, then, strongly challenged traditional cultural practices.

Although this religious struggle was taking place in Ochollo, it did not at this time spread much further into the highlands. An SIM mission was set up in Chenchä town, but local government officials were unfriendly and openly antagonistic towards the missionaries (Fargher 1988:512). The people of Dorze were staunchly Orthodox, and were not interested in this foreign religion. The people of Doko were not about to stop initiating *halak'as*, and attempts to introduce them to Protestantism at this time were singularly unsuccessful. It seems that the Protestant message did not filter much further into the highlands during these two decades.

It was only in the 1960s that Protestantism began to be taken up in the Gamo highlands. Through SIM support, a school was built in Ochollo. The local Ochollo teachers taught the basics, and then sent the students to the mission school in Chenchä town to complete their secondary education. In this way, the majority of Ochollo youth were converted (Abeles nd:193). By the late 1960s Protestantism was beginning to spread to Doko, also via people that had been converted during visits to Wolaita. However the hostility to the Protestant church was still pronounced, and even during this time there were few converts in Doko Masho, although there were more in Doko Gembela. The Gembela community built a church in Shaye, and in 1973 the fledgling Protestant community in Doko Masho built a small church in Yoira. The slower uptake of Protestantism in Doko Masho, compared to Doko Gembela, is still evident today, and, as I shall argue in chapter seven, can be explained in terms of the more hierarchical form of the Doko Gembela initiations. But on the eve of the revolution, Doko Masho had few converts to Protestantism, while Doko Gembela was considerably missionized.

2.4.3 Other Changes

As well as the political and religious changes discussed in the last two sub-sections, there were several other changes during this period. The most important was the increasing integration of the Gamo highlands into the developing and modernizing state of Ethiopia. In the early part of the century Ethiopian currency was introduced, replacing the iron bars (*march'o*) that had been used before.¹² First *Marie-Theresa Thallers*, and then the Ethiopian *birr*, were brought into the highlands, and became the predominant means of payment in the local markets. As the iron bar currency was superseded, and as the importance of metalwork in general declined, the *mala* smiths gave up their trade and concentrated on farming full time. Only a few *mala* smiths remained in Dorze and Ezzo, and enterprising *degala* took advantage of the vacuum in other *deres*, and started to take up smithing, producing the knives, hoes and tongs that people still required for day-to-day life (Freeman nd). Although metalwork was more economically rewarding than tanning, the *degala* continued to be despised and landless, and often had to work as the servants of the *kawo-balabbat*.

In the 1960s outside influence became more direct. The town of Arba Minch was founded, and the provincial administration moved there from Chenchä. A lowland road connecting Arba Minch to the town of Soddo in Wolaita, and on to Addis Abeba was completed, providing a better route than the muddy highland road. This route was soon plied by buses, thus making Addis Abeba only a day's journey from Arba Minch. In the early 1970s some enterprising Dorze men joined with some *neftenya* merchants in Chenchä town and formed a transport co-operative that would bring buses and taxis right up into the highlands. By 1971 they owned a bus that travelled the Addis Abeba-Arba Minch route, another bus that went between Addis Abeba and Chenchä, and two taxis that linked Chenchä to Arba Minch (Olmstead 1973:232).

¹² In other parts of Ethiopia salt bars (*amole*) were used as currency, and it is possible that they were used by Gamo individuals involved in long distance trade. See chapter five.

Many men in the *deres* around Chenchā and Dorze had taken up weaving during this century¹³, and as transport links improved, some of them began to sell their cloth in Addis Abeba and other urban centres. Dorze were the trendsetters in this regard, and by the 1970s many of them spent most of their year in Addis Abeba, returning home only for the *Mesqalla* celebrations of the New Year. Some men from other *deres* also went weaving in urban centres, but the number of migrant weavers from *deres* more than a few miles from Dorze or Chenchā was considerably less, and for this reason, all weavers from the Gamo highlands came to be known generically as ‘Dorze’ by other townspeople (eg. Mesfin nd). By 1971 77% of Dorze men made a living predominantly from weaving¹⁴ (Olmstead 1973:230). The majority of these men maintained a house and wife in Dorze, and returned home to settle after some years. With only a small percentage of Dorze men working the land at any one time though, agricultural labour needed to be found elsewhere, and for the most part men from other Gamo *deres* were hired by their wealthier Dorze neighbours. Working for room, board and a cash wage, these men farmed Dorze land, and returned to their *deres* with cash in their pockets (ibid:232).

Other men took advantage of the improved transport links to become merchants and traders. From Addis Abeba they brought second hand salvage clothes (known as *selbaj*), plastic plates and jugs, pens and notebooks, coloured thread, scrap metal, and so on. These would then be sold in Chenchā and Dorze markets, where local traders would buy them and take them further into the highlands. Imports outnumbered exports in the Gamo highlands, but traders would take spun cotton and woven cloth to markets in various urban centres, and some animal hides were sold to tanneries in the capital.

¹³ Local tradition asserts that knowledge of weaving predates Menelik’s conquest (Olmstead 1975:90), but the number of weavers has expanded dramatically this century.

¹⁴ In contrast, in the *dere* of Dita, just ten miles from Dorze, only 9% of males supported themselves from weaving (Olmstead 1975:91). I do not know what the numbers were in Doko at this time, but I would guess that they were about midway between these points.

As more and more men went away weaving and trading, and more and more men worked as hired agricultural labourers, the Gamo highlands became increasingly integrated into the national economy, and local people became more knowledgeable about life outside of the highlands. People saw the secondary school and hospital in Arba Minch, and demanded schools and clinics up in the highlands where they lived (Bureau 1979a:210). Those who had been to Addis Abeba felt the buzz of vibrant urban life, learned to speak Amharic and talked to people from different cultures and backgrounds, and became more aware of the ins and outs of national politics. When they returned to the highlands, they came as knowledgeable and cosmopolitan individuals who felt very much part of an Ethiopian state.

2.4.4 The Previous Anthropological Studies in Historical Context

Most anthropological research in the Gamo highlands was conducted towards the end of this period. More specifically the extended fieldwork of Abeles, Bureau, Olmstead and Sperber all took place in the years between 1969 and 1975. Only Bureau, living in Addis, made brief return trips after this period. The bulk of their research, then, was carried out during a period where tensions in the capital were high, and the country was on the brink of revolution. But the revolution was made in Addis, and not in the Gamo highlands. And although many men in the areas around Dorze spent time in Addis, it is probably true to say that the tensions that were most central in Gamo life at this time were those between villagers and corrupt *balabbats*. It was in this context, with the role of the *kawo* much transformed by his having been made *balabbat*, and the importance of the assemblies having been much curtailed through the imposition of national courts and administration, that these researchers tried to understand the interconnection and relation of the sacrificial and initiatory systems.

There was a consensus between all the researchers that these indeed were two separate cultural systems, although there was some disagreement on the nature of their interrelation. Sperber considered them to be complementary (1973:218), while Abeles thought them to be antagonistic (1978:294). And, influenced by Leach's work on

highland Burma, they all agreed that the contradictions between the systems would cause there to be an oscillation over time, such that one or other system would be more powerful at the expense of the other (Abeles 1978:294, Sperber 1981:219). Unlike Leach, though, they made no attempt to suggest the mechanisms of this supposed oscillation, and the only evidence presented was the suggestion that the sacrificial system had been more powerful in the nineteenth century than it was in the twentieth century. Thus Abeles thought that *kawos* used to dominate village life in the past, and Bureau noted the considerable power that some *kawos* appeared to have before the end of the nineteenth century (Abeles 1978:297, Bureau 1981:122). This, indeed, does appear to be the case, and people in Doko were also quick to tell how their *kawo* had been much greater in the past. But the gradual weakening of the sacrificial system is in itself no evidence for oscillation.¹⁵ To speculate that earlier on in the nineteenth century, or in the eighteenth century, the sacrificial system would have been weaker again, and the initiatory system stronger, is speculating beyond the bounds of reasonable inference. With no other evidence, and no suggestion of mechanism, there is little reason to find such a scenario plausible. I will return to some of these questions in chapter five.

2.5 Revolution and the Derg Government (1974-1991)

The increasingly autocratic government of emperor Haile-Sellase, and the contradictions between an essentially feudal system and processes of modernization, set up tensions that eventually erupted into revolution. In 1974 Haile-Sellase was overthrown, and the Imperial throne of Ethiopia came to an end. Some years of confusion, power struggles, and violence followed, but by 1978 Mengistu Haile-Mariam had emerged as the totalitarian leader of the new Marxist-Leninist military regime, commonly known as the Derg. For the next fifteen years or so the Derg government ruled Ethiopia and embarked on a process of development and transformation that would affect even the most far-flung of its peoples.

¹⁵ For a similar argument with regard to Leach's claim of oscillation amongst the Kachin, see Nugent (1982).

Soon after the revolution all Universities and secondary schools were closed, and the students were sent out into the countryside for two years to teach the Socialist values of the new government. These young men and women of the Development Through Cooperation campaign became known as *zamach* (Amh: campaigners), and with greater or lesser degrees of sensitivity they gathered together local elders and told them to change their ways. Their role was to nationalize land, build schools, bring basic health education and to modernize what Mengistu saw as a backward and superstitious peasantry. This involved the abolition of all religious practices except Orthodox Christianity and Islam, including all traditional practices that were deemed to be exploitative or hierarchical.

In the Gamo highlands the *zamacha*, as they were locally called, taught that everybody was equal, that the *kawo*, the regular farmer, and the *degala* were all brothers. Either on their own accord, or stirred up by the *zamacha*, most *deres* expelled their *balabbats* and looted their house and property. Many *balabbats* were forced to flee the highlands, and they sought sanctuary in Arba Minch or Addis Abeba. The situation in Doko was somewhat unusual. This was one of the few *deres* where the *balabbat* was still the *kawo*, and *kawo-balabbat* Darza had managed to carry out his roles with a degree of honesty and fairness that was unparalleled in other *deres*. The *zamacha* that went to Doko also seem by chance to have been rather more flexible and sensitive to cultural values than most. Thus when the other *deres* were expelling their *balabbats*, Darza stayed put and the *dere* decided to keep him as their *kawo*.

The *zamacha* forced the people of the highlands to stop their 'backward traditions'. All sacrifices were banned, and sacrificers were to be treated like other people. Initiations were also banned, and any status differential between *mala* and *ts'omma* was rendered illegal. In short, most aspects of traditional Gamo life were banned. Protestantism was also banned, and only the Orthodox church was allowed to continue. Land was nationalized, and there was some redistribution such that land was taken from richer families and given to those who were poorer. The previously landless artisans were all given small plots of land, and told that now they could farm it like everybody else. The

extent of land redistribution varied throughout the highlands however, and in Doko it seems to have been fairly minimal.

The words of the *zamacha* were initially greeted with enthusiasm by most people in Doko. The teachings of equality resonated with the earlier teachings of Essa, and many people embraced them. People in different social positions, of course, reacted differently. Those with most to lose were more resistant, while those with most to gain jumped on the socialist bandwagon with vigour. The *degala*, for example, became ardent socialists, and used the backing of the new government to press their case for equality. The *zamacha* gave them land, and forced *mala* farmers to accept them into their workgroups so they would hoe the land together. They also gave them places on the new local *k'ebelles*¹⁶, and exhorted *mala* and *degala* to eat together. Most *mala* considered this to be going too far with equality, and there was some resistance. For example, when a *degala* woman died in 1980, the *mala* could not bring themselves to bury her in the communal burial ground, traditionally reserved for the *mala* but now officially open to all. Instead she was buried in the separate *degala* burial place, against the government rules. The *degala* however, flushed with the excitement of their increased status and power, protested against this. One of them, a fiery character called Kampo, decided to take the case to the court in Chenchu town and demand that she be re-buried with the *mala*. He returned from town accompanied by police and cadres and set about digging up the corpse. When the corpse was uncovered the stench was so terrible that the farmers begged the police to let them leave it there, and they promised that in the future all the *degala* would be buried in the *mala* burial places. The *k'ebelle* chairman ran away to Addis, fearing that he would be put in prison for allowing the initial burial to have taken place, and from then on all *degala* that died were buried with the *mala*. Kampo used to go to each burial to check that they were buried in the right place, walking all over Doko in his mission.

For the most part the *zamacha* were successful in stopping the practices that they thought were backward, including both the sacrifices and the initiations. After they left,

¹⁶ Peasant Association, or local council.

the local administration continued their work and during this period in Doko people say that no sacrifices were performed. Neither the *kawo* nor any of the local sacrificers carried out their traditional roles, and the elaborate practices of clan seniority, which had previously affected the order in which people starting sowing their land, were given up. The sacrificial system, attacked before by *Essa woga*, seemed finally to be crumbling under the impact of the Derg. The initiatory system, in contrast, proved remarkably resilient. Its centrality and importance to Doko life was such that people adapted it to the new conditions. *Halak'as* were initiated in secret. People say that there was not one year when there was no *halak'a*. But instead of making many *halak'as* each year, it was honed down to a minimum of one. And elements of the ritual were changed. Instead of erecting large bamboo poles in the *halak'a's* compound, for example, small bamboo twigs were stuck in the ground so that the local government spies and officials would not notice. Instead of publicly parading in the market place, the new *halak'a* kept out of the public eye, and paraded secretly in a small assembly place high in the mountains. Many of the necessary feasts were scaled down to their bare essentials, and the initiates promised to make up the debt some time later. In this way the initiatory system kept going throughout the period of the Derg government. Given that a great many of Doko cultural practices effectively came to a halt in this period, this is a truly remarkable fact.

In 1990 the people of Doko Masho went one step further. The elders got together and decided to ask the administration in Arba Minch for permission to make *halak'as* and follow their customs. They sent a letter, written in the hand of Desta, son of *kawo* Darza, which explained how their traditional practices caused the *dere* to be well and kept away hunger and disease. They ended it with the following request:

We are asking your office to understand that our customs are useful, and not harmful. We respectfully apply for permission to perform our customs, and to thus alleviate the problems that we are currently facing.¹⁷

¹⁷ Translated from the Amharic by Tadesse Wolde.

Fifteen men put their thumb prints to this letter, and it was taken to the Department of Culture and Sports in Arba Minch. The head of that office was a local man who had been one of the *zamacha* in Doko Masho. He rather admired Gamo culture, and he tacitly gave his permission. Thus in the final years of the Derg government *halak'as* were being initiated openly in Doko Masho.

For many people in Doko, though, the most significant thing about the Derg period was the wealth that came to the *dere*. One of the original tasks of the *zamacha* was to set up service co-operatives, and one was set up in both Doko Masho and Doko Gembela, and others were formed in every *dere* throughout the highlands. These co-operatives were supposed to collect contributions from all their members and then to buy materials from Addis Abeba and sell them locally at minimum cost. Thus the service co-operatives provided coloured thread for the weavers, metal for the blacksmiths, exercise books for the school children, and other things such as salt and sugar. After a year or so, however, most of the co-operatives descended into in-fighting and corruption. In many *deres* one or two people became very rich at the expense of the local populace, and the local experiment in socialism was, by and large, a failure.

Doko, though, was unusual. Both the Doko Masho and the Doko Gembela co-operatives were phenomenally successful. By the late 1980s the Doko Gembela co-operative owned two trucks, while Doko Masho surpassed all other *deres* and owned four trucks. These trucks took people and produce between Addis Abeba and the highlands, and were frequently rented out by the other co-operatives in the area. Run by astute and yet honest men, the Doko Masho co-operative ran at such a profit that exercise books could be given, rather than sold, to the school children, and every year free salt was given to each household at *Mesqalla* time. This period, then, was one of plenty for the people of Doko, and it is often fondly remembered.

People's worst memories of this period, though, are of army conscription. During the mid to late eighties many young men were conscripted into the National Military Service, and went to fight in northern Ethiopia. Those that came back often returned

with the glory of a killer (*wor?ats*), and many of them went through the traditional ritual of ear-piercing that honoured such men. But as the fighting in the North got worse, increasing numbers of men did not return and people began to fear and resent conscription. Mothers worried about their sons fighting wars with unknown people, and young men tried to remain elusive when officials came looking for them. Thus the fighting that would eventually lead to the fall of the Derg, also cast a shadow over life in the Gamo highlands.

2.6 1991 and After

In May 1991, following years of unrest in northern Ethiopia, particularly in the provinces of Tigray and Eritrea, Mengistu's government was in its turn overthrown, and the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), led by Meles Zenawi, marched into Addis Abeba and took power. A short period of turmoil followed, as the country descended into chaos before a strong rule of law was enforced. Towns were looted, powerful leaders under the last regime were murdered or expelled, and old scores were settled. The Gamo highlands managed not to descend into this chaos, as despite the efforts of the *zamacha*, much day to day life was still managed, overtly or covertly, by local people and institutions, and not by the state. Thus the fall of the state did not leave a political vacuum, and the rioting and looting that swept the country at this time did not impinge much on Gamo highland life.

What did happen in this period though, was that as the traditional institutions resurfaced, many of the changes that had been enforced under the Derg were over-turned. In Doko Masho the elders called an assembly to discuss the problems of the *dere*. There had been a few years of bad harvest, and, as in the time of Essa, the elders decided that this had been caused by their not following *woga* properly. They argued that treating the *degala* the same as *mala* was a serious infringement of taboo, or *gome*¹⁸, and that their former

¹⁸ *Gome* refers to both the transgression and the sanction when a rule of *woga* is broken. If, for example, someone sacrifices at the wrong time or at the wrong place, then it is *gome*, and some misfortune is considered likely to result from such an action.

low status should be reinstated. The land that had been given to them was forcibly taken back, and they were removed from the *k'ebelle* council. A few days later a *degala* man died and, despite Kampo's protests, he was buried in the separate *degala* burial place. Furthermore, while the *degala* were mourning, the farmers went and dug up the bones of all the *degala* that had been buried in the *mala* burial place and threw them into the same grave. When the *degala* found out they were furious, but now that their state backing had gone, they were powerless. Kampo came with his spear and threatened to kill someone for this atrocity, but the *mala* outnumbered him and his neighbours held him back and took away his spear.

It is interesting that of all the traditional rules that had been broken during the Derg period, the *dere* decided that it was the laws about the *degala* that were the most important. Sacrifices had not been performed for years and many other traditional Gamo rules had been broken, and yet the *dere* did not decide that this was the *gome* that was causing the *dere* problems. The singling out of the laws surrounding the *degala* can be read as a tacit acceptance that the other changes had not been so bad.

As the people in the Gamo highlands used this interim law-less period to put their *deres* to right, so the EPRDF formed a transitional government and soon the rule of state law was returned. A few years later the transitional government became the nationally elected government, and Ethiopia entered into yet another new phase of her history. Although continuing the general socialist ethos of the previous government, the EPRDF has reversed many of the trends of the Derg¹⁹. Religious freedom has been reintroduced, and Protestant churches have been allowed to function again. Ethnicity is the new buzz word, and in line with this, traditional practices are not only allowed, but encouraged. The internal map of Ethiopia has been re-drawn along ethnic lines, and a federal state structure that theoretically guarantees the unrestricted right of nations and nationalities to self-determination up to secession has been adopted. Local languages are now being used in schools instead of Amharic, and the whole process of writing down these previously oral languages is well under way. As ethnicity is being fostered, traditional

¹⁹ All the service co-operatives in the Gamo highlands have been closed down.

practices are now encouraged as a marker of one's ethnic and cultural identity. It is not surprising therefore, that in the Gamo highlands a cultural efflorescence is taking place²⁰. This, then, is the context in which I arrived in the field.

2.7 Doko 1995-7

By 1995 Doko had been through many of the general processes and events that have influenced the Gamo highlands this century. The historical events discussed above had impinged on Doko, as they had all Gamo communities. But each community reacted to these events a little differently, due to differences in their local form of Gamo culture and also due to the different characters and personalities that played important roles in different *deres*. Doko's trajectory through this century was thus both unique, and also part of the greater trajectory of the Gamo highlands in general. As mentioned above, Doko was unusual in a number of ways. In the early part of the century it was one of the few *deres* whose *kawo* remained *balabbat*, and after the revolution it was practically the only *dere* not to expel its *balabbat*. And during the Derg period it was unusual in the particular success of its Service Cooperative, and the wealth that it generated. Doko, then, is both an example of a Gamo community, and a particular community in its own right. In the rest of this chapter, and indeed throughout most of the thesis, I will be concentrating primarily on Doko, with all its idiosyncrasies and specificities.

Doko is a fairly large *dere* in the present context of the Gamo highlands, and has a population of about 20,000 people (Population and Housing Census 1994:314-5). But as I have mentioned above, *deres* are multi-scalar, and *deres* exist within *deres*. Thus Doko sub-divides into two medium-sized *deres*, Doko Masho and Doko Gembela, each with a population of approximately 10,000 people. And each of these medium-sized *deres* further sub-divides into even smaller *deres*, each with a population between 1,000 and 2,500. There are eight small *deres* within Doko Masho, and these are Shale,

²⁰ During my fieldwork this was only happening in the northern highlands. The reasons for the lack of cultural efflorescence in the southern highlands are complicated, and cannot be discussed here.

Woits'o, Masho, Ch'ento, Yoira, Dambo, Gedeno and Eleze. And in Doko Gembela there are nine - Kale, Shaye, Dalo, Ts'ida, Zad'a, Upper Losh, Lower Losh, Zolo and Elo. Diagram 1 shows their respective locations. Each of these *deres* is a *dere* in its own right, as well as being part of the larger *dere* of Doko. Thus each *dere* had its own assembly place, its own sacrificer and its own initiations. It is these three elements, rather than scale, that define a *dere*. So, for example, Dambo makes its own initiates according to its own *woga*, and these initiates are called *halak'a*. The larger *dere* of Doko Masho also makes its own initiates, according to its own *woga*. These initiates can come from anywhere in Doko Masho, and they take the title of *hudhugha*. Thus the same man could be initiated as *halak'a* in Dambo, and then later become *hudhugha* in Doko Masho. He belongs to both these *deres* at the same time, and chooses his most salient identity according to context.

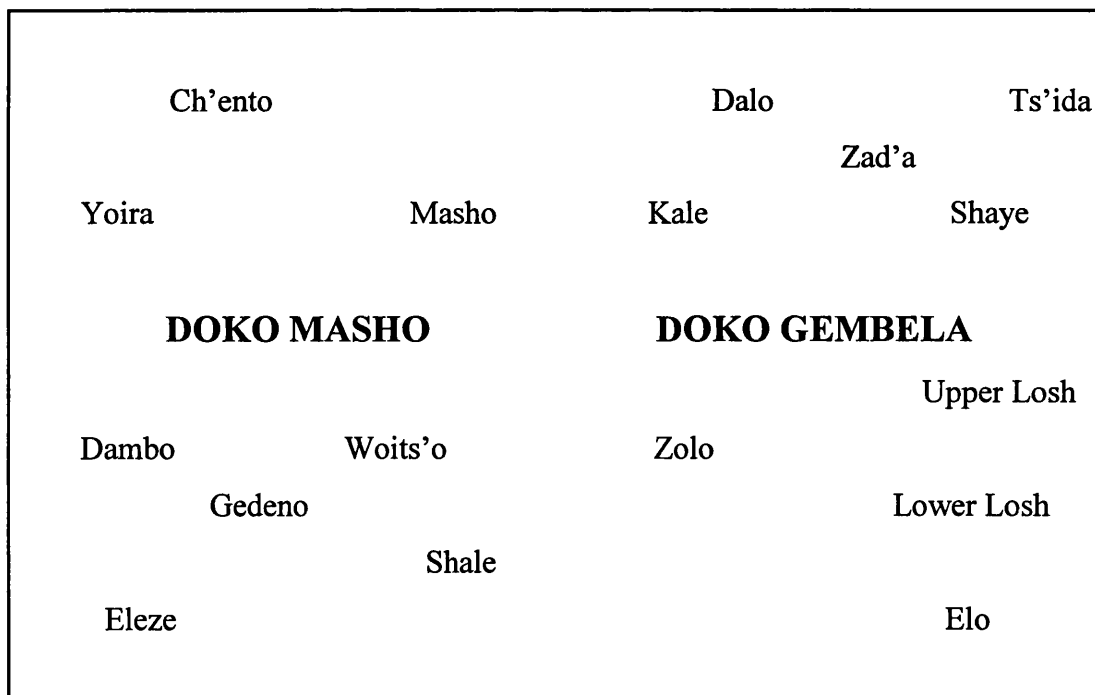


Diagram 1: Doko and its Sub-divisions.

2.7.1 Cultural Life in Doko

When I first passed through Doko in 1995 it was during the New Year festival of *Mesqalla*. *Halak'as* were visible in the market place in full ceremonial attire, and people

were stopping on the path to wish each other the traditional New Year's greeting, "yo-ho-o!" The excitement of the celebration was palpable, and traditional practice seemed to be in full swing. When I returned there to live in 1996 my opinion was not much changed. Doko was a place with a vibrant cultural life and traditional practices were an important part of most people's lives. *Kawo* Darza had died a few years ago, and his son Desta was about to be installed as the new *kawo*. *Halak'as* were being initiated with flourish, and assemblies were taking place at least once a week.

There was perhaps a special buzz to cultural life at this time though, as people were still celebrating their ability to follow their customs as they liked. More importantly, people were still in the process of deciding what practices should be reinstated post-Derg, and what should be allowed to fade into the past. Clan assemblies discussed the possibility of performing clan sacrifices that had not been performed for twenty years; *dere* assemblies discussed holding the women's *mara?e* ceremony that had not been held for a similar period; and inter-*dere* assemblies discussed how they should renew their peace treaties (*ch'ako*), and reinstate their officiants (*kare/ogets*). In these assemblies, then, cultural life was actively being re-created.

But this process of re-creation was not one of simply reproducing all the old practices as they had been before the Derg came to power; it was as much a process of transformation as it was reproduction. Certain practices were tacitly allowed to drop by the wayside, while the re-introduction of others was heatedly debated in series of assemblies that spanned months or years. Other practices, by contrast, had been quickly reinstated straight after the fall of the Derg, and were carrying on in seeming stability around all the debates. A simple generalisation that can be made from this complex process of discussion and debate is that, on the whole, the sacrificial system was fading in importance, while the initiatory system was the locus of most cultural efflorescence (particularly in Doko Masho). The reasons for this disparity will be one of the themes of this thesis, but it is worth noting here that this pattern is merely a continuation of a process that has been unfolding in different contexts throughout the whole of this century: sacrificers are on the decline, initiates are on the ascent.

2.7.2 Modernity in Doko

In 1996, though, there was more to Doko life than sacrificers and initiates. While *halak'as* wore traditional attire, other young men could be seen walking around in trousers, jackets and shoes that would not look out of place in Addis Abeba. Many of them carried bibles under their arms, and they could often be seen in earnest discussion. These were the new Protestants. Many young men had been influenced by the Protestants in Wolaita and Addis Abeba, and after 1991 the Protestant community in Doko went through a rapid expansion. In Doko Gembela the vast majority of young people now belong to the church, and a number of older people have also joined. In Doko Masho the growth has been slower, but there is still a burgeoning community of young believers. The small church built before the Derg period cannot hold the current numbers, and a new building is being constructed. When it is finished it will be by far the largest and most impressive building in Doko Masho. A core of committed believers attend study groups and healing sessions at the church, while the majority attend for Sunday prayers. The Protestants turn their back on much of traditional Gamo life, claiming that it is the work of Satan. They do not participate in sacrifices or initiations, and they only participate in weddings, funerals and assemblies in a modified way. All but the lax do not drink or smoke, and they prefer their songs about Jesus to the traditional Gamo songs. The main dualism in Gamo culture at the moment, then, is not between sacrificers and initiates, but between traditionalists and Protestants. There are certainly tensions between these groups, particularly in families split by belief, but for the most part people make an effort to get on and accommodate each other. Protestants can be seen attending the *dere* assemblies if they have a case to bring, and traditionalists can be seen participating in the Protestant weddings of their children.

The junior school in Masho, founded in the late 1960s, is taught by local teachers trained in Arba Minch, and is full of children, attending half the day and working on the farm or at home for the rest of the day. Once they have finished the six grades, some of them go on to the secondary school in Chenchä town, walking an hour there and back daily. As the number of children making this trek has grown, the *dere* has decided that their

school should be extended to grades seven and eight. On their own initiative they have collected contributions from everybody, and have started to build a new school block to house the extra classrooms. The construction was well under way during my stay.

Other people prefer to gain experience outside of the highlands, and the number of migrant weavers from Doko has steadily increased. Nowadays most families have at least one member who has spent some time weaving in Addis Abeba, Wolaita or elsewhere. Still others have become traders, and the elite few have made it to University or College in one of the major urban centres in the country. Doko continues to be an enterprising community, and during the time of my fieldwork they were trying to set up a generator in the market place in Doko Masho, so that there would be electric light in the bars during the evening. The scheme worked for a number of months, making Doko Masho market the only place in the whole of the highlands that had electricity, surpassing even Chenchu town!

While all these changes take place, both in traditional life and in the increasing encounter with modernity, there is also much that is relatively stable. Throughout this century people in Doko, and throughout the highlands, have continued to live in traditional-style houses, to get married according to their custom, to farm the land with the same tools, to eat the same kind of food, to respect their elders and their affines, and so on. Nowadays some of the Protestants are beginning to build new 'modern' houses, and to modify the marriage ritual, but even they continue to act according to the tacit beliefs that, though implicit and unspoken, permeate much of Gamo life. As a background to the rest of the thesis, I will end this chapter with a brief discussion of two of the more continuous features of life in Doko - houses and marriage.

2.7.3 The House

Houses in Doko are made from split bamboo, woven like an upside-down basket, and then thatched (see also Olmstead 1972). Houses are located in compounds, and diagram 2 shows a typical Doko house and compound.

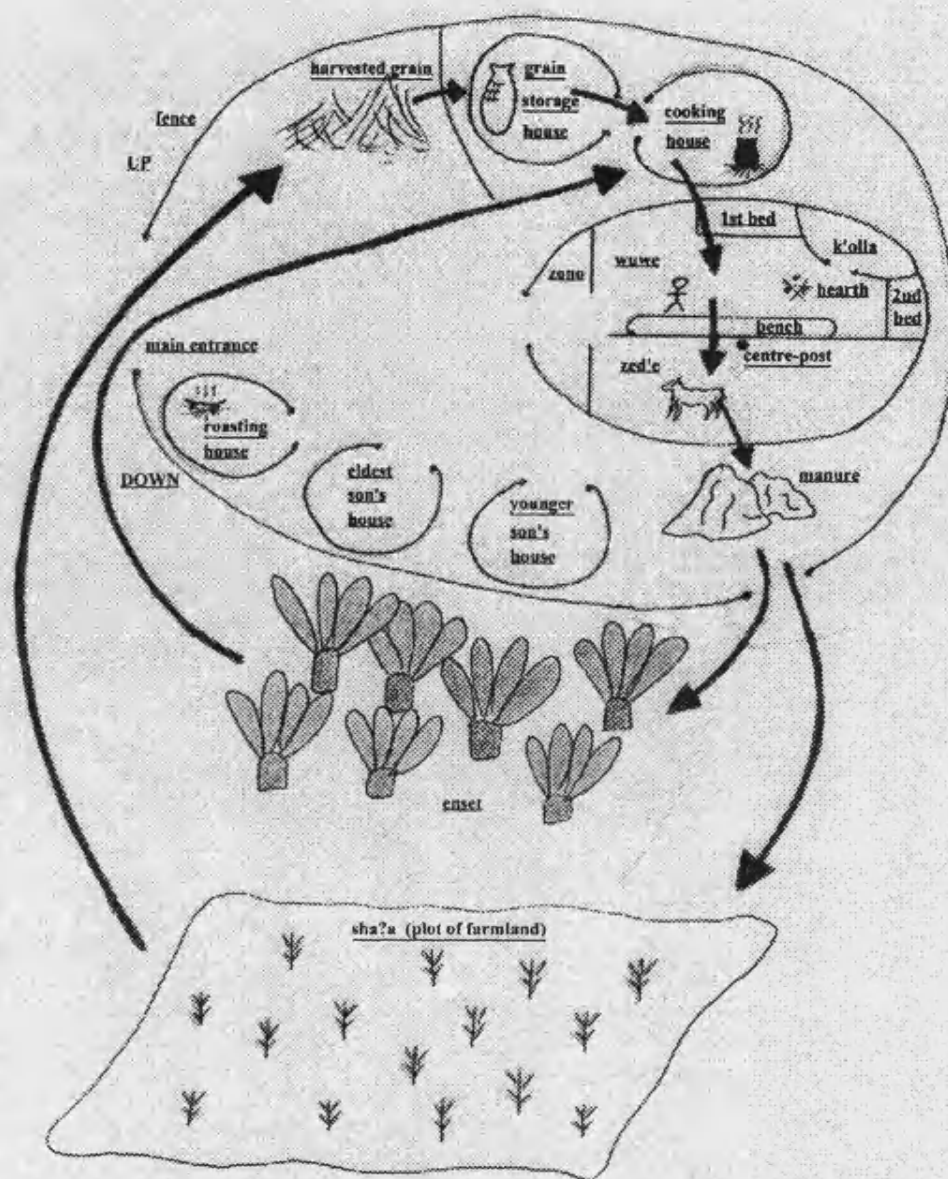


Diagram 2: House and Compound, Showing Cycles of Production and Consumption.



Houses in a Compound.



The Protestant Church in Doko Masho.

Whilst details vary from house to house, the layout is always topologically the same. The domestic organisation of space, both inside the house and in the compound, tells us much about the taken-for-granted elements of Doko life.

Just inside the entrance to the house is a porch-like area called *zono*, which is an area both inside and not inside. People who are not allowed to enter certain people's houses for various reasons²¹ can still come and sit in the *zono*. Partitions mark out the entrance from the *zono* to the main part of the house.

Running along the length of the house is another partition which separates it into upper and lower parts. Doko is a mountainous area and all houses will be built on sloping hillside to some extent. Whilst the base of the house is obviously levelled, the division into upper and lower is a key part of local conceptual ordering. The lower part of the house is called *zed'e*, and this is where cattle live. Horses and smallstock may stay here too, but conceptually the *zed'e* is the place of cattle. It is also the place where manure is produced, for later use in agriculture. Menstruating women and those who have recently given birth can wash there, and blood from such women should only fall in the *zed'e* of their house, and not elsewhere. The centre-post of the house, symbolic of the male household head, stands by the central partition on the side of the *zed'e*.

The upper part of the house is known as the *wuwe*, and is the main living area where people eat, talk and sleep. It is considered to have a lower status than the *zed'e*. A bench runs alongside the central partition and small puff-like seats (*shid'a*) are spread around for people to sit on. Towards the far end of the *wuwe* there is a three-stone hearth, which is used for brewing coffee, providing embers for the bubble pipes that men smoke, and occasionally for cooking. At the very far end of the *wuwe*, perpendicular to the central partition, is the main bed, where the senior couple sleep. Along the upper wall, parallel to the central partition is a second bed, where the household head sleeps with his wife if his father has died but his mother is still alive. In such circumstances the mother continues to sleep in the main bed, and only after she has died do the new senior couple move over to the main bed.

²¹ See below in this chapter.

The heads of both the beds come up against a partitioned-off area called the *k'olla*. This is the most private part of the house, and is where valuable possessions are stored. This is primarily milk, but also includes grain, spears, ceremonial staffs and so on. Outsiders do not enter another person's *k'olla*.

This house, with this formal structure, is called *kets*. In most cases such a *kets* will be located in a compound, or *gats*, with other buildings used for cooking, or housing a married son and his wife, and so on. None of these other buildings, which I shall describe in a moment, are called *kets*. They are referred to as *embere*. None of them have any internal structure, and in particular they have no centre-post. It is in fact possible to consider the whole compound as a magnification of the house, with these additional huts serving as extensions of particular parts of the main house. All the members of the compound eat and work together as one unit.

The compound itself is generally fenced, and the main house is located with its door facing the compound entrance. The upper and lower parts of the house thus correspond to the upper and lower parts of the compound. Below the *zed'e* is a place where manure is collected before it is taken to the fields.

Also on the lower side of the compound, but further towards the compound entrance, are the houses of any married sons and their wives. When the eldest son marries he will build a house near the *zed'e* of his father's house and live there with this wife. When the next son marries he too must build a house on the lower side of the compound. First the elder brother's house will be lifted up and moved towards the compound gate and settled there. Then the younger brother will build his house close to the main house. In this way the houses of the married sons are arranged in order of seniority, with the most senior closest to the compound gate and the most junior closest to the *zed'e* of the main house.

These houses have no internal structure and are just for sleeping in. A few Protestant sons have built modern-style rectangular wattle-and-daub houses in recent years, and since the internal structure of sons' houses is conceptually unimportant, this innovation

has not provoked any reaction from the traditionalists. As long as they are built in the right place, on the lower side of the compound, then everyone is satisfied. I lived in such a modern son's house in a traditionally-headed compound, and Shagire, the household head, would often admire the new house but say that it was impossible to live a traditional life in it. To my knowledge there were no modern-style main houses in existence in Doko. When the Protestant sons become household heads in their own right this may change.

To return to the compound. Right up by the compound gate there is usually a small house used for cooking low status foods. Tasks such as roasting and grinding are often performed here, and foods which have no symbolic value, such as potatoes, cabbage and *kolts'o*²² are cooked here.

On the upper side of the compound there is an area that is used to store harvested grain before it is threshed. Beyond that, further into the compound there are two houses facing each other, often hidden behind a fence. The first of these is the grain storage house, and the second is the cooking house. Once grain has been harvested, dried and threshed, it is stored in bamboo containers inside the grain storage house. This house is also used for cooking, along with the cooking house next to it. Here the high status foods made from barley and *itima* (part of the *enset* plant) are prepared, and wheat beer is brewed. These two buildings are clearly extensions of the *k'olla*, places where valued foodstuffs are stored and then cooked.²³ They are hidden away behind a fence, like the *k'olla* is fenced off inside the main house.

Likewise, the area beneath the *zed'e* where manure is collected is clearly an extension of the *zed'e* itself, and the empty central part of the compound is an extension of the *wuwe*. The fence is a magnification of the wall of the main house, containing within it a house which exists at two different scales, as the *kets* (house) and as the *gats* (compound).

²² *Kolts'o* is a vegetable that looks like a yellow potato, but stings to the touch. It must be ground and boiled before it is edible, and it is a low-status food.

²³ In some other parts of the Gamo highlands, such as in Balta, cooking is actually carried out in the *k'olla*.

Below each compound there is a plot of farmland known as the *sha?a*. Even the houses of otherwise landless people have a *sha?a*. This land is owned by the father of the house, and in general all farmland in Doko is held in ownership by male household heads.²⁴ Part of this plot is generally used for *enset*, and the tall leaves of the plant hide the compound from view and provide shade on sunny days. Because *enset* requires lots of fertiliser, the *enset* plot is also the general toilet area of the compound. The rest of the *sha?a* will usually be planted with barley or wheat, or the lower status peas, beans, potatoes or cabbage.

The people who live in such a compound are typically the household head and his wife, their unmarried children, and their married sons with their own wives and children. Thus three generations are commonly present in one household, although households with two or four generations are also found. The compound/household is the basic unit of production and consumption, and these people make up its labour force. By considering the division of labour, and the spatial organisation of the compound, some basic ideas about production and consumption can be elucidated.

Diagram 2 also shows the cycle of production and consumption of grain in a Doko House. We can follow this cycle round, and by doing so uncover the tacit model of production-consumption inherent in this schema. To start at the *zed'e* then. Here household waste, excrement and cow dung is converted into manure, one of the key elements of production. Before the main farming season starts women carry manure from the *zed'e* out into the fields. Men spread it over the fields and mix it into the earth as they turn over the land before sowing. Men also sow the seed and hoe the soil again. Subsequent work in the fields, such as weeding, can be done by either men or women. Harvesting too is carried out by both men and women, and the new grain is carried into the compound and piled up on the upper side. When it is dry it is threshed by men and women, and placed in the storage containers in the grain storage house. From here the

²⁴ Sons can only own land after their fathers have died. At this time brothers inherit an equal share of the land, unless their father has willed a different distribution for some reason.

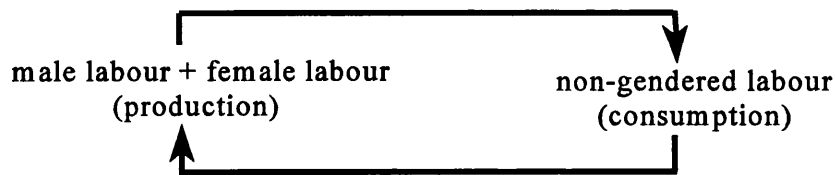
grain progresses into the cooking house where it is cooked by women, over fire made with wood chopped by men. The completed meal is brought into the *wuwe* where it is eaten together by men and women. Waste and excrement passes into the *zed'e*, and the whole cycle begins once again.

The lower side of the compound is thus associated predominantly with production, whilst the upper side is associated predominantly with consumption. Other sets of symbolic oppositions also map onto the upper-lower dichotomy. The most significant ones are damp/dry, cool/ hot and fertile/sterile. The lower side of the compound is cool, damp and fertile. Water flows downhill such that moisture from the upper side drains into the lower side. The tall leaves of the *enset* in the *sha?a* provide shade from the hot sun. The *zed'e* and the *sha?a* are damp with excrement and manure. The land is fertile from this dampness and brings forth crops. Cattle in the *zed'e* are fertile as they give birth and produce milk. The upper side of the compound in contrast is hot, dry and sterile. Moisture flows away downhill, and grain is left to dry in the sun. The fires in the cooking house and the *wuwe* produce heat and further dryness. Nothing fertile is found here.

This cycle contains within it the seeds of gender inequality. The status of Gamo women is rather high, compared to women in other communities in Ethiopia, but there is indeed a status differential between men and women. The ownership of land and houses by male household heads is the most obvious basis of this inequality, and also of the inequality between these men and their sons, but the symbolic organisation of production also subtly subverts women's input and allows their labour to be devalued.

If we look at the cycle of production and consumption we see that it is formed of units in which gendered labour culminates in non-gendered labour. Women carry manure to the land, men sow and hoe the land, and then both men and women harvest. Men chop firewood, women cook food, and then both men and women eat. In each case the gendered activities are considered to be productive, whereas the non-gendered activities are considered to be consumptive. This oscillation between gendered and non-gendered

labour can be considered as the most basic model of production and consumption. Productive activities are valued more than non-productive activities, and since both male and female labour are necessary for production, both are valued. We have the pattern:



However, when the cycle is taken as a whole as it is mapped onto the compound we find that a slightly different picture has been created and that male and female labour becomes differentially valued. The different parts of the cycle become positioned in different parts of the compound, and since these parts of the compound have their own symbolic associations, the activities that take place in them become re-interpreted to be congruent with this symbolic system. Gender is not significant in the layout of the compound, and production and consumption simply form alternating parts of a cycle. Thus the gendered production-consumption units described above fall into either the production or the consumption part of the cycle. One type of labour is emphasised over the other, as carrying manure is eclipsed in one part, and chopping wood in the other. Men play the dominant role in the production of grain, and women play the dominant role in its consumption. This allows the illusion that:



This is thus the second model of production that can be discerned here. Whereas the first model is based on the notion that production can only be accomplished by the combination of male and female efforts, and the second model is based on the notion that production is a purely male activity. The two different models of production interact in such a way that women's labour is both acknowledged and valued (as integral to production), and yet devalued (as non-productive) at the same time. Men's labour is always deemed to be productive, and is therefore more highly valued. The basis of gender hierarchy is thus evident through the tacit views about production that can be discerned from the organisation of domestic space and some of the mundane phenomena of everyday life.

2.7.4 Marriage

Some further aspects of gender relations can be seen when we look at marriage, and the relations that this constructs between the houses of affines. Since marriage symbolism is drawn on in a number of other contexts which will be discussed in this thesis, I will discuss it here in some detail.

Marriage in Doko consists of the transfer of a woman from one house to another. She leaves her father's house and enters the house of her husband's father. In fact there is no separate verb meaning 'to marry' in the Gamo language. A man simply 'takes' a wife (*macha ekkes*), and a woman simply 'enters' a husband (*azina gelaus*). There are three different ways that a marriage can take place. One possibility is known as *mak'o*. This involves the bride willingly leaving her father's house for that of a man she likes, without the knowledge or permission of her father. When the deed is done an intermediary (*lazantsa*) makes peace between the two households. This type of marriage is quite common now as it by-passes the often lengthy waiting period that a girl's parents might impose before they lose the labour of their daughter.

Another possibility is kidnap, or *dafa*. The groom or his father, having decided who they want as the new wife, may get together with other family or clan members and go out and kidnap the girl on the road, or at a market, or in the fields. The girl will scream for help, and it is unlikely that a successful kidnap will take place without the prior permission of the girl's father. He may give such permission if the girl continually turns down offers of marriage from suitable young men. Such marriage by kidnap is very rare now, but about twenty years ago it was extremely common, and many couples now in their thirties and forties were married this way.

The most common, and most proper, form of marriage is that known as *sorro*, which refers to the feast that is central to this standard type of marriage. I will describe this marriage ritual below in some detail. However, all the events that take place after the marriage ritual are applicable to any couple, no matter how their marriage was accomplished.

Before a bride can be brought to her husband's house it is necessary to build him a house of his own. Up until now he will have been living in the main *kets* or in one of the other *emberes*. Only now will he have his own *embere*. Before the couple can move into this house however, it must be marked off and separated from the father's house, because only the household head can have sex in his house. So in order for the son and

his wife to be together in the father's household, their house must be ritually separated from the rest of the compound. This is done by placing some stems of the *oluma* plant on the ground around the son's house, to mark out his space²⁵.

Once the groom's house is built and the *oluma* has been done, the new bride can be brought. The marriage ritual itself deals with the transferal of the bride and her incorporation into her husband's house, although as we shall see, her incorporation at this stage is far from complete. After a full day feasting at the houses of both the bride and groom, the groom and a party of friends and relatives set off for the house of the bride. Leading the groom's party is the *lazantsa*, the intermediary chosen by the groom's father, who carried out all the pre-nuptial negotiations between the two houses. When the groom's party reach the bride's house they are greeted by the bride's friends and relatives. Amidst much singing and dancing the two groups sit down and eat together. Later, after nightfall, the groom and his party try to take the bride and leave. The bride's clan sisters demand gifts of butter, or money, and unless the *lazantsa* hands this over they can try to block the exit. The bride's friends accompany her a little way along the journey, and then return, leaving her in to be taken to her new home.

Along the route to the groom's house the party is supposed to stop on some land that belongs to the clan of neither the bride or groom. Here the groom slaps her on her right shoulder and tells her that she must now enter his house and take his ancestry. On marriage a wife is said to join her husband's clan. Then he unties the cloth belt from around her waist, showing his ownership of her sexuality and fecundity, and walks on ahead of the party towards his father's house. When the *lazantsa* arrives at the house with the bride and the rest of the party, the groom is waiting inside the *kets* with his mother and father. The *lazantsa* takes the bride up to the house and tells her to put her

²⁵ A neighbour from a different clan will usually do this, and as he places the *oluma* he blesses the son, "Grow well beneath your father! May there be no arguments! Give birth and become many!" Incidentally, the *oluma* plant is also used for marking boundaries between plots of agricultural land, and it is a plant that grows well and sprouts easily in new places, and can survive the dry season. It is also said to be good for healing burns, wounds and eye problems.

right foot through the doorway and into the house. After she does this the groom, from inside the house, places his right foot above hers. His mother places her foot above his, and the father places his foot above them all. He then pours a mixture of *uts'uma* grass²⁶ and water over the hierarchy of legs and blesses the bride to live in peace with them and to bear many children. The bride then enters the house.

Inside, the process of her incorporation continues. The father takes a bowl of barley porridge and eats three mouthfuls. He then feeds three mouthfuls to his wife, then to his son and then to the new bride. He then takes a full gourd of wheat beer and drinks three times from it, together with his wife, cheek to cheek. Drinking together like this is called *dago*, and clearly shows closeness. The groom and his bride then also *dago* three times. The food and drink that the father feeds in this context is called *kacha*. While the tower of feet makes clear the order of the household hierarchy, feeding *kacha* shows that it is the father who provides for this household and thus justifies his position as head of the house. The *lazantsa* then takes the young couple to the groom's hut where the marriage will be consummated²⁷.

The marriage ritual seems to imply that the bride has been taken from her father's house and completely incorporated into the house of her husband's father. And at this stage it would thus appear so. The marriage marks the beginning of a period where members of the two houses should remain distanced. They should not enter each other's houses, and should not eat together. The groom in particular must avoid his father-in-law, to the extent of hiding his face and running away if they accidentally meet. The fiction of

²⁶ *Stellaria media*, a common grass known for its abilities to grow well anywhere.

²⁷ The Protestants modify the marriage ritual slightly, but significantly. Instead of stopping in a field and untying the bride's belt on the way between the houses, the Protestants will often go via the church, and pray or sing there. On arrival to the groom's father's compound the party spend some time outside in the compound, and the preacher will often give a sermon and then ask the couple if they both agree to marry each other. Most significantly though, the couple do not then enter the main house of the compound, but instead enter directly into their own house. None of the rituals of incorporation are performed, and the seniority of the groom's parents is thus subtly challenged.

complete incorporation of the bride and complete separation of the houses is maintained for some time.

During this time the bride's incorporation into her new house continues. For a month or two after the marriage she is considered to be *gach'ino*. In this state she must stay inside her husband's hut and do no work. She should be well fed with all the best Gamo food, and kept warm and content. Friends come to pass the time with the couple, who are getting to know each other a little better. During all this time the bride must not enter the main house, or see her father-in-law.

After a month or so the father summons the *lazantsa* and tells him he is ready to accept the couple into his house. The *lazantsa* then comes at night and leads the couple out of their house. He calls out, "Your child is begging you!", and leads the couple into the father's house. Here they kiss the feet of the father and mother, and receive blessings to be prosperous and fertile. Then they all eat together. This reconciliation between the parents and the young couple ends the period of *gach'ino*, and now the bride is expected to commence work as a household member. The next market day the couple and their parents will *sofe* in the market place. Each couple will *dago* wheat beer three times and then parade around the market, thus publicly marking their new status as a married couple. Later on, at the New Year festival of *Mesqalla*, the couple will *sofe* again with all the other couples married throughout that year.

Once the bride has left the state of *gach'ino* she can pop over to see her parents, whom she will not have seen since the day of her marriage. She can talk and eat with them, but she cannot enter her father's house. Instead she must sit in one of the other huts in the compound, or in the porch-like *zono* at the front of the main house. Although the members of her new household are still avoiding her father, she is allowed come and eat with him. This suggests that her incorporation into her new household is not as complete as would otherwise appear.

Some time later, a few months or years, the bride's father decides to activate the relation which everyone has so far pretended does not exist. He summons the *lazantsa* and tells him to bring the young couple to his house for *guyhatets*. *Guyhatets* literally means 'togetherness' and it marks the reconciliation of the two houses and the formal establishment of a relation between them. On the arranged day, the *lazantsa* leads the couple to the house of the bride's father. This time they enter on their knees and approach the father and mother who are sitting inside. They each kiss the feet of the father and mother, and are blessed to be fertile and prosperous. The groom then gives a full pot of wheat beer to his father-in-law. This is the first gift of *kumets*, literally meaning 'fullness' or 'wholeness', to pass from wife-taker to wife-giver, but not the last. They all then spend the day eating good food together, and some food will also be sent to the groom's parents to eat in their own house. The *guyhatets* marks the end of the avoidance between the households, including the exclusion of the bride from her father's house. When she comes to visit now she may fully enter the main house.

The *guyhatets* also marks the establishment of a formal, and hierarchical, relation between the wife-giver and the wife-taker. From now on the bride's father can demand labour, help and money from his son-in-law. In the first year this is traditionally help in agricultural work, and the groom will be expected to bring ten or twenty friends and come and work the land of his father-in-law for a day or two. After that the demands diminish. He may be asked to hoe the land a day or two per season, or to help with some other work. The seniority of the father-in-law demands not only respect and obedience, but also some degree of labour tribute.

And this fledgling tributary relation is not limited only to labour. After the birth of each child, when the mother has left the post-parturient state of *gach'ino*, and when the child has grown up a little, a gift of *kumets* must be taken to the bride's father. After the birth of a girl a full pot of wheat beer and a container of barley must be taken, after the birth of a boy a sheep should be added as well. Until this *kumets* is taken neither the bride nor the child can enter bride's father's house. Like the *guyhatets*, taking *kumets* is said to reconcile the two houses. The birth of a child is seen as possible due to the flow of

fertility from the wife-giver to the wife-taker. As in so many other contexts, where fertility flows down, wealth flows up.

Thus the hierarchical relation continues between the two houses during the bride's fertile period, the birth of each child giving further evidence of the fertility of the wife-giver. But when the bride reaches menopause the situation changes. There is no more fertility flowing from the wife-giver. At this stage, if all the *kumets* gifts have been taken, the couple can take the gift of *gu?a* to the bride's father. This again is a full pot of wheat beer, and this gift marks the end of the formal relation between the two houses²⁸. After this no more gifts of *kumets* will be taken, and only now is the bride considered to have fully left her father's house and been completely incorporated into her husband's house. Only now can she herself make offerings to the spirits as part of the house to which she fully belongs. The hierarchical relation between the two houses has ended, the flow of fertility has ceased, and the incorporation of the bride into her new house is complete.

2.8 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has provided both an historical and ethnographic context for the discussions that follow in the rest of this thesis. Gamo history in the twentieth century has been described in some detail, and the historical context of my fieldwork has been made explicit. The dynamism of many aspects of Gamo life have been contrasted with the relative stability of other elements, such as houses and marriage. Awareness of this contrast between dynamism and stability is central to the approach of this thesis. Cultural change and transformation for the most part does not entail a radical break from the past, but rather its gradual modification. And as some elements transform more quickly, they are counter-balanced by other elements that are more conservative.

²⁸ If *gu?a* is not taken then the relation between the houses of wife-givers and wife-takers can last up to four generations.

Throughout this century, we can see that there has been a general decline in the sacrificial system, and a resilience, if not ascendance, of the initiatory system. The rather different influences of both Essa and the Derg have fed this internal trend. Rather than seeing them as 'external factors' that have deterministically brought about local change, they can perhaps more accurately be seen as providers of new contexts in which already-present local dynamics have been elaborated. These dynamics seem to predate the end of the nineteenth century, and our analysis thus far cannot explain them. Part Two of the thesis will return to this issue, but for the rest of Part One the current situation in Doko will be described. In the present context of the re-creation of tradition on the one hand, and increasing modernisation on the other, the next two chapters will consider what is becoming of the sacrificial and initiatory systems in Doko in 1995-7.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present the sacrificial system as a dynamic system in flux, rather than as a fixed and rigid structure. It is being constantly created and re-created in changing environmental circumstances, the most recent of which have been described in chapter two. The present version of the sacrificial system will have grown out of former versions, and much about contemporary sacrifices and sacrificers can only be understood by looking at previous forms. This chapter, then, describes the sacrificial system both pre- and post-Derg, and makes sense of the latter version in terms of the former. The focus is primarily at the level of structure, and a more micro-level discussion of process and mechanism is reserved for a later chapter.

Furthermore, while this chapter concentrates on the sacrificial system as a system, there is no implication that everybody in Doko is following the rules and practices detailed below. On the contrary, there are many people in post-1991 Doko who do not engage in the activities of the sacrificial system. Followers of *Essa woga*, Protestants, and young educated professionals (such as school teachers) do not follow the sacrificial system of *beni woga*. However, by continuing to live with their more traditional relatives, many of these people incorporate aspects of the system into their lives in one way or another. The challenge of this chapter, then, is to depict the structural principles of the sacrificial system, while at the same time portraying the rather more messy, and lively, reality of Doko life

3.2 The Sacrificial System in Doko, 1995-7

The sacrificial system of *beni woga* is inherently linked to a belief in the spirits, or *ts'ala?e*. These spirits, a combination of ancestral spirits and nature spirits, are thought to live in the ground, and to affect the lives of the people of Doko. If fed, through

offerings and sacrifices known as *maggana*¹, they will cause the crops to grow, the cows to give milk and women to have babies. In short they will cause the people who feed them to become fertile and prosperous. However, if these spirits are ignored they can cause crop failure, sickness, and conflicts. Feeding the spirits is therefore crucial to the successful productivity of any house, and this logic provides the motivation for the system of sacrifices².

According to *beni woga*, however, not everyone can make offerings to the spirits for themselves. Only certain seniors can make offerings to the spirits, for themselves and on behalf of their juniors. Seniors thus mediate the rather important productive relation between their juniors and the spirits. The fact that seniors mediate this relation means that the productive relation effectively becomes that between seniors and their juniors, and it appears that seniors control the fertility of their juniors (see also Donham 1990:104-13, Todd 1978:316). This is the ideological basis by which hierarchy is constructed and legitimated in the sacrificial system.

Seniority in Doko is figured according to primogeniture. So fathers are senior to their sons, elder brothers are senior to younger brothers, and the descendants of an elder brother are senior to descendants of younger brothers, irrespective of age. From the same principle we derive many different seniors. There is the *kets ade*, the household head; the *bekesha baira*, the eldest son of an eldest son down to four generations; the *angisa*, the lineage head³; and the *korofine*, the clan head. Succession to these positions is by

¹ These offerings are sometimes also referred to as *yarsho*. This term is more common in some of the *deres* further north, such as Chenchu and Dorze.

² The existence of the spirits is taken for granted by just about everyone in Doko. Even the Protestants do not question their presence, they simply question their morality. According to Protestant belief in Doko, the spirits are the devil, and for them the words *ts'ala?e* and *saytan* are interchangeable. Thus, for the Protestants, the sacrificial system is essentially devil-worship, and is to be avoided. The belief in the existence and efficacy of the spirits, though, is continuous between *beni woga* and the Gamo form of Protestantism.

³ This seems the best translation for *angisa*, even though people in Doko do not think in terms of, or have a word for, lineages.

primogeniture. So the eldest son of the clan head, for example, will become clan head when his father dies. The eldest son of a *bekesha baira* will likewise become *bekesha baira*, but after four generations of succession in this manner the group will segment and other men in his generation will also become *bekesha bairas* even though their fathers did not have this position. See diagram 3. All of these seniors relate metaphorically to their juniors as ‘fathers’ (*ade*). Thus, in certain contexts, a man can refer to his genealogical father, his *bekesha baira*, his *angisa* or his *korofine* as his ‘*ade*’.

Distantly related clan members cannot rank themselves with respect to each other, but just as everyone knows who their own household head is, so everyone knows who their own *bekesha baira*, *angisa* and *korofine* are. Seniority is clear when looking upwards, so to speak, but less clear when looking sideways. This is because fertility flows downwards. While the household head can make offerings for, and thus cause fertility to flow to, only his household members, the *bekesha baira* can do this for all of his genealogical juniors. And so on up to the clan head. Beyond that an easy elision is made from genealogical senior to community senior, and above the clan head there are *dere* sacrificers, or *ek’k’a*, who can make offerings to the spirits for the well-being of the whole community. Larger scales of *dere* each have their own *ek’k’a*, and thus the hierarchy continues up to the senior *ek’k’a*, who is known as *kawo*. Like the genealogical seniors, these communal seniors also relate to their juniors as metaphorical ‘fathers’.

However, within this general schema, the actual relation between different seniors and their juniors is rather variable. Moreover, although the general principles of hierarchy and fertility seem fairly constant, the way that these particular relations are actualized is open to continuous change and reinterpretation. Thus in the rest of this section I will describe these different relations as they were manifest in late 1990s Doko, and in the following section I will consider the form of these same relations in the 1960s, before the Derg came to power. Both versions represent different instantiations of the same system, and these are only two of the many versions that have no doubt existed at different times in Doko, and in different places throughout the Gamo highlands.

3.2.1 Fathers and Sons

Since the hierarchical relations of the sacrificial system are modelled on the father-son relation, it is important to discuss some aspects of this relation before proceeding further. As mentioned in chapter two, most fathers and sons live together in the same compound throughout their lives.⁴ They and their wives form one combined unit of production and consumption as they work and eat together.

Fathers, as household heads, own the house, the animals and the land and its produce. This renders sons extremely dependent on their fathers. It is fathers who have the prerogative to make decisions about who will do what work, and when. In most cases such decisions are made in consultation with sons and wives, but the overall position of the father as 'boss' is clear. If a father decides to send his son to work with the neighbourhood work group (in which one man per household must participate), while he himself attends other business, it is rather difficult for a son to refuse. And if a father thinks it is more sensible to sow a particular field with wheat, then it is unlikely that his son will convince him to sow it with barley. Thus in daily life sons must continually defer to their fathers and do as they are told. This situation can continue well into middle-age, and can be a source of considerable frustration as sons increasingly resent their junior status. This only changes when the father becomes incapable or dies, and thus the tensions between fathers and sons are felt throughout the duration of most men's lives and is a general theme in Gamo social and cultural life.

The status of 'father' is incredibly important in the context of the house, where to be a father means to be a king over one's own domain, however small. The respect shown to such men in the *dere* is markedly greater than that shown to men who are still 'sons' living under the authority of their father. The larger the house and the more numerous the dependants that a man has, then the greater the respect he is shown.

⁴ Only in cases of continual fighting between household members will a father allocate his son a plot of land nearby and let him build his own house. Even then, this house may not have a centre-post, and the son remains dependent on his father and is not considered to be a true household head.

The importance of being the father and creator of a household of dependents is clearly shown in the use of teknonyms. Most household heads, in most contexts of daily life, are not referred to by their own names, but as ‘father of X’, where X is the name of their first-born child (son or daughter). Thus I rarely referred to Shagire as ‘Shagire’, but addressed him instead as Assani Ade (Assani’s father). There were many people who I knew only by their teknonym because their names were so rarely used. The use of the teknonym emphasises the status of a man as a household head and father, and points to the respect that should therefore be accorded to him.

Household heads whose children are still young, and sons who are fathers to their own children but are still living with their father, are rarely addressed using the teknonym. Only in light-hearted jest might friends refer to each other in this manner, but for the most part personal names continue to be used. Thus Wale, despite being in his late thirties and the father of three young children, was always addressed simply as Wale. In this way the teknonym is used continually in daily life to elaborate the differential status between household heads and their sons.⁵

3.2.2 Household Heads and their Juniors

The hierarchical relation of dependency between father and son is mirrored in the ritual practices of the sacrificial system. Although there are certain occasions when the senior woman of the house can offer to the spirits, it is the male household head who makes offerings for the benefit of all the household members.⁶ Thus all household members are ritually dependent on him, as he is the one who ensures their fertility and well-being.

⁵ Women are also addresses using the teknonym. Thus Halimbe, Shagire’s wife, was known as Assani Inde (Assani’s mother).

⁶ The senior woman, either the wife or mother of the male household head, can only make offerings to the spirits if she is post-menopausal and has been fully incorporated into the house, as described in chapter two. Once the final *gu?a* gift has been taken, and her incorporation is complete, she can sacrifice a female sheep (that is itself a mother) in the *enset* plot. Meat from this animal must not enter the house, and can only be eaten by women and children. After this, the senior woman can make offerings to the spirits when the household head does, but all her offerings must be made in the *enset* plot, and they are not thought to be on behalf of all the household. Very few women made these offerings in the mid 1990s.

This further legitimizes his authority in the house, and his position as owner and boss is sacralised. Sons cannot slaughter an animal or make offerings of barley porridge while their father is alive.

The household head should make offerings of barley porridge (*gurdo*) and wheat beer (*perso*) to the spirits before and after all major productive events, such as sowing the land, harvesting, childbirth or the birth of a calf, and at *Mesqalla*. Not everyone who makes these offerings does so in an identical way, although there is a general pattern that is common. Shagire, the head of house where I lived, made the offerings as follows.

First of all he would prepare a small quantity of barley porridge himself. Because he has not finished taking the *gu?a* for his wife, Halimbe, she could ^{not} touch anything that is used for the offering, and thus Shagire would grind the grain, mix in the *itima* and butter, and cook the porridge entirely on his own. This was the only context in which he cooked, but no-one commented on his performing 'women's work'. When the food was ready, he would take it into the main house and use it to make the offerings.

First he would go to the *k'olla*. There he would place a dollop of barley porridge on a *mayo* leaf⁷ and flick some of it onto the ground three times. Next he would pour some of the wheat beer onto the ground. While he did all this he would call out 'eat this!' ('*haissa ma!*'). He would repeat this at the *k'olla* once more⁸, and then go on to do the same thing at the centre-post and the main doorway. Then he would go out into the compound and do the same thing at the base of a bamboo marker (known as *bacha*⁹), placed above the house, and at a certain place below the house (known as *ts'ade gars*¹⁰). Finally he would go down into his *sha?a* and repeat the same thing at one or two spots

⁷ *Discopodium Penninervum*.

⁸ He said that once was for God, and once was for the ancestors (both male and female).

⁹ The *bacha* was said to represent the house of his great grandfather, from whence he had descended.

¹⁰ Offerings here were said to be for the snakes and frogs.

there. Once this was done, he would call me and Halimbe, and we would eat the rest of the porridge. His Protestant son and daughter-in-law, Wale and Almaz, always refused to eat this food, or to let their children eat it, and Shagire had long given up calling them.

Other men, in their own houses, made the offerings in slightly different ways. All men that were *bekesha bairas*, like Shagire, would make the offerings at the five key places - *k'olla*, centre-post, doorway, *bacha* and *ts'ade gars*. Some would also offer on their *sha?a*, or round the back of the house, or out on the path in front of their compound. Some of them would use the *mayo* leaf, but others preferred to use the tip of an *enset* leaf instead. Those men that happened not to be *bekesha bairas* could only use an *enset* leaf and, as I will explain below, could only make the offerings at the *k'olla* and the doorway.

Followers of *Essa woga* did not make offerings of barley porridge at all, but instead they made offerings of honey to God. The household head would take a small pot of honey and, standing either in his house or compound, he would flick some three times into the sky, crying out 'praise to God!' (*'ts'osa gelata!*'). For a man to do this it was irrelevant whether or not he was a *bekesha baira*, but nonetheless, only household heads could make this offering. And likewise, sons in these houses still cannot slaughter an animal while their father is alive. Thus it is interesting to note that the fundamental hierarchy between father and son is maintained in *Essa woga*.

Protestants and other people who did not follow *beni woga* did not make any offerings at all. However, Protestant sons that lived with their traditionalist fathers often ended up taking on board some of the rules of *beni woga*. Thus although Wale would not eat the food from the offerings that Shagire made, he nevertheless refrained from slaughtering animals on Shagire's land. In this way father and son could continue living together, although it made it almost impossible for them to share a meat meal¹¹.

¹¹ Wale would not eat meat from an animal that Shagire had slaughtered, and yet could not slaughter himself. In recent years they have sought to get round this impasse at *Mesqalla*, when everyone traditionally eats meat, by joining in a meat-sharing group in which the animal would be slaughtered by a man genealogically senior to Shagire, and yet a Protestant. In this way both sets of beliefs could be satisfied.

3.2.3 *Bekesha Bairas* and their Juniors

The relation of the *bekesha baira* to his juniors is rather different from that of the plain household head to his juniors. The direct relations of dependence that exist between father and son are not found between *bekesha bairas* and their juniors at the present. Although *bekesha bairas* can claim some kind of ‘ownership’ over the land of their juniors, because it is they who ensure its fertility through offerings to the spirits, they have little actual control over that land. They likewise have little authority over their juniors.

Although he is considered to be able to mediate between his juniors and the spirits, few men in 1990s Doko asked their *bekesha baira* to make offerings on their behalf. One or two did, generally small groups of brothers, amongst whom the eldest was the *bekesha baira*. I did not, however, come across any larger groupings where cousins or second cousins would ask their *bekesha baira* to offer for them. For the most part, the *bekesha baira* was accorded special respect, was allowed to talk first and to take the best seat by the fire, but otherwise had little special role with regard to his juniors.

Shagire’s family had just segmented in the last generation, and thus, with no brothers in Doko, he was a *bekesha baira* with only his son as his junior. In the previous generation, Choro, his grandfather’s eldest brother’s son, had been *bekesha baira* to over thirty men, but on his death six new *bekesha bairas* were formed, according to the rule whereby there is a split after every four generations (see diagram 3).

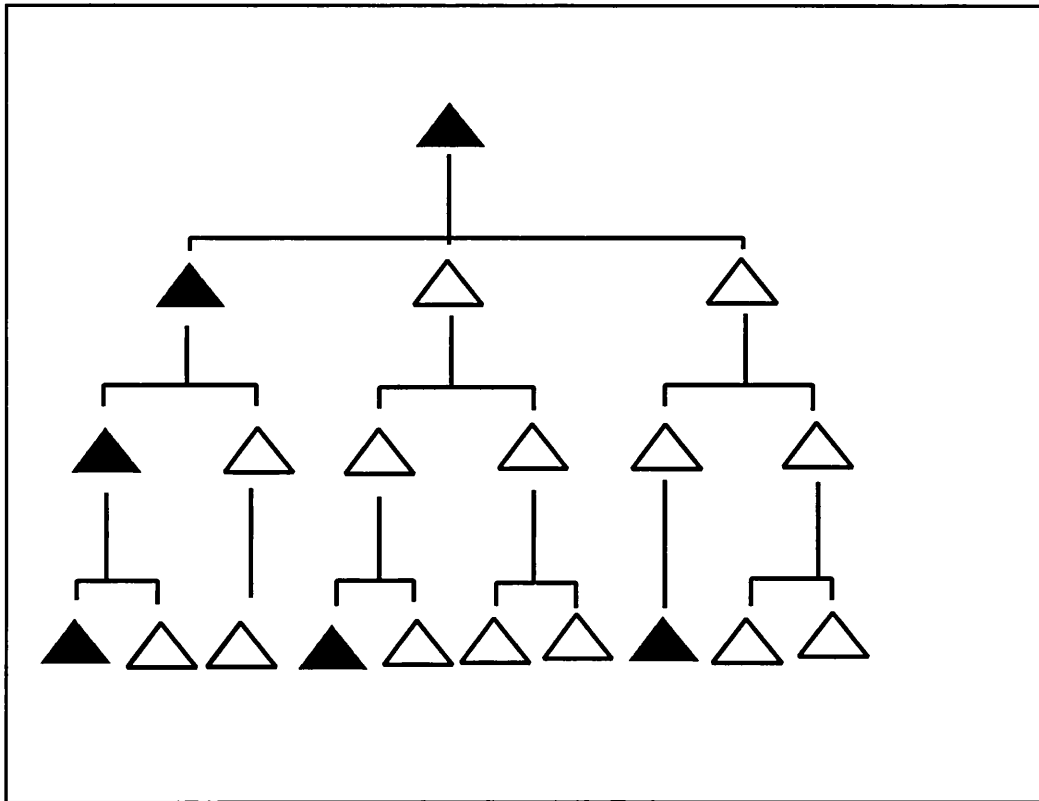


Diagram 3: *Bekesha Bairas* in Doko.

Shagire's cousin Anjulo also became a *bekesha baira* this way, but with three brothers, and many sons and nephews, Anjulo already had a number of juniors. Of his three brothers, the elder two, Maaga and Dola, asked Anjulo to make offerings for them. The youngest brother, Abera, chose not to follow the *beni woga* strictly, and preferred to make the offerings on his own.

Whenever Maaga or Dola wanted to make offerings to the spirits they would prepare the porridge and beer, and then call Anjulo to their house. Anjulo would make the offerings at the centre-post and the two places outside the house (the *bacha* and the *ts'ade gars*), and only then would his brother make the offerings at the *k'olla* and doorway. Anjulo would generally then stay and join his brother's family in eating the porridge. In this way some dependency was created between Anjulo and his two younger brothers, but the extent of this dependency was minimal. And when Abera decided not to call him to make the offerings, there was nothing he could do.

Followers of *Essa woga* do not call their *bekesha bairas* to make offerings for them, and every house is considered to be autonomous. Protestants, likewise, accord no special role to *bekesha bairas*, beyond the respect that is shown to any genealogical or chronological senior. Thus those that do not follow *beni woga* do not imbue this relation with any significance at all.

3.2.3 Lineage Heads, Clan Heads and their Juniors

Like *bekesha bairas*, lineage and clan heads exert little authority over their juniors. Although they too can claim some kind of ‘ownership’ over their land, because it is they who ensure its fertility, they have little actual control of that land. The significance of the clan grouping in general is rather minimal at the present. Whilst rules that land should not be sold outside the clan persist, the notion of a ‘clan estate’ is extremely weak.

According to the logic of *beni woga* though, the lineage head (*angisa*) and the clan head (*korofine*) should be able to make offerings to the spirits, and thus control the fertility of all their respective juniors. However, even though this idea persists, they have little role in 1990s Doko life. Shagire’s lineage head is a pleasant and well-respected man called Meresho. He lives nearby, just ten or fifteen minutes walk uphill from Shagire’s house, and the two of them would often bump into each other in the market, or at assemblies, or just walking around. When I first moved into Shagire’s house he was a frequent and curious visitor, and I could tell from the respect that was accorded to him that he must be somebody fairly important. He was always offered the first cup of coffee, the first bite of food, and the best seat near the fire.

However, beyond these shows of respect, Meresho did not seem to have any particular role in Shagire's life, or in the lives of his other juniors. He did not make offerings to the spirits on their behalf. This situation was much the same in other families.¹²

The relation between the clan head and his juniors was much the same. For the most part he played little role in their lives, and currently did not offer to the spirits on their behalf. Shagire's clan head lived in Doko Gembela, and he was the senior of all the Michamala clan members throughout Doko. The fact that he lived some way away from Shagire, and was part of the Doko Gembela community while Shagire lived in Doko Masho, meant that there was little day-to-day contact between them. He never visited our house during my stay, and the only time he and Shagire met, to my knowledge, was at the special Michamala clan assemblies that took place at the clan assembly place outside his house.

The topic of discussion at these assemblies during this period was, in fact, the offerings to the spirits that the clan head was supposed to make for his juniors. This clan sacrifice had not taken place since before the Derg came to power, and there were a number of clan members who thought that it would be a good thing if one was performed in the near future. I will return to this particular discussion in some detail when I look at the assemblies in chapter six, but for now it is sufficient to note that the assembly had not made a decision by the time that I had left the field, and thus no sacrifice had taken place. Some other clans were involved in similar discussions, while others seemed to show little interest in performing a clan sacrifice and had let the matter drop. To the best of my knowledge, no clan in Doko had performed one of these sacrifices since the Derg came to power.

¹² In some families the lineage head still played an important role when one of his juniors died, when he would 'clear the blood' from his kin. This involved coming to the house of the deceased at night, when everyone was asleep, and slaughtering a sheep there. He would then take the meat home to eat himself, and the next day the household head would slaughter another sheep in daylight and sprinkle the chyme in the compound, to finally cleanse the death impurity. This whole process was very secretive, and was spoken about with awe and fear, and I am not sure to what extent it still continues.

Followers of *Essa woga* and Protestantism did not involve themselves in these discussions, and in general gave little special attention to their clan or lineage heads. One of the (non-Protestant) school teachers said that he thought the clan sacrifice was a good idea because it provided a context for the whole clan to come together and show solidarity. However, his clan head was away weaving in Addis Abeba so the likelihood of this sacrifice taking place was remote.

3.2.5 *Ek'k'as* and their Juniors

An *ek'k'a* is a *dere* senior, or sacrificer, and he can make offerings to the spirits on behalf of the whole *dere*, (although like the other seniors, he too has no direct authority over his juniors). One man described the role of the *ek'k'a* as follows:

An *ek'k'a* takes from the *dere* and sacrifices and makes offerings so that the *dere* will grow well; so that the boys and the girls of the *dere* will grow up; so that the cows will produce milk; so that the sheep will give birth. That's what he does, the *ek'k'a*. When he slaughters cows produce milk, sheep give birth, people give birth, and children that have been born grow up.

As with the genealogical seniors, this position is inherited agnatically according to primogeniture, and he is considered to be like a father to his juniors. However, in contrast to genealogical seniors, *ek'k'as* are easily recognisable because of their long hair, which they must not cut or cover, and most *ek'k'as* are the heads, or owners, of *dere* assembly places (*dubushas*). Most of the smaller *deres* of Doko have an *ek'k'a*. Only Ch'ento, Woits'o and Lower Losh do not.¹³ The Masho *ek'k'a* is a man called Indalle, although he is generally referred to as *ade*. The *ek'k'as* of Dambo and Shaye are

¹³ There used to be an *ek'k'a* in Ch'ento, but he left the *dere* about two generations ago. Woits'o and Lower Losh have no tradition of ever having had *ek'k'as*, and I imagine that this is because they are relatively new *deres*, having seceded from larger groupings with Shale and Upper Losh respectively.

referred to as *adento*¹⁴, the *ek'k'a* of Zolo goes by the title of *maako*¹⁵, and the *ek'k'a* of Zolo is called *dorane*. The others, though, are simply referred to by their names or teknonyms.

In 1990s Doko some of these *ek'k'as* were more important than others. This partly depended on their own personalities. The Yoiria *ek'k'a*, for example, is held in high regard and people listen attentively when he talks. He is considered to be honest and wise and to be good for the *dere*. When I witnessed him talking at *dere* assemblies I could see that his calm and good judgement was taken very seriously by the members of the assembly. He spoke with the air of a leader, and was treated as such, even though he was only a relatively young man. In contrast, the *ek'k'a* of another *dere* is often derided by people in private. This particular *ek'k'a* is considered to be selfish and arrogant, and is criticised for not carrying himself with the dignity that is required. When a man in his *dere* overheard him telling me that he was like the *dere*'s father and that everyone else was like his children, he waited until the *ek'k'a* was safely out of earshot and then spluttered angrily, "I am not his son and he is not my father. He just has the *woga* to be *ek'k'a*, that's all."

According to *beni woga* the *ek'k'a* can sacrifice on behalf of his *dere* juniors, whenever they ask him. Although I did not witness this kind of sacrifice while I was in the field, I heard that several of the *ek'k'as* had performed it since 1991. All the *mala* in the *dere* contributed money to buy a bull, and the *ek'k'a* slaughtered it with a spear in the abdomen. He put blood on his forehead and sprinkled some over the crowd. He kept the heart and the front right leg for himself, while all the rest of the meat was cut up into little pieces and eaten raw with ground barley and wheat beer by members of the *dere*.

Over and above this, the *ek'k'a* of Masho, Indalle, has a special *woga* that none of the other *ek'k'as* in Doko Masho share. When the agricultural season is approaching he is

¹⁴ *Adento* is an honorific form of *ade*, and both mean 'father, owner, boss.'

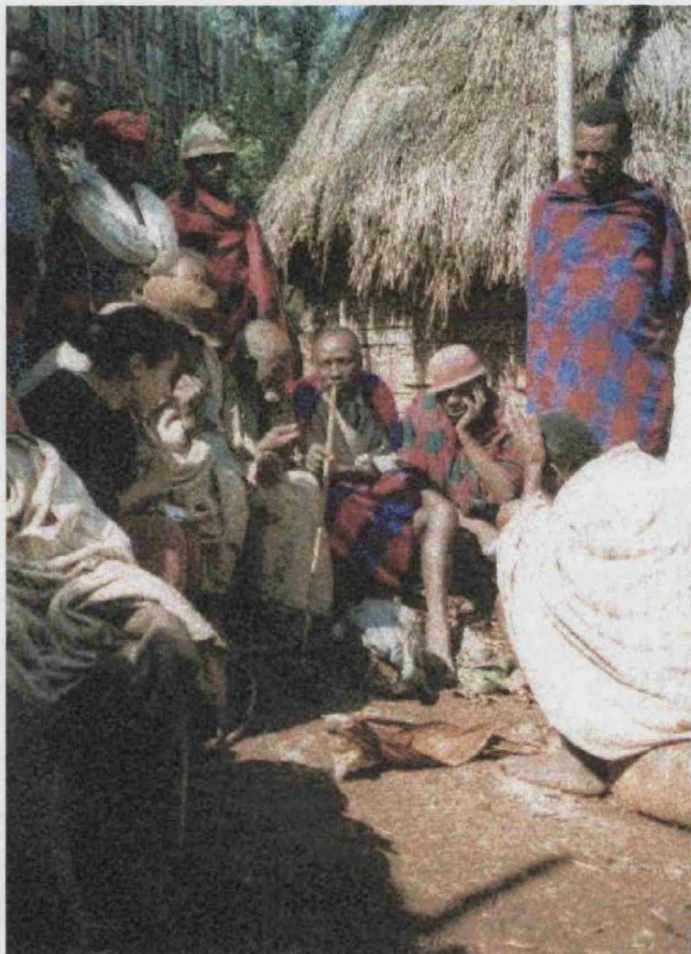
¹⁵ He is not, though, a *maaka*. See below.

supposed to make an offering to the spirits and sow his land first, before anybody else can begin work on their own land. In 1995-7 this practice was taking place, and I was allowed to attend.

In 1996 the *dere* provided Indalle with a male sheep to kill, and each neighbourhood, or *guta*, of Masho supplied a pot of wheat beer, and some ground barley and barley porridge to feast on. Some men of the *dere* were invited to spend the day feasting on this food in the *ek'k'a's* house, although not everyone could come due to limitations of space. The guest list alters from year to year, but only initiated men are allowed to attend. In the afternoon, after all the feasting had finished, the *ek'k'a* got up and prepared to kill the sheep. Before he did this all the men stood before him and sang a praise chant to him and his ancestors, known as *woze*. Then the *ek'k'a* killed the sheep with a spear in the abdomen, removed the heart and insides and put some blood on his forehead. The men of the *dere* returned to drinking their beer while the *ek'k'a* took the stomach fat and some seeds and went to his *sha?a*. There he hoed a little piece of land, buried the stomach fat and sowed some barley.

When he returned he removed the entrails from the sheep, and then he and the men sat around and considered what the entrails had to say. The most famous diviner had been invited, and he led the discussion, as a number of minor *gomes* were revealed. The *gome* caused by the *ek'k'a's* genealogical juniors not calling him to make offerings for them was mentioned, and a *dere* assembly was arranged for the following week to discuss one or two *dere* issues that also came up. Soon afterwards it began to get dark, and people started to make their way home. The next day people were free to begin to sow their land.

Because other people must wait for him to perform this ritual before they can begin to sow their land, the *ek'k'a* has some (limited) control of the productive process of his juniors, and thus derives some (limited) political and economic advantage. This may have been more significant in the past, but in 1990s Doko it is relatively minor. If Indalle tried to hold up the first sowing for some reason, it is extremely likely that the *dere* would simply choose to sow the land without him.



Entrail Reading at the *Ek'k'a*'s House on the Day of the First Sowing.



Making the *Maggana* Offerings.

It is curious that none of the other *deres* in Doko Masho have this practice, and that none of them recall having it in the past. Only in Doko Gembela do we find another practice that is clearly a variation on this one, and this is found just in the *dere* of Kale. The Kale *ek'k'a* is a little different from the other *dere ek'k'as* in that he is a *demutsa*. I will describe *demutsas* in more detail below, but it is sufficient here to note they are a particular type of *ek'k'a*, and with the exception of Kale, *demutsas* and *dere ek'k'as* are different people with different roles. Anyway, when the agricultural season arrives, the Kale *ek'k'a* hosts a feast in his house, similar to the feast that I attended in Masho. The most important difference is that in the afternoon, when the first sowing takes place, the *ek'k'a* does not do it on his own. Instead he goes to his *sha?a* accompanied by another type of *ek'k'a*, known as *maaka*¹⁶, and the Doko Gembela *hudhugha* (initiate). All three of them jointly hold the hoe, and they dig and sow the land together. After this, as in Masho, everyone is free to work their own land. No-one could explain this somewhat bizarre variation to me, and this is one of the puzzles to which I will return in Part Two of this thesis.

For all the *dere ek'k'as* in Doko, though, their most important role in the 1990s was their involvement in initiating *halak'as*. I will discuss their role in more detail in chapter four, but it is relevant here that in most *deres* the blessing of the *ek'k'a* and his sacrifice of either a sheep or a bull is a crucial part of the initiations. In some *deres* it is also the *ek'k'a* who presents the *halak'a* with the ceremonial staff, and who puts *uts'uma* grass on his head. At any rate, for many people the *ek'k'a* is 'someone who makes *halak'as*'.

Protestants obviously did not partake in any of these practices, and the followers of *Essa woga* only partook in those that were to do with the initiations. Both of them, though, would participate in assemblies when they had something to say. And since the *ek'k'a* was generally present at the assemblies, and had to bless it first before discussions could begin, this required some nominal respect even from those who did not follow *beni woga*.

¹⁶ See p126.

3.2.6 The *Kawo* and his Juniors

Deres on different scales had their own *ek'k'as*, and the *ek'k'a* for the whole of Doko was known as the *kawo*. According to *beni woga* the *kawo* could offer to the spirits on behalf of the whole *dere*, and thus was extremely important for its fertility and well-being. The changes that the position of the *kawo* has gone through in the twentieth century, in particular the appointment of *kawos* as *balabbats* under the national administration, have been described in some detail in chapter two. The last Doko *balabbat*, *kawo* Darza, died a few years before I arrived in the field, and while I was there his son, Desta, was part way through his installation to become the new *kawo*. The first part of the ceremony had been performed before I arrived, and Desta had sacrificed a bull for the *dere*.

However, the completion of the installation was being held up for a number of reasons, both traditional (arguments between Doko Masho and Doko Gembela about how and where the installation should be performed), and modern (a serious court case was being brought against Desta by one of the Protestants in the *dere*). Thus Desta's position as *kawo* was somewhat ambiguous, and he did not appear to play a central part in *dere* affairs. He did not perform any special sacrifices, he was not involved in initiating *halak'as* and there was nothing that he had to do before people could start sowing their land each season.

3.2.7 Summary

The sacrificial system in Doko in the 1990s, as described above, seems to be of relatively little importance. Although people believe in the spirits, and are aware who their respective *bekesha baira* and clan and lineage heads are, relations between these seniors and their juniors are rather unimportant. For the most part these relations do not affect political or economic life, and are merely ones of respect. The relation between a household head and his sons, though, is still one of authority and dependence, as only fathers can own land, slaughter animals and make offerings to the spirits. And there is

a hint of authority and dependency between the Masho *ek'k'a* and his *dere*, in that they must wait for him to sow the land before they can start their agricultural work. But the other relations seem merely symbolic, and rather insignificant.

It seems, then, that the 1990s version of the sacrificial system is rather weak. It looks like a system on the wane. One presumes that clan seniors and *ek'k'as* had more important roles in the past, and that what we find now is a shadow of its former self. The logic of the system suggests a neat hierarchy of conical domains, with the *kawo* at the top, but the actuality in the 1990s suggests a fragmented and devolved version, where the only significant relations remain those between a father and son, and between some *ek'k'as* and their *deres*. Given what we know of twentieth century history, it seems reasonable to see this system as one that is devolving, rather than evolving. This assumption is supported when we consider the 1960s version of the system, and get a glimpse of the less devolved version that preceded the current one.

3.3 The Sacrificial System In Doko in the 1960s.

According to people's accounts during my fieldwork, the sacrificial system looked rather different in the 1960s. Although the roles of the household head and the *dere ek'k'a* seemed little changed, the roles of the *bekesha baira*, the clan and lineage heads, and *kawo* were significantly different. At this time the *kawo* was *balabbat*, and his transformed role has been described in chapter two. In this section I will fill in the gaps regarding the *bekesha baira*, and the clan and lineage heads.

3.3.1 *Bekesha Bairas* and their Juniors

In the 1960s the relation between a *bekesha baira* and his juniors was extremely important. There were a number of practical consequences of this relation that rendered the juniors very much dependent on their senior. The most important of these was that at this time the vast majority of people, excepting the followers of *Essa woga* and the few Protestants, considered it very important to make the offerings to the spirits before

they started sowing or harvesting their land, and that to do this they needed to call their *bekesha baira*. If the *bekesha baira* refused to come, or chose to delay, then his junior had little choice but to wait for him before he could start to sow his crops. To do otherwise would anger the spirits and thus risk almost certain crop failure and disaster.

Once the *bekesha baira* had made the offerings in his own house and started to sow his own land, his juniors could start to call him. They each had to go to his house in turn, in order of genealogical seniority, and take a gift of raw barley wrapped in an *enset* leaf, a pot of wheat beer, and a male sheep, known collectively as *hinguts'ats'o*. As Sando, a Masho elder and *bekesha baira*, remembers it:

We are approaching the farming season. It approaches. I have a junior, a junior, a junior, four or five juniors. They bring *hinguts'atso* barley to my house wrapped in *enset* leaves. Carrying it and bringing it they come to my house. I put a mat by the *k'olla* and they put it there saying, "Come and make the offerings for me! I'm pouring it here. It's full." If they don't complete this, then I don't do make the offerings for them. It's known as 'calling', it's like saying "come to my house."

The *bekesha baira* would then kill the sheep by the *k'olla* and bless for fertility and prosperity for himself and his junior. He would put some blood on his forehead, and then eat the meat with his wife and children.

The next day or so he would go to his junior's house and kill another male sheep provided by the junior. This time he would kill it at the junior's centre-post, and again bless for fertility and prosperity for them both. He would put some blood on his own forehead, and then on his junior's forehead. He would be given the heart and the front right leg of this sheep to take home, and the rest of the meat would be eaten by them both with the junior's wife and children. The *bekesha baira* would then take some barley porridge and wheat beer prepared in the junior's house and make offerings to the spirits at the centre-post, the upper side of the doorway, the *bacha*, the *ts'ade gars* and on the land. After this the junior could make offerings at the *k'olla* and on the lower side of the

doorway. Then the *bekesha baira* would go to the junior's *sha?a* and hoe a little piece of land and sow a small amount of grain. No manure would be used on this occasion, and only after all this could the junior begin to sow his land.

A number of things should be noted here. Firstly, some points should be made about ownership. Although it is true that at some level the junior owned his own land, it was also the case that the *bekesha baira* had certain rights to this land. After all, it could not be sown or harvested without his permission. Secondly, attention should be drawn to the significant economic exchange that took place. Barley, wheat beer and meat were given to the *bekesha baira* by his junior so that he would make the necessary offerings. Here we have a proto-typical tributary relation. And thirdly, the political implications of all this should be noted. Because of the junior's dependence on the *bekesha baira*, there was considerable pressure not to anger him throughout the year. One man's apparent control of another's fertility created a relation of authority and obedience between them.

3.3.2 Lineage Heads, Clan Heads and their Juniors

The roles of both the clan and lineage heads were also more important in the 1960s, but even then they did not have the same degree of dependent relation with their juniors, as did the *bekesha baira*. Although both of them made offerings for their juniors, these offerings were not linked directly to each year's agricultural production, and thus had fewer practical implications. *Bekesha bairas* did not have to wait for their lineage head to sow their land before they could start their own agricultural work, and thus the system did not neatly magnify up in scale.

Rather, every four or five years or so, or when there were problems in the clan, the juniors of one lineage head would get together and ask him to offer to the spirits for them. They would all contribute money and one of these juniors who had the title of *mura* would go and buy a bull or a male sheep. On the specified day all the juniors would gather at the lineage head's 'spear house' (*tora kets*) where the lineage head would kill the animal. Lineage heads only slaughtered animals in a certain way. They had to use a spear, rather than a knife, and kill the animal by stabbing it in the abdomen,

and then pulling out the animal's heart and insides.¹⁷ As the lineage head killed the animal he made blessings for the fertility and prosperity of himself and all his juniors. He would put blood on his own forehead, and then on the foreheads of all his juniors in order of seniority.

Everyone would then go back to the lineage head's house for a feast. The lineage head did not have to contribute to the cost of the bull or sheep, and he kept the heart and the front right leg for himself, but he did have to provide ground barley (*kurch'aka*) for all his juniors to eat.¹⁸ They, in turn, would each come with a gourd of wheat beer. The lineage head would offer some of the wheat beer to the spirits and bless again for fertility. The meat from the animal would then be cut up into little pieces and spread out raw on some enset leaves. Everyone would sit in a line by this meat and feast on it with the ground barley and wheat beer.

Every eight or nine years, or even more infrequently if all is well in the clan, all the clan members would similarly get together and ask the clan head to offer to the spirits for them. The event was more or less the same as when the *angisa* made his offerings, only in this case the clan head could only kill a bull, and not a sheep. The second most senior man in the clan, who goes by the title of *debebe*, would collect contributions from all the clan members to buy a bull, and the clan head would then kill it at the clan assembly place, with a spear in the abdomen. He would put blood on his own forehead, and then dip a *mayo* leaf in the blood and flick it over the assembled crowd. Again there was a similar feast on raw meat, with ground barley supplied by the clan head and wheat beer provided by each participant.

Clan and lineage heads did not otherwise have any influence on the productive activities of their juniors. The content of the senior-junior relation between a *bekesha baira* and

¹⁷ Most people kill animals by cutting the throat with a knife. No-one could tell me the significance of this variation, and I note it here only for completeness.

¹⁸ The lineage head gave the head of the animal to his *degala* (tanner) in return for working the skin, which the lineage head then kept for himself.

his juniors appears to have been significantly more important than the relations between both clan and lineage heads and their juniors. Despite the similarity in form, and the apparent magnification of the same relation at a greater scale, we see that much of the political and economic significance of seniority was in fact not present at the higher scales, even before the Derg came to power.

3.3.3 Summary

This version of the sacrificial system certainly seems less devolved than its 1990s version, although the neat system of conical domains that is logically possible did not exist in this period either. The important role of the *bekesha baira* contrasts strongly with the relatively unimportant role that he plays in the 1990s, although the roles of the clan and lineage heads do not seem that important during this period. The fact that the sowing order was influenced by both the *ek'k'a* and the *bekesha bairas* (in some *deres* at least), makes it seem curious that the intermediary stages between them, the clan and lineage heads, did not affect the sowing order in turn. In other words, we might have expected that first the *ek'k'a* would sow, then the clan head, then the lineage head, then the *bekesha baira*, and then the household head. But instead, the upper and lower part of the system worked like that while the middle part did not. Although the historical memory of contemporary Doko people runs out at this point, it seems fairly likely that further in the past the relations between lineage heads and their juniors, and clan heads and their juniors, was more similar to that between *bekesha bairas* and their juniors in the 1960s.

In other words, even the 1960s version of the sacrificial system suggests that it is a devolved form of a previous, more hierarchical, version. And given that people said that they were beginning to stop calling their *bekesha bairas* in the late 1960s, even before the Derg period, it seems that the system has been devolving for some time. The actions of the Derg perhaps sped up this process, but it most certainly did not start it. The reasons for this devolution cannot be fathomed from this ethnography, and as I suggested in chapter two, it seems to have been going on well into the nineteenth

century, if not for longer. The versions of the system in the 1960s and the 1990s represent but two snapshots in the dynamic life of the system. From these sketches the structural principles of the system are clear, but the system has not been portrayed as a rigid structure.

3.4 Variation

From the ethnography discussed in the last two sections, the sacrificial system appears to be changing through time, but to be relatively constant in different places at the same time. There is evidence of temporal variation, but little suggestion of spatial variation. Where there have been spatial variations I have noted them, such as in the roles of the Masho and Kale *ek'k'as*, and in the differences of the personal *maggana* offerings of household heads, but for the most part there do not seem to be many spatial variations at all. Furthermore, those variations that I have mentioned seem fairly insignificant. They do not change the functioning of the system in any important way. It is rather odd that three people must hold the hoe together while doing the first sowing in Kale, but this does not have any serious implications for the average Kale man and woman. Likewise, if a particular household head chooses to make an offering round the back of his house after he has made the offerings at the other places, then this has no significant wider consequences which might render it particularly significant to anyone else.

Where there is spatial variation, though, is in different types of *ek'k'a*. As hinted at above, there are other *ek'k'as* in Doko who are not *dere ek'k'as*. These *ek'k'as* do not fit into the sacrificial system as described above, and they seem quite anomalous. Nevertheless, they are part of Doko life, and I shall include a brief discussion of them in the remainder of this chapter. There are three types of *ek'k'a* that I will consider - *demutsas*, *maakas* and mountain *ek'k'as*.

3.4.1 *Demutsas*

There are four *demutsas* in Doko Masho, all of whom live in Shale; and one *demutsa* in Doko Gembela, who lives in Kale. These *demutsas* are *ek'k'as*, and they do not cut their hair, and on certain occasions they sacrifice for the well-being of their followers. Their followers, though, are not defined by *dere* boundaries, and their sacrifices are not considered to be *maggana*.

The Shale *demutsas* sacrifice sheep for Shale, but their most important role stretches beyond Shale into other parts of Doko. They are rather like judges, and they are especially important in land disputes. In particular, they make a plaited bamboo known as *gik'a*, which can be used to protect people's land or property. If someone were to steal land where there was a *gik'a* erected, he would risk incurring serious misfortune from the supernatural powers of the *demutsa*. Communal land that should not be farmed or used for pasture during a certain period is similarly marked with a *gik'a*, and everyone knows not to use it.

I was told that in the past their houses were like law courts, and people would bring cases there. They also used to have a messenger, known as *barunts*, who worked for them. There are no *barunts* in the 1990s, but I did come across one or two instances in which land disputes were taken to the *demutsa*. In one family there was a man who kept selling land, much to his cousins' annoyance. The cousins tried to buy the land back, and even though land sales are currently illegal, his brother kept taking him to the court in Chenchu town about the case.¹⁹ The situation with one piece of land became particularly problematic. The man's brother brought a piece of paper from the court in Chenchu that gave him permission to farm this land, and he went with the cousins to hoe, and thus stake his claim, to this piece of land. However, the man who had sold the land followed his cousins there, and said 'in the name of the *demutsa*, don't hoe this land' (*demutsa amat gwoyopite*). Even in the 1990s these were strong words, so the cousins put down

¹⁹ This was a very sensitive issue, and I did not probe too far. For this reason I do not know how the case was presented to the court, and what the claim was.

their hoes and they all went to the *demutsa*'s house. After some discussion the *demutsa* did not forbid them to hoe the land, and thus the cousins jubilantly returned to their work. They spent the day farming, and the evening drinking, while their angry kinsman stormed off home.

Such is the role of the *demutsa* in the present, and I was unable to piece together anything more about it in the past. But *demutsas* command a lot of respect, and they have an unusual burial where their grave is filled with barley and wheat, and it seems likely that they had a more important role in the past.²⁰

3.4.2 *Maakas*

There are a number of different types of *maaka* in Doko, but only one type is considered to be an *ek'k'a*, and this is the *mits'a maaka*²¹. There are two such *maakas* in Doko Masho, one in Masho and one in Shale, and they both belong to the Maaka clan. These *maakas* are sacrificers, and they must not cut their hair or be initiated as *halak'a*. They do, however, have a role in the initiation of the *halak'as* in their *deres*. By sacrificing a sheep that has been passed over the shoulders of all the *halak'as*, they symbolically bind all the *halak'as* together as one. In *deres* where there is no *mits'a maaka* this ritual is not performed, as I will discuss in chapter four.

²⁰ In some other *deres* in the Gamo highlands *demutsas* have different roles. In Dorze the *demutsa* was a ritual specialist second only to the *kawo*, and he led a fairly secluded life (Sperber 1973:214). As well as making the plaited bamboos, they had an important role in the initiation of *halak'as*, and they sacrificed to control rainfall or certain species of wild animals, such as hyena (Olmstead 1973:233). In Dita and Dara the *demutsa* was the senior sacrificer, and there was no sacrificer called *kawo* in those *deres*. Both of these *demutsas* came from the Ts'am clan and sacrificed for rain.

²¹ The other types of *maaka* are not *ek'k'as*. One of them has a special role to sleep with the corpse of the dead *kawo* or *demutsa*, before his son is installed. Another type of *maaka* is called purifying *maaka* (*gesho maaka*), and he is responsible for clearing serious *gome* in Doko. A third type of *maaka* is found only in Doko Gembela. He is a type of *ek'k'a*, and he sacrifices in the Ts'udo forest. However, he is unusual in that his position is not inherited according to primogeniture, as with all other *ek'k'as*, but he is initiated in a manner rather similar to that of the *halak'a* initiations. He must come from a certain lineage of the Maile clan, but beyond that he becomes a *maaka* by feasting the *dere* like the *halak'as*.

The Masho *maaka* also had another interesting *woga* earlier in the twentieth century, although it is no longer practised in the present. He is the head, or owner, of the senior assembly place, or *dubusha*, in Masho, which is called Haile. Haile *dubusha* includes a large field which used to be cultivated by the *dere*. Every year the initiated men used to plough this land and sow barley. The *maaka* had to be the first person to stab the earth with the hoe, and then agricultural work could commence. Likewise he had to sow the first seeds, and manure was forbidden on this land. During the farming time the *dere* provided the *maaka* and the workers with ground barley and wheat beer to eat and drink. After the *maaka* had harvested the first bundle of barley the other men could begin the real harvest. All the harvested barley would be piled up by the side of the field. The *maaka* would then sit on top of this pile, and whatever barley that was covered by his cloth shawl was taken by him. The remainder was shared out amongst the *dere*. However, Haile has not been cultivated from since well before the Derg, because of the greedy behaviour of the *maaka*. People say that he used to spread his cloth shawl out very widely and then take home most of the harvest. Eventually people got fed up with his behaviour and refused to continue farming for him.

In the present the Masho *maaka* is still respected and considered to be the owner of Haile *dubusha*, and even though the land is not farmed, he still makes offerings to the spirits at a special bamboo pole that he erects annually in the centre of the field. Certain *dere* rituals take place at Haile, and the *maaka*'s seniority there is recognized. The significance of his role in the past is likely to have been more complicated than this brief sketch suggests, but no-one was able to explain to me how he linked in with the *ek'k'a* and other *dere* seniors. Some people suggested that he was senior to Indalle, the *ek'k'a*, because Haile *dubusha* was senior to Gad'a *dubusha*, where Indalle was head. Others said they were just different, and refused to rank them. The role of the *maaka*, then, is a rather incoherent piece of the jigsaw, and is a puzzle that will not be solved in this thesis.²²

²² *Maakas* have different roles in other *deres*. In Ochollo, for example, there is a *maaka* who looks after the gold insignia of the *kawo* between his death and the installation of his son, and also a *maaka* who purifies and clears *gome* (Abeles 1981:158, 182)

3.4.3 Mountain *Ek'k'as*

The *dere* of Doko is located in a dip within a circle of mountains. Each of these mountains has a special *ek'k'a* who sacrifices on their peaks at certain occasions. Some of these *ek'k'as* do not cut their hair, but most of them are allowed to. Two of them, the Surra *ek'k'a* and the Maazi *ek'k'a* are not allowed to be initiated as *halak'a*, while the others can be initiated without problem. The form of their sacrifices show many continuities, in that they all slaughter a male sheep on a mountain peak in a ritual that involves either the new *halak'as* or the young shepherd boys. Most of them also make offerings of barley porridge, and then feast on it while up the mountain. Some, though, perform the sacrifices during October or November, while others do them around March or April, and there are several other small variations.

These sacrifices were being performed during my fieldwork, and they are considered to be extremely important. No women are allowed to attend, and although this rule was waived for me in numerous other contexts, it was decided that on this occasion my gender barred me from the proceedings. The following, then, is an account of the 1996 sacrifice on the Surra mountain of Masho, as told to me by one of its participants:

The Surra *ek'k'a* climbed up the mountain followed by the new *halak'as* and the young shepherd boys. Some pots of barley porridge were carried by a few uninitiated men, and one of them led a bull with him, and another brought two sheep. Together they all proceeded up the mountain. At the top, the Surra *ek'k'a* killed the two sheep at a small lake, and buried the kidneys and the stomach fat. Then the men went to another place where there was a cluster of bamboo poles. Here everyone sat down in three circles and ate barley porridge. One circle was for *halak'as*, one circle was for the shepherd boys, and the last circle was for the uninitiated men who had carried the barley porridge up the mountain. When the food was finished, the Surra *ek'k'a* took the bull and led it round the cluster of bamboo poles three times. Then the oldest of the new *halak'as* slaughtered it. After that there was a free-for-all where each *halak'a* took his knife and tried to cut off as much meat as he could. It was chaotic and there was some fighting. Some of the meat was then eaten there, and the rest was taken home.

No-one was able to tell me the particular significance of this sacrifice, or how the mountain *ek'k'as* fitted into the sacrificial system as sketched above. As with the *demutsa* and the *maaka*, the mountain *ek'k'a* seems to stand outside this system, and essentially belongs to a different type of sacrificial system. And as with the others, the present ethnography cannot explain the situation.

3.4.4 Summary

I have provided these brief sketches of the *demutsa*, *maaka* and mountain *ek'k'a* because they are significant in 1990s Doko life. Although I cannot make sense of them, or fit them into the sacrificial system as described above, I include them for completeness. This chapter has not aimed to present some neat and idealised picture of Doko sacrificers, and thus all types of sacrificer have been described. Thus is the complicated reality of Doko cultural life.

3.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has portrayed the sacrificial system as it existed in Doko at two different points in time - in the 1990s and in the 1960s. These two snapshots allow us to see different versions of the system, and to see that it is dynamic and in flux. In this way the structural principles of the system have been elucidated, without however representing the system as a static 'structure'.

Furthermore, it has been shown that although there is considerable temporal variation in the sacrificial system, there is relatively little spatial variation. The sacrifices and rituals are performed in much the same way in different *deres* of Doko at any one time. What spatial variations there are seem fairly minor and insignificant.

Where there are variations, though, is with different types of *ek'k'a*, who seem to fall outside this sacrificial system. It strikes me that these *ek'k'as* are most likely cultural remnants from former versions of Doko culture in the more distant past. At any rate, their existence cannot be understood solely in the context of present-day ethnography, and they are included here in order to provide a full picture of Doko sacrificers in the 1990s. In the next chapter I will turn to consider the initiatory system, and all its permutations.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE INITIATORY SYSTEM

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the initiatory system in all its complexity. In contrast to the sacrificial system, as described in the previous chapter, the initiatory system exhibits remarkable spatial variation. As will become apparent, it is virtually impossible to talk about 'Doko initiations' in the way that it is possible to talk of 'Doko sacrifices'. All over Doko the form and meaning of the initiations differ. In total there are twenty *deres* that are part of Doko, and each one of these *deres* makes its initiates differently. Some of these differences seem rather small and inconsequential, but others are clearly significant structural variations. This presents a challenge for both the presentation of the ethnography, and its comprehension. Thus is the problematic of this chapter.

In further contrast to the sacrificial system, the initiatory system is considered by local Doko people to be fairly constant through time. While it was easy to discuss the different functioning of the sacrificial system in the pre- and post-Derg periods, it proved impossible to collect historical accounts of the initiations. People were adamant that the initiations had always been done the way they are done now, and that they were continuing to follow this *woga* in all its detail. This is somewhat paradoxical, because evidence of the dynamic, changing nature of the initiations was abundant, as I shall discuss in Part Two. But people certainly did not see the initiations this way. They invited me to attend contemporary initiations and were happy to give me standard accounts of how initiations were performed in their *dere*, but as far as they were concerned there was no history to tell. This chapter, then, presents the initiations as they were performed in Doko between 1995 and 1997.

4.2 General Principles of the Initiatory System

Although there is phenomenal variation in the initiatory system, there are some continuities between different forms that indeed clearly link these practices as being examples of the same kind of behaviour, or particular instances of the same system. In the first part of this chapter, then, I will outline these general features of the initiatory system, and explain in brief why people choose to be initiated in Doko, and what role initiates play in Doko cultural life. I will end this section with a consideration of the conceptual logic of the initiatory system and a discussion of how it relates to the sacrificial system, before moving to a detailed discussion of different forms of initiation in the following section.

4.2.1 Initiates in Doko

Previous researchers in the Gamo highlands have described *halak'as*¹ as 'dignitaries' or as elected leaders of the assemblies (eg. Abeles 1981, 1983, 1985; Bureau 1981; Halperin & Olmstead 1976; Sperber 1973). The focus of these studies has been on the *halak'a* as an elected political leader, and much attention has been given to his role in the assemblies, the manner of his 'election', and the system of exchange which forms an integral part of his initiation. There has been some interest in the different notions of seniority that underlie the initiatory system and the sacrificial system, but other than this there has been no attempt to gain a conceptual understanding of the *halak'a* or to consider his role in anything but the political and economic spheres. In this thesis I see the *halak'a* primarily as an initiate, and consider the initiatory system, like the sacrificial system, to be of ritual as well as political consequence².

¹ The word '*halak'a*' is generally thought to be of external origin. Most scholars assume that it derived from the Amharic word '*alak'a*', which nowadays means 'boss' and used to be the name of an officiant in the Orthodox church.

² Dan Sperber has come close to this position, when he writes, "there is good ground for considering that the whole term of office - not just the installation - is a ritually marked transitional period between the status of junior citizen and that of senior citizen,... which [the Dorze express]... in terms of generation" (Sperber 1973:215). Unfortunately, though, he never pursued this insight.

Each of the twenty *deres* that are part of Doko make their own initiates. To do so is indeed one of the characteristics of a *dere*. However, there are some differences between the initiates made at different scales of *dere*. The seventeen small *deres* of Doko, such as Masho, Dambo and Shaye, all make initiates generically known as *halak'a*. I will focus on these initiates for most of this chapter, and much of this thesis. The two medium sized *deres*, Doko Masho and Doko Gembela, make initiates known as *hudhugha*, and the large *dere* of Doko makes initiates known as *dana*. These latter two types of initiates differ from the *halak'a* initiates in that they require the distribution of far greater amounts of wealth, and that the initiates are accorded greater respect, but have little special role in the day-to-day affairs of the *dere*.

4.2.2 The Role of the *Halak'a*

Halak'as are said to 'herd' the *dere* (*dere hemo*). A *halak'a* who does this well is thought to cause the *dere* to be fertile. If he has 'good shoulders', the crops will grow, cows will calve, women will give birth, and the *dere* will live in peace and prosperity. *Halak'as*, however, do not herd by ruling or by imposing orders, but rather by observing a number of prohibitions themselves and by carrying out the will of the communal assembly. They are easily recognisable by their special garb and the ceremonial staff that they carry. They herd the *dere* for a certain period of time, anywhere between a day and several years, and then leave office and become *dere* fathers, or *dere ades*. As *dere ades* they are respected, and they will generally participate more actively in *dere* discussions and events.

A *halak'a* must wear his cloth shawl (*gabi*) wrapped to the right, whereas other men wear it wrapped to the left. Round his shoulders he wears a striped cotton cloth (*k'ole*)³ and, instead of trousers, he wears a wrap-around loin cloth (*assara*) tied with a cloth belt

³ The *k'ole* is a new innovation. In the past a black sheepskin, known as *zito*, was worn over the shoulders. Nowadays people in Doko prefer to wear cloth to skins, and thus the *k'ole* has replaced the *zito*. In many other *deres* the *zito* is still worn.

around his waist. He must not cut his hair, and the long hairstyle (*dishko*) with butter rubbed in marks him out from ordinary men. And he should carry his *horoso*, a ceremonial staff made with a wooden handle above an iron base and with brass twirls at the join and on the top.

As well as not cutting his hair, a *halak'a* should not fall down or let his *horoso* fall down. He should not enter a burial place or come into contact with a corpse. He should not beat his wife or argue with anyone, but should be calm and well-behaved at all times. When sitting with people he should sit in the middle and not on the end. In the past a *halak'a* was expected not to spend a night outside his *dere*, but nowadays this prohibition has been dropped and many young *halak'as* spend much of their time away weaving in the towns of Ethiopia.

These rules distance the *halak'a* from death and weakness and associate him with success and fertility, and most are still kept strictly. Their infringement is considered *gome*, and a cause of possible drought, crop failure or other calamity in the *dere*. In 1994 one of the Masho *halak'as* was found walking through a burial ground. After a long discussion at the assembly it was decided that this was such a serious *gome* that this man could not continue as *halak'a*. The *gome* had to be cleared by the sacrifice of a sheep and the *halak'a* was dismissed from office. In Masho there are a number of *halak'as* at any one time, but they are all considered as one. If one of them is expelled then they are all expelled. This caused a great deal of anger among the other *halak'as*, but the elders were adamant. All the *halak'as* were removed from office, and a man who had been *halak'a* before was put in their place to herd the *dere* until next *Mesqalla* when the next batch of *halak'as* could take over.

The most visible role of the *halak'a* is in the communal assemblies (*dere dulata*). These assemblies are open to all male *mala*, and all kinds of communal issues are discussed. Conflicts between individuals are resolved, dates for communal rituals are set, and infringements of *gome* are discussed and plans are made to clear them. Before discussions can start, the assembly must be blessed. The head of the *dubusha*, usually

the *dere ek'k'a*, will stand in front of the assembly and bless the *dere* to be fertile. Then the *halak'as* bless, and finally some of the elders. The purpose of the assemblies is to keep the *dere* in a state of reconciliation (*mak'aino*), which is the prerequisite for the flow of fertility. They are a central part of Gamo life, and I will deal with them more fully in chapter six.

Halak'as do not rule over these assemblies or have any rights to impose their views on others. They have no authority to make decisions, and their role is to carry out the decisions of the assembly. *Halak'as* may be sent to bring a defendant who has not arrived, or to represent their community at the assembly of another community. If a sacrifice is required to clear *gome*, or for any other reason, then the *halak'a* may be told to carry it out. In some *deres* the *halak'a* may introduce the issues for consideration and may sum up after lengthy discussions, whereas in other *deres* the *halak'a* may be more a messenger of the assembly. In part this depends on the personality of individual *halak'as*, but there is also a variation between *deres* as to the age at which one becomes *halak'a*, and this affects the degree to which *halak'as* are active in the assemblies. In Masho men become *halak'a* at a relatively young age (late twenties to thirties usually), and the experience is partly one of learning the art of rhetoric, the rules of the assembly and the forms of blessing. In the *deres* of Doko Gembela though, older men become *halak'a* and thus they are more vocal at the assemblies.

4.2.3 Who becomes *Halak'a*?

In theory any male *mala* can become *halak'a*. This is often emphasised by the people themselves, and the ideology of democratic equality pervades the institution. In practice the percentage of men that actually become *halak'a* varies greatly from *dere* to *dere*. In most of the *deres* of Doko Gembela only about 10% of all men become *halak'a*, while in the *deres* of Doko Masho the figure is closer to 60%.⁴

⁴ The figure for Doko Gembela comes from Dan Cartledge's data. His survey in 1993 revealed that 9.25% of household heads had been initiated as *halak'a* (Cartledge 1995:80, 121, 171). This percentage is similar to that found in Dorze in the early seventies, when Dan Sperber suggested that about 10% of men became *halak'a* (Sperber 1973:216). The higher figure for Doko Masho derives from my own survey in Masho.

This difference is connected to the variation in two rules about becoming *halak'a*: the number of *halak'as* that can be initiated at a time, and whether or not the *halak'a* has to be married. In some *deres*, such as those in Doko Gembela, only one *halak'a* is appointed at a time, whereas in other *deres*, such as those in Doko Masho, many *halak'as* are appointed at the same time. Clearly more men are going to have the opportunity to become *halak'a* in *deres* where many *halak'as* are appointed at one time. And in some *deres* only married men are eligible to become *halak'a*, while in other *deres* unmarried men can and do become *halak'a*, even when they are as young as eleven or twelve. When men can become *halak'a* at such a young age then it is clear that more men in the *dere* will have the opportunity to become *halak'a*.

In all cases, it should be pointed out, it is more accurate to say that a couple become *halak'a*, either a man and his wife, or a man and his mother. In no case can a man become *halak'a* on his own. The wife/mother of the *halak'a* has no special role in the assemblies like her husband/son, but she too is subject to certain rules and prohibitions while they are herding the *dere*. She must not cut her hair, and must wear it in a special quiff-like style, known as *ante*. She should not fall over, or argue with people, and she should not sit with her legs crossed. If the wife/mother of the *halak'a* dies while in office the *halak'a* will be dismissed unless he remarries speedily.⁵

In all *deres* there is a further rule about the eligibility of men to become *halak'a*, and this is that a man cannot become *halak'a* before his father or elder brothers. In *deres* such as those in Doko Gembela where only a small proportion of men get to become *halak'a* this rule is significant because it means that *halak'a*-ship is in effect generally restricted to senior brothers in senior lines⁶. In *deres* such as those of Doko Masho, where more

⁵ If a *halak'a* argues with his wife/mother and she spends the night away from him then a man with the title *dortane* must spend the night with the *halak'a* until she returns. The *dortane* is junior to the *halak'a* and the title is taken by poorer people who cannot afford the elaborate *halak'a* feasts. He stands the *halak'a's* *horoso* in the ground at the assemblies and hands it back to the *halak'a* when he leaves. It seems the *dortane* had other roles in the past, but they have not been continued.

⁶ Sperber (1973:215) has made the same point for Dorze *halak'as*.

men become *halak'a* and do so at a younger age, this rule only orders priority and does not have a significant restrictive effect.

It is also of note that if a man becomes *halak'a* while his father is still alive, something that is very common in Doko Masho but less so in Doko Gembela, then the father also becomes *halak'a* along with his son. He too is subject to the same rules and prohibitions and must carry out the wishes of the assembly. If the assembly requires a sacrifice to be made then it is the father who will make it and not the son, because a son cannot offer sacrifices while his father is still alive (see chapter three). It is common these days in Doko that young men who spend most of their time away from Doko weaving in the towns will come back for their initiation as *halak'as* and will then spend the rest of their year in office away from Doko while their fathers carry out the politico-ritual duties of the *halak'a*.

The case of Abera Yesa⁷ is not unusual. Abera was born in Masho to a good farming family. When he was young he went away weaving with his father's elder brother's sons, to a town in Bale, in southeast Ethiopia. The older boys had been there a while before they took Abera, who was only a boy when he went. He grew up in Bale, as part of the group of Masho weavers who live there throughout the year, and he thus speaks Amharic and is used to town life. Some years ago he joined the Protestant church, much to the horror of his father. Since then his father and the *dere* have insistently asked him to leave the church and become *halak'a* in Masho. He refused a number of times, but eventually they succeeded in persuading him, and he agreed. In 1994 his name was announced as one of those who would become *halak'a* next year. He returned from Bale a few weeks at a time in order to go through the various stages of the initiation rituals, but managed to spend most of his 'herding' year living in Bale, while his father performed the duties of the *halak'a* in Masho. He now continues to live in Bale with his wife and two young children.

⁷ This is a different Abera to the one we met in the last chapter, Abera Amano. It is currently a rather popular name in Doko.

4.2.4 The Relation between the Initiatory and Sacrificial Systems

The status change that a man accomplishes through initiation is that from *dere* son to *dere* father. Uninitiated men are known as *k'ach'ina*, and they are considered to be juniors in the *dere*, while initiated men are *dere ades*. During the process of initiation the initiate is properly referred to as *halak'a*⁸. It is while he is *halak'a* that he 'herds' the *dere*, and carries out the duties described above. Thus, like the sacrificial system, the initiatory system conceptualizes seniority according to fatherhood. However, despite the same metaphorical allusion, initiatory seniority is rather different from sacrificial seniority. According to the logic of the sacrificial system, 'fathers' and 'sons' are two components of a hierarchical relation, but in the initiatory system 'fathers' and 'sons' are structured as categories. The categories exist with respect to each other, but any particular father is not father to any particular son. He is simply 'a father'.

Dan Sperber has written cogently about the 'paradoxes of seniority' that are found in the co-existence of the categorical seniority of the initiations and the relational seniority of the sacrifices in the Gamo highlands (Sperber 1973). Pointing to the lack of integration between the two cultural systems he writes that they, "co-exist, interfere with, complement each other, and to certain extent compete"(ibid:209). Given that both the sacrifices and the initiations are based on the notion of 'fatherhood', it might seem strange to consider them as two separate systems. I think it is correct to do so for several reasons.

Firstly, it is an ethnographic fact that the sacrifices and initiations are conceptualised as different things by the people of the Gamo highlands. This is clear from the way they talk about them, and from the fact that certain people prefer one system over the other. The followers of *Essa Woga*, for example, partake in the initiations, but not in the sacrifices. This clearly shows that they consider the two to be distinct phenomena. People also considered the sacrifices and the initiations to have different ontological

⁸ This term is sometimes also used for men who have already been through initiation, but for clarity I will only refer to them as initiated men, or *dere ades*.

statuses. While initiates were clearly ‘man-made’ or ‘cultural’, sacrificers were more ‘natural’. Genealogical seniority, unlike initiatory seniority, is seen as a ‘natural’ or ‘obvious’ fact. How such seniors should be treated is open to discussion, but who they are is clear to everyone (including followers of *Essa Woga* and the Protestant church). *Dere* seniors might seem slightly less ‘natural’, but they are still more ‘natural’ than initiates, who are not ‘natural’ at all. People took it for granted that, even in England, my father would be senior to his younger brother, because that is simply how things are. They did not imagine, however, that English people made initiates, because that is part of Gamo *woga*. This shows, then, that they are considered to be quite different types of phenomena.

Secondly, if we look at the broader regional context of southern Ethiopia, we find, as mentioned in chapter one, that several societies have either sacrificial or initiatory systems, and that the Gamo highlands are relatively unusual in having both. This regional distribution supports the notion that the sacrifices and the initiations are two distinct systems, and not different aspects of one integrated system. And, as I will discuss in more detail in chapter five, it may well be that the Gamo sacrifices and initiations have different historical origins.

However, since these two cultural systems co-exist among the same people, there has inevitably been some degree of integration between them. Sacrificers have an important role in making initiates, and initiates often sacrifice for the *dere*. However, for the most part, the relation between the two systems can be seen as accommodation, rather than integration. Instead of merging so that they share one overall logic, the two systems preserve their differences, while accommodating each other.

For example, the fact that men cannot become *halak’a* before their fathers or elder brothers is a clear accommodation to the logic of the sacrificial system, because seniority-by-birth should be irrelevant according to the logic of the initiatory system. Although the initiatory system incorporates this rule, it continues to focus on seniority-by-achievement. Another example of accommodation concerns the rule about whether

kawos can be initiated. According to the logic of the sacrificial system the *kawo* is the senior of the *dere*, and so it does not make sense for him to be initiated, as he cannot become more senior than he already is. However, it would also seem improper to forbid the *kawo* from eating at the *halak'a* feasts, which would follow according to the logic of the initiatory system. This contradiction is resolved by allowing the *kawo* to give the feasts without actually becoming *halak'a*. In this way he can eat at subsequent *halak'a* feasts without having been initiated himself.⁹ By these sorts of measures the two systems retain their distinctiveness without being entirely separated from each other in either discourse or practice.

It is not always easy to find ways to accommodate the two systems, however, because in many respects they are directly contradictory. While the sacrificial system emphasises hierarchy in all social relations, the initiatory system stresses equality amongst initiates. Thus, for example, if both a lineage head and his junior have become *halak'a*, then the logic of the initiatory system would regard them as equals, while the logic of the sacrificial system would regard them as senior and junior. In practice, people will try to manipulate this ambiguity to their own advantage in different contexts, and it is not unusual for genealogical juniors to try to assert some kind of equality with their seniors by emphasising their status as *ades*. Sons living in their father's house are particularly sensitive to such possibilities, as the following ethnographic vignette shows.

One day I came home and found Shagire, his son Wale, and about twelve of their close patrilineal kin feasting in the house. When I asked what this feast was for Wale started joking around, and said that he was becoming *dabo halak'a*¹⁰. Most of the kin fell about laughing, and clearly thought this was a great joke. However, Shagire, usually the one

⁹ Most sacrificers are in fact initiated as *halak'a*, and all *dere ek'k'as* should be initiated by the time their father dies and they take office. The *kawo*, however, cannot be initiated, but instead he can simply provide the feasts so that he can eat at other *halak'a* feasts. This appears to be an innovation made after many arguments between the *kawo* and the *dere* in the past. Other sacrificers, such as the *demutsa*, *maaka* and certain of the mountain *ek'k'as*, are not allowed to be initiated at all.

¹⁰ 'Dabo' means 'kin' or 'family'.

with the wildest sense of humour, got up angrily and walked outside, muttering “you’re not the *dabo halak’a*”.

The feast was in fact for something entirely different. The group of patrilineal kin had recently started up a work group together, and instead of paying the group to work his land, Shagire had decided to throw a feast.¹¹ The providing of this feast had been a source of tension between Shagire and Wale. Ideally Wale should work with his father and they should farm the land together. Then Shagire would throw such feasts with the produce from his land, and he would appear able and generous, having appropriated Wale’s labour through the relations of production, as described in chapter two. But Wale has become a Protestant, and he refuses to work the land with his father and instead works as a carpenter, building modern style houses in Doko and in the nearby towns. On this occasion Wale had been persuaded to pay for the feast with money that he had earned through his work. Whilst Shagire thought that this money was rightfully his, as father of the house, Wale thought that the money was rightfully his because it was the fruit of his labour. In this context Wale’s joke about becoming *dabo halak’a* is revealing. He was implying that by distributing his wealth he was buying fatherhood in the family, and thus equality with Shagire. Painfully aware of his lack of control over his son’s wealth, and thus his diminished ‘fatherhood’, Shagire felt the jibe sharply and left the group in anger. As mentioned in chapter three, the tension between fathers and sons is a recurring theme, and both the sacrificial and initiatory systems can be used as weapons in this inter-generational battle.

On a practical level the initiatory system has important implications for social life. Firstly, it opens up avenues for individual ability and achievement to be rewarded. In the sacrificial system all statuses are rigidly ascribed and there is little possibility for social improvement. Juniors are born juniors and will always remain juniors. But in the initiatory system juniors can achieve some degree of equality with their seniors by

¹¹ This new innovation builds on the past tradition of community work groups. One member of these work groups would usually feast the group instead of paying them in either cash or grain. Such feasting members are much respected for their effort.

becoming *dere ades*. Any man who works hard can better his position, and the ideology of the potential to achieve equality pervades the *halak'a* system.

Secondly, it affects the flow of surplus wealth. In the sacrificial system, particularly in its pre-Derg forms, surplus wealth is siphoned off from juniors by seniors, or from 'sons' by 'fathers', in the fledgling tributary relations whereby wealth flows up the hierarchy as fertility flows down. In the initiatory system surplus is still siphoned off by 'fathers' (in the requisite feasts), but the category of people who are considered to be fathers is different. Instead of the ascribed genealogical fathers of the sacrificial system, achieved communal fathers receive the surplus in the initiatory system. Surplus wealth from neighbourhoods is channelled through the *halak'a* and the feasts he must provide, to be consumed by the *dere ades*. Again this shows the direct competition between the two systems: they both compete for the same surplus.

This section has discussed the general features of the initiatory system, and has shown how it relates to the sacrificial system. Although they both use the same metaphors, they appear to be structured in very different ways, and the relation between them can be considered as one of accommodation, peppered by antagonism and challenge. A possible explanation for the co-existence of such contrasting ideologies will be discussed in chapter five, but the rest of this chapter will be devoted to portraying the actual form and functioning of the initiatory system in Doko in 1995-7.

4.3 The Form of the Initiations

As mentioned above, there are twenty different *deres* in Doko, and each performs its initiations slightly differently. Since, on the one hand, it would be extremely tedious to describe each version in turn, and on the other hand, it would be extremely flat and lifeless to draw up a matrix of variations, I have decided to opt for a compromise. In the first part of this section I will describe the initiations in the *dere* of Masho in full detail. This is the *dere* where I lived, and these are the initiations that I witnessed in all their intricacies. I will then present more briefly standard type accounts of the initiations in

five other *deres* - Dambo, Shale, Upper Losh, Kale and Shaye. In all cases I will divide the initiations into their component parts, so that the form will not become lost in a mass of ethnographic detail. This section will end with some brief remarks about these variations.

4.3.1 The Masho *Halak'a*

(1) Arrangement and Announcement

Whenever a boy is born in Masho the *dere* sends a *lazantsa*¹² to his father and demands a small cash payment. The payment that is made to the *dere* is already the start of the process to become *halak'a*. Later on, when the boy is adult and married he will volunteer to become *halak'a*.

In Masho any number of *halak'as* can be initiated in one year, and in 1996 there were fifteen. Once it has been arranged who will become *halak'a* in a certain year, there is the matter of its announcement. This takes place at Gad'a *dubusha* on the Naming Day (*Suntsa K'ama*) of the previous *halak'as*, in October or November. Thus as one batch of *halak'as* start to herd the *dere*, the names of the next batch of *halak'as* are announced. Sitting amongst all the *dere ades* (ie. all those who have already been initiated as *halak'a*), the *dere ek'k'a* announces the names of each *halak'a*-to-be in turn, calling out "tie *bullus* for Abera!" or "Goba says tie *bullus* for his son!"

Bullus is the name of the germinated wheat that is used as the agent of fermentation when brewing wheat beer (*perso*). It is tied above the hearth to dry and then it is ground into a powder. Telling someone to tie *bullus* is equivalent to telling them to brew beer. And this is exactly what is necessary for the next stage of the initiation.

¹² A *lazantsa* is a type of messenger who mediates between two units, most commonly between the houses of a prospective bride and bridegroom, but also between two parties in a land transaction and, as here, between a *dere* and a prospective *halak'a*. The *halak'a lazantsa* is always a *dere ade*.

(2) Beer Feast (*perso oosha*)

There is no change to a man's status after his name has been announced as a potential *halak'a*. He carries on with his life as normal until the following March or April, after the wheat has been harvested and threshed. Then he must sponsor a huge beer feast. He must provide enough beer for all the *dere ades* to drink well for a day. This requires 25-30 pots of beer (about 750-900 litres). When Shagire became *halak'a*, about thirty years ago, each *halak'a* had to produce this amount of beer by themselves. Nowadays people cannot afford this, and the neighbourhood, or *guta*, helps. Thus when Abera gave the beer feast he produced seven pots of beer and received another eighteen pots from *guta* and kin, as *woito*. These *woito* gifts are carefully noted, and when the donor becomes *halak'a* himself the equivalent gifts must be returned.

On the day the *halak'a*-to-be will sponsor two feasts, one in his house and one in the communal beer *dubusha*. Friends and neighbours, men and women, will come to the feast of beer and barley in his house, *dere ades* will attend the more extravagant beer feast in the *dubusha*. The *halak'a*-to-be hosts the feast in his house, while the *ek'k'a* leads the feast in the *dubusha*. No-one can drink in the *dubusha* until he opens the pots and flicks some beer on the ground for the spirits. Then the close kin of the *halak'a*-to-be pour out the beer and pass it round to everyone. Just as on the day of a marriage, two separate feasts are going on in two separate houses. And just as the focal point of the marriage day is the transfer of the bride from one house to the other, so the focal point of the day of the beer feast is the transfer of the *halak'a*-to-be from his own house to the *dubusha*, the house of the *dere*.¹³

This is how it happened when Abera and Yesa, the young man and his father we met above, gave the beer feast in Masho in 1997. A few days before the feast the Surra *ek'k'a* had come round to Yesa's house to put *uts'uma* grass and butter on the heads of all the family members, and from then on none of them could cut their hair. Abera was the first of the *halak'as*-to-be to give the beer feast this year, because he, or rather his

¹³ See chapter two for a full description of the marriage ritual.

father Yesa who will also become *halak'a*, is the oldest of this year's initiates. Thus there was a great feeling of excitement and celebration on the day of the feast. I arrived at Yesa's compound early in the morning of a bright Saturday in April and found a group of some twelve neighbourhood men already sitting inside Yesa's house eating ground barley (*kurch'aka*) and drinking wheat beer (*perso*). The Surra *ek'k'a* had come by before anyone else had arrived and had eaten a little bit of the food and drunk some of the beer, because he must eat before anyone else can start. He had then dashed off to another engagement. The men were now discussing the case of a stolen horse and trying to bring two parties to terms. A few women were sitting in one of the other huts also eating and drinking. Abera, Yesa and Mome, Yesa's elder brother, were running around greeting people as they arrived and serving up more barley and more gourds of beer.

More neighbourhood men and women continued to arrive throughout the morning, and soon the main house and two other huts were full of people eating and drinking, talking and laughing. By about 11 am the men who were *dere ades* started to leave and go to the beer *dubusha*. Some women were chosen to carry pots of beer from Yesa's house to the beer *dubusha*, and a few of the younger men were designated to distribute tobacco during the feast. A discussion ensued as to whether I should be allowed to enter the beer *dubusha*, as women are not allowed in. Some men said that I should stay here in Yesa's house, while others said I could come to the beer *dubusha*. Someone else suggested that I could come inside but not drink there, and his suggestion was finally agreed upon.

Soon most of the men had gone, and more and more women and children started to arrive, many bringing beer or barley as *woito*. The older women had now taken the positions in the main house, and most of the other huts in the compound were full of the happy sound of people eating and laughing. Yesa, Mome and Abera continued running around serving people, and their wives were busy dishing out the barley and beer behind the scenes.

Meanwhile all the *dere ades* were seated in the beer *dubusha* facing twenty five pots of beer lined up invitingly in front of them. The senior of the *dubusha*¹⁴ blessed the gathering,

May the blessing of the *dubusha* reach us!

May the blessing of the *ek'k'a* reach us!

May what you have bought here cause us to burp and pee!

The *ek'k'a*, Indalle, then opened the first pot and spilled some on the ground for the spirits. After he had drunk the first mouthful, close kin of Abera got up and started to pour out the beer into gourds and pass them around the expectant men. Everyone drank heartily and the spirit of intoxication soon filled the air. A little while later someone walked down to the front and presented a case to the gathering, rather like at an assembly, which in a way it was. Men continued to call out for more beer, and others periodically shushed them because they could not hear the case. And thus it went on for most of the day - drinking, joking and bringing reconciliation to the *dere*.

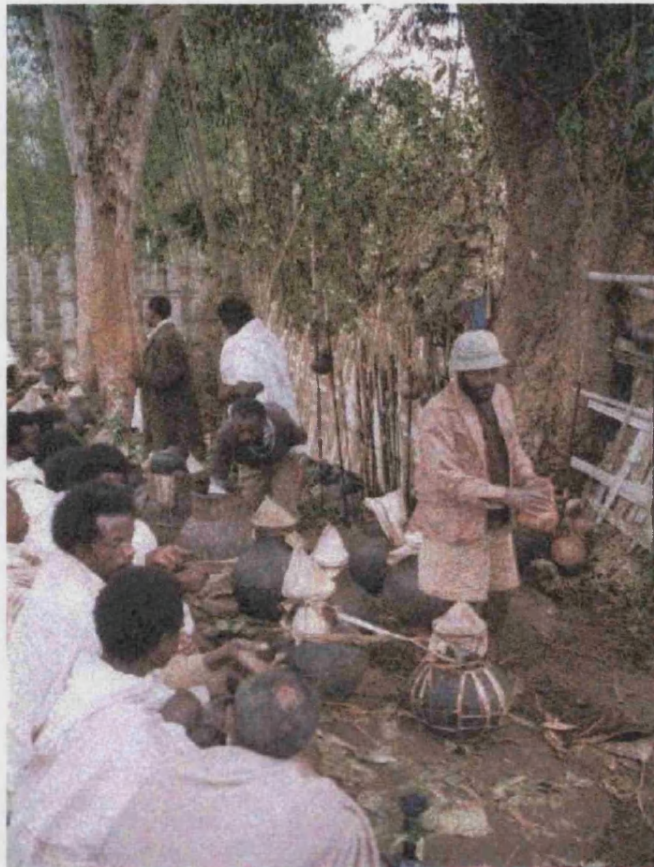
Back at Yesa's house, the women and *k'ach'ina* continued feasting, and by about 2pm the women started to sing. There are certain songs that should be sung on this occasion, and many of them are about beer. After about an hour of this singing Yesa, Abera and their wives went off to get dressed. The men put on the loin cloth (*assara*) and they all wrapped their clean white shawls to the right. The women started to sing a special song about good strong beer and how it should be plentiful in the future. Yesa took some butter and put a dollop on his head and on the heads of his wife, son and daughter-in-law. As the women sang the song about the beer, the four of them left Yesa's compound and, followed by me, walked as two couples towards the beer *dubusha*.

As we neared the beer *dubusha* the sound of men talking and laughing could be heard. They had finished resolving a number of disputes while drinking huge amounts of beer,

¹⁴ Although in most cases the senior of a *dubusha* is an *ek'k'a*, in this case the *dubusha* senior was a man from the clan on whose land the *dubusha* had been built.

and now they were joking and laughing and were clearly rather drunk. Some of the women who had helped carry pots to the *dubusha* were sitting outside the fence and also drinking. As we approached the *dubusha* it started to rain and soon it was pouring. Men started to run out of the *dubusha* and seek shelter. The *halak'as-to-be* were trying to enter. Some men were shouting at the others not to leave until the *halak'a* had entered. Amidst the chaos Yesa and his wife entered the *dubusha*, followed by Abera and his wife. Both couples walked across the *dubusha* and sat in a certain designated place at the front. The *ek'k'a* brought them a gourd of beer. Yesa and his wife drank three mouthfuls out of it together, and then Abera and his wife also drank three mouthfuls together. This is called *kacha*, like the food fed by the father on the marriage day. In other circumstances the two women would then have returned home and Yesa and Abera would have stayed drinking with the men. Because of the pouring rain, they all joined the chaotic exodus out of the *dubusha* into a nearby house for shelter. When the rain finally stopped it was beginning to get dark. Most of the men went home, and close neighbours went back to Yesa's house and spent the evening eating and drinking even more.

The next day close neighbours and those who had helped yesterday went back to Yesa's house for more eating and drinking. On this occasion seven *degala* came, five women and two men. They were not invited into any of the houses, but were seated outside in the compound. While everyone agreed it was right for them to come today, nobody made any effort to talk to them or to be nice. The hosts served other people before them, so that they kept demanding that they be served. Eventually they were brought roasted barley and beer. The barley was served in little plastic bowls to each of them individually, and not in a large bowl for them to share, as was the case with everyone else. The *degala* complained that the bowls were not full and refused to eat until more was added. Finally the bowls were topped up and they started to eat. This feast carried on until around midday, when the *dere ades* went off to the beer *dubusha* for the beer feast of the next *halak'a*, and the others returned home. Since today's beer feast was given by someone who lived quite far away, these men did not go to the neighbourhood feast in the *halak'a-to-be's* house, but only joined in the *dere* feast in the *dubusha*.



Pots of Beer at the Beer Feast.



Drinking at the Beer Feast.

When Abera and Yesa had entered the beer *dubusha* they had symbolically entered the house of the *dere*, like a bride on her wedding day. This is the conceptual focus of the event, and the similarity with a marriage is explicitly noted. In fact, the *halak'a* is often referred to as the *dere's* wife. After the event their status had not changed, and they continued to wear their shawl to the left. Other than not cutting their hair, they were not yet subject to any prohibitions.

(3) *Mesqalla*

Mesqalla is the Gamo New Year and is the most celebrated day in the year. The old November date of *Doko Mesqalla* had some significance, because it meant that there was approximately nine months between the beer feast and *Mesqalla*,¹⁵ a time pregnant with significance. For it is at *Mesqalla* that the *halak'a* is considered both to give birth and to be born. Many people were keen to point out to me that the *halak'a* is like a baby (*vid'a*) at *Mesqalla*, and that the red feather that he wears on this day is his *che?o*, the first cry of a new-born baby. For the next few months he will be in the state of *gach'ino*¹⁶, and must do no work.

In general *Mesqalla* is a time of birth and re-birth, and huge celebrations take place. In Masho the initiation of the *halak'a* is very much intertwined with these events and *halak'as* are initiated according to an annual cycle. In the morning all men light a torch from their fire and take it to a local neighbourhood *dubusha*. Brandishing these flaming bamboo poles, arriving men will 'yo' with those men already there. For example, when Tapas, a neighbour and cousin of Shagire, arrived at the *dubusha* he held his torch threateningly and chanted 'Yo-ayo! Yo-ayo!' The men at the *dubusha* picked up their torches and went to receive him, also chanting 'Yo-ayo! Yo-ayo!' in a war-like manner. The two sides stood facing each other, chanting threateningly, and slowly edging

¹⁵ The Beer Feast ideally takes place in mid-February. This year it was rather late.

¹⁶ People are also in the state of *gach'ino* after marriage, childbirth, and circumcision.

towards each other. 'Yo-ayo! Yo-ayo! Yo-ayo!' And then suddenly they rushed towards each other and hugged and cried 'Yo-ho-ho-ho!'

This process of 'yo-ing' is one of the most central themes of *Mesqalla*. Groups of *mala* and *degala* 'yo' with each other, as do groups of men and women, and groups of men from different neighbourhoods and *deres*, not to mention individual people in the general *Mesqalla* greeting. As a process of marking difference and then temporarily merging that difference, it gives an insight into the metaphors that underlie the *Mesqalla* celebrations.

Like other men, the *halak'as*-to-be bring fire to the *dubusha*. On this day both they and their wife/mother wear a small red feather (*kets'a*) on the right side of their head. Later on in the day the men proceed from their small neighbourhood *dubushas* to Gad'a, one of the *dubushas* for all of Masho. As each neighbourhood enters they 'yo' with those already there. The whole of Masho, now all mixed together, then heads down to Pango, the market place and *dubusha* for the larger *dere* of Doko Masho. As senior *dere* Masho enters Pango first, followed by the other *deres*. They 'yo' together, and then everyone sings and dances until nightfall.

(4) Naming Day (*suntsa k'ama*)

A week or so after *Mesqalla* the new *halak'a* must take gifts called *ifate* to certain people. The most important one is the gift of a young female sheep that has not yet given birth (*uze*) to the man in the *dere* who became *halak'a* the longest time ago. This man is known as the *halak'a baira*, the senior of the *halak'as*. He feasts the *halak'as* on ground barley, and the *halak'as* provide the beer. Each *halak'a* must give him a sheep before they can proceed to the Naming Day.

The Naming Day is the day that the *halak'a* starts herding the *dere* and is thought to become good for its fertility. Early in the morning, before dawn, *k'ach'ina* boys (ie. those not yet *halak'a*) of the neighbourhood creep out and cut bamboo from other men's

land. Every man must allow one bamboo to be taken from his land, but if he is not careful then as many as fourteen of fifteen may be cut by the enthusiastic boys. Thus on this morning I joined my family as they crawled out of bed in the cold, damp morning and went to guard their bamboo.

The boys took the bamboo poles to the *halak'as* house and stood them against the fence proudly. The boys at the house where Dola, one of the 1996 Masho *halak'as*, lived were larking around and showing off about what big bamboos they had managed to cut. When the *lazantsa* arrived they were all served good food and were feasted until they were full. Many of the boys were going off to school at midday, so some of them ate earlier and left. When the *lazantsa* was ready, he went out and cut one bamboo himself. Then he erected it on the upper side of the entrance to Dola's house. As he did this two men came and blew a special horn called *p'o?ets*. They ate some food and then went off to the houses of other *halak'as*. After them some *degala* blew their horn, called *zahe*, as the boys erected the rest of the bamboo poles. One was placed on the other side of the house entrance, and the rest were placed all over Dola's compound. These poles are known as *gazo*, and are an acknowledged symbol of maleness and maturity. Like the centre-post, these *gazo* represent the father of the house.

The *lazantsa* then took a small piece of bamboo and combed it through Dola's hair, which by now was quite long. He then placed it above Dola's bed, on the wall of the *k'olla*, and some kin and neighbours that had come round to watch started to sing *basse*, a chant of praise to brave ancestors. Then, for the first time, Dola tied an ostrich feather on the back of his head. Like the *gazo*, this is also a symbol of maturity, showing that the *halak'a-as-baby* that was born at *Mesqalla* has now grown into *halak'a-as-boy*.

Shortly afterwards everyone was ready and the crowd of neighbours and kin escorted Dola, wearing the wrap-around loin cloth, with his shawl to the right, and with an ostrich feather tied to his head, to Gad'a *dubusha*. His wife, Gentero, and the other women stayed at home. The *degala* followed behind blowing their horns and everyone chanted *basse*. As they reached the *dubusha* the *dere ades* entered and the new *halak'as*

waited outside. The *dere ades* 'yo-ed' with those already there and then sat down in lines. The *ek'k'a* sat in the middle at the front, with the elders on either side. Younger men sat further back. Some young boys sat on a ledge overlooking the *dubusha* to watch what was going on, and the *degala* sat outside and below the *dubusha*, and blew their horns at the appropriate points. By about 5pm all the fifteen *halak'as* had arrived, and the proceedings started.

First of all the *ek'k'a* called out the names of next year's *halak'as*, as I described above. When this was over a close relative of each of the *halak'as*, who were still sitting outside the *dubusha*, stood in front of the assembled *dere ades* and held up a lump of butter (wrapped in dried *enset* leaves) that each *halak'a* was presenting to the *ades*. The *degala* blew their horns and the *ades* looked at the lumps of butter carefully and discussed whether they were big enough. Dola's was praised for being the largest, and eventually it was decided that all of them were of a satisfactory size. The *ek'k'a* then untied the bundles and began distributing the butter to all the *ades*. He walked around the crowd of men and placed a dollop of butter on each man's head. This soon descended into apparent chaos as the men argued that the division was not equal and that they had not been given enough and so on. Eventually all the butter was distributed and everyone was satisfied that they had received a more or less equal share.

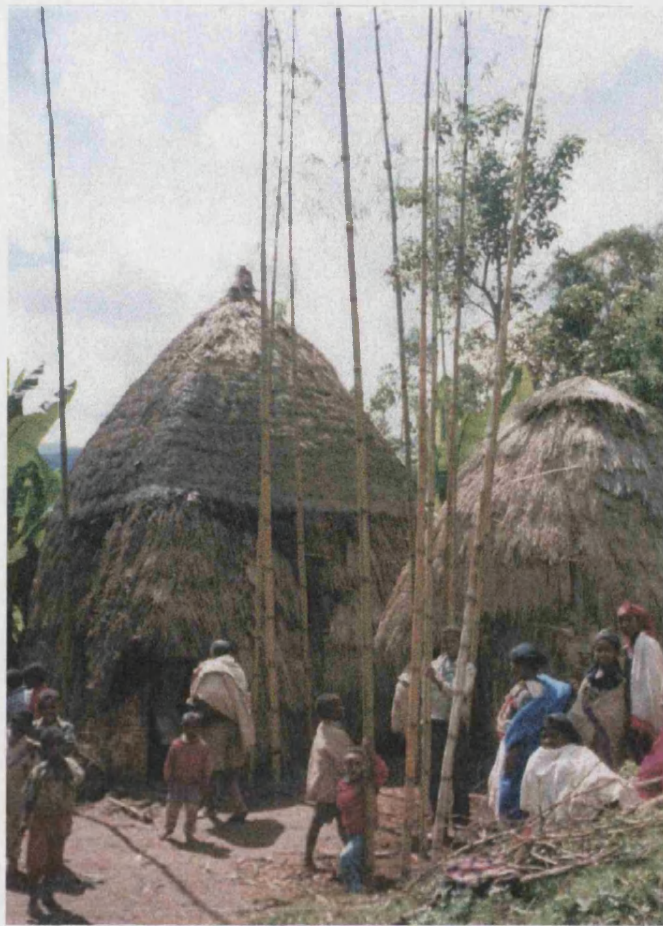
Then the fifteen *halak'as* were brought into the *dubusha*. Each was held on both sides by two close kin, brothers or cousins, and in this way they stood in an arc before the seated *ades*. Their shawls were arranged in a special way so that they hung over both shoulders. Then, supported by their kin so that they would not fall down, the *halak'as* bowed down in front of the *ades* and kissed the ground. Everyone cried out 'Yo-ho-ho-ho!' and the *degala* blew their horns. The *halak'as* stood up again, and all went quiet. The *ek'k'a* stood up and blessed,

May the blessing of Gad'a reach us!

May the *ek'k'a*'s blessing reach us!

May the shoulders of the *halak'as* be good!

May the shepherd boys herd well!



Erecting Bamboo Poles in the *Halak'a's* Compound.



Presenting Butter to the *Ades*.



Halak'a being helped with his Ostrich Feather.

May the *degala* too make their own *halak'as*!

We will celebrate *Mesqalla* as equals!¹⁷

After each sentence everyone responded 'amen', and at the end everyone called out 'yo-ho-ho-ho!' and the *halak'as* bowed to the ground and the *degala* blew their horns. Some of the elders then blessed in the same way, and the *halak'as* again bowed to the ground while everyone 'yo-ed'. On this day the *halak'as* accepted the authority of the *dere*, and that they would do what the *dere* asked of them.

When all the blessing was finished the men processed around the *dubusha*, led by the *halak'as*, chanting 'wolesole'. Then they formed a circle and sang and danced for a short while before it got dark and was time to go home.

(5) *Sofe*

Some twelve to fourteen days later it is the day of the *sofe*, the public show of a change of status. In the morning there is a small feast at the *halak'a's* house for kin and neighbours, but particularly for the wife's kin. They come and eat at their son-in-law's house, and present their daughter with a new shawl, cloth belt and necklace for her to wear at the *sofe*. By this day her hair will have been done in the quiff-like style of *halak'a* women, called *ante*.

Later on in the afternoon the *halak'a* again ties an ostrich feather to his head, and this time his wife wears a few small white feathers on her head, known collectively as *zazanto*. Both of them put butter on their heads, and then the kin and neighbours parade them to Pango, the market place and *dubusha* for the whole of Doko Masho, to *sofe*. *Degala* follow behind the crowd blowing their horns. In the crowd of people heading towards the *dubusha* kin are careful to support the *halak'a* couple so that they do not fall down, which would be a serious *gome*. Masho, as usual, must enter the *dubusha* before the other *deres*. They sit at their designated place, men and women separately, and wait

¹⁷ This is the best translation for the rare phrase 'awalagina mesqallsandos'.

until the other *deres* enter. When six of the eight *deres* have entered, everyone charges across the *dubusha* to the far end where the *dere* of Dambo are waiting. They all ‘yo’ and hug and mix up. Then this even larger crowd rushes across to the other side of the *dubusha*, where the *dere* of Shale are waiting. The *halak’as* and their wives and supposed to touch the hands of Shale people¹⁸, and again are supported by kin in this chaotic stampede. They all ‘yo’ and hug and mix up, and then the whole *dere* of Doko Masho marches around Pango *dubusha*, chanting ‘*wosolesole*’. Then each new *halak’a* and his wives go and sit on their own clan stone, which is found in the *dubusha*. There they drink beer together three times from a gourd, and they then go to join in the dancing that lasts until sunset.

(6) Sacrifices

A few days later the *halak’as* and their wives go to the *ek’k’a’s* compound. The *dere ades* sit inside the *ek’k’a’s* house, while the *halak’as* sit outside. The *ek’k’a* brings a full gourd of beer and holds it while each *halak’a* drinks three mouthfuls from it with his wife. Meanwhile the *dere ades* sit in the house and drink beer together. Then the new *halak’as* stand in one line, and their wives in other, and the *ek’k’a* mixes some butter with *uts’uma* grass and places some on their heads. He then presents each *halak’a* with a *horoso*¹⁹ and tells him to wear the striped *k’ole* over his shoulders from now on. He also tells them what they should and should not do as *halak’as*. He then lectures the women on what they should and should not do.

Then, after the women have gone home, the *dere ades* stay drinking in the *ek’k’a’s* house, and the new *halak’as* go with the *ek’k’a*, and the *maaka*, to Haile *dubusha*. The *halak’as* stand in a line and the *maaka* passes a male sheep over their shoulders from left

¹⁸ This is because Shale is known as the *dere* of the *kawo*. However, the present *kawo* does not live in Shale, and his family never has done. It appears there used to be a different *kawo* in Doko. I will discuss this in more detail in chapter five.

¹⁹ A family member of the *halak’a* will have brought the *horoso* to the *ek’k’a’s* house earlier on in the day. The *ek’k’a* does not buy the *horoso* himself.

to right. He then slaughters this sheep for the spirits and puts blood on his forehead. This sacrifice is not done in many of the other *deres*, and seems to bind the *halak'as* into one unit, such that if one *halak'a* is dismissed from office then they all must leave. After this the *ek'k'a* kills two male sheep, and a week or two later there is the sacrifice on Surra mountain, as described in chapter three.

The day after the sacrifice on the Surra mountain the new *halak'as* go with the *dere ades* to Bulogars *dubusha*. For the first time the *halak'as* bless the assembly. The *dortane* picks some grass and hands it to each new *halak'a*. Holding his *horoso*, the *halak'a* throws the grass and blesses, "sprout!" (*ach'ite!*). He then blesses the *dere* in full, as he will now do at the beginning of every *dere* assembly. Today the *halak'a* ends his period of being *gach'ino*, and can start to work again. From now on he goes about his day-to-day life and performs the duties of the *halak'a*, carrying out the will of the assembly, performing sacrifices and so on.

(7) Seniors' Feast (*baira musa*)

Many months later, in May or June, the *halak'a* has to provide the Seniors' Feast. This involves the preparation of huge quantities of the best Gamo food - roasted barley (*ocho*), barley and milk paste (*gabula*), barley and butter porridge (*gurdo*) and wheat beer (*perso*). In order to provide such great quantities of food and drink the *halak'a* must again rely on *woito* from kin and neighbours. Even when Shagire gave the senior's feast it was necessary to ask for *woito*, although he says that in his day *woito* was given predominantly by kin, and not by neighbours²⁰.

All the *dere ades* in the *dere* are divided equally between the new *halak'as*, and spend four days feasting in their house. Women who help in the preparation of the food, or in carrying it to the house, are fed in one of the other huts. Only the *ades* can enter the main house. For the *dere ades* these are pleasant days, spent eating and chatting with friends. On the fifth day the *degala* and their wives are invited to finish up the left-overs. Current

²⁰ See also Halperin & Olmstead 1976:150.



Eating at the Seniors' Feast.

halak'as must also give some money to the *dere ades*, about £20. This is because the feasts of today are said to be much smaller than those of yesteryear, and the *halak'as* must make up the shortfall in cash terms.

Once the *halak'a* has provided the Seniors' Feast, he is himself considered a senior - a *baira* or *ade*. He can now eat at the Seniors' Feast of other *halak'as*, drink at their beer feasts and in general participate in any *dere* feast. He continues to herd the *dere* until *Mesqalla*, and only then is his new status as a *dere ade* marked.

(8) Exit

On the day of *Mesqalla* the herding *halak'as* each wear an ostrich feather on their heads, while the new *halak'as* wear the small red *kets'a* feather. Instead of taking their torches to their neighbourhood *dubushas*, the herding *halak'as* take them to Haile, a *dubusha* for the whole *dere* of Masho, showing that they have now fully entered this *dere*. On the Naming Day, when the new *halak'as* enter Gad'a *dubusha* and bow down before the *ades*, the old *halak'as* leave office. They can now cut their hair and must put their shawl back to the left. They can still carry the *horoso* and can still be called *halak'a*, but they are now no longer herding the *dere* and are no longer considered good for its fertility. They have become *dere ades*.

4.3.2 The *Halak'a* in the *Deres* of Doko Masho

Initiations in other *deres* are carried out somewhat differently. However, amongst the eight *deres* of Doko Masho these variations are relatively small. The form of the initiations in two other *deres*, Dambo and Shale, are presented below in point form, to illustrate the type of variations that are found between these *deres*. Most of the same elements are present, although in some cases they are in a slightly different order. The scale of the Beer Feast is rather different in Shale, and it is referred to as '*Uts'uma*', rather than '*Perso Oosha*'. Both Dambo and Shale contrast with Masho in that the initiate is given a special stick, known as *gatuma*, as well as the *horoso*. And Dambo,

Dambo	Shale
<p>Many <i>halak'as</i> initiated at a time. If one <i>halak'a</i> is expelled from office, the others can remain. <i>Halak'as</i> do not have to be married.</p> <p>Announcement: <i>Dere</i> sends <i>lazantsa</i> to tell initiate. <i>Ek'k'a</i> announces names of initiates at his house, on the day of the butter distribution.</p> <p>Beer Feast: <i>Lazantsa</i> puts <i>uts'uma</i> grass on initiates' head, then initiate provides small feast at home for neighbours, and big Beer Feast in the <i>dubusha</i> for <i>dere ades</i> only. At the end of the day the initiate enters the <i>dubusha</i>, and is fed <i>kacha</i>.</p> <p>Mesqalla: Initiate wears red <i>kets'a</i> feather and is symbolically born.</p> <p>Butter distribution to <i>dere ades</i>, at the <i>ek'k'as</i> house. <i>Lazantsa</i> combs initiate's hair with small piece of bamboo.</p> <p>Bamboo poles erected in initiate's compound by <i>k'ach'ina</i> boys. (But no ostrich feather).</p> <p>Initiates each take a sheep to <i>halak'a baira</i>.</p> <p>Initiates go to <i>dubusha</i>, and a certain man ties an ostrich feather on their heads. Then they enter a special fenced part of the <i>dubusha</i>, and stand in a line and are blessed. (No kneeling or kissing the ground). Sing <i>wosolesole</i>.</p> <p><i>Sofe</i></p> <p><i>Dortane</i> gives the initiates a stick, known as <i>gatuma</i>. After this the initiate can simply take his <i>horoso</i> from home. The initiate makes his first blessing.</p> <p>Sacrifice: the <i>ek'k'a</i> slaughters a bull and a female sheep.</p> <p>Seniors' Feast.</p>	<p>Many <i>halak'as</i> initiated at a time. If one <i>halak'a</i> is expelled from office, the others are expelled with him. <i>Halak'as</i> must be married.</p> <p>Announcement: <i>Dere</i> sends <i>lazantsa</i> to tell initiate. <i>Ek'k'a</i> announces names of initiates at the <i>dubusha</i>, on the day of the <i>Mesqalla</i> fire.</p> <p>Uts'uma: <i>Ek'k'a</i> puts <i>uts'uma</i> grass on the initiate's head, then the initiate provides a feast in his compound. Only <i>ades</i> can enter the main house, while neighbours feast in the other huts. At end of day the initiate enters the main house, and is fed <i>kacha</i>.</p> <p>Mesqalla: Initiate wears red <i>kets'a</i> feather and is symbolically born.</p> <p>Initiates each take a sheep to <i>ek'k'a</i>.</p> <p>Bamboo poles erected in initiate's compound by <i>k'ach'ina</i> boys. Initiate kills a sheep, and uses intestines to tie ostrich feather on his head. Then initiates go to the <i>dubusha</i> and there is a butter distribution to the <i>ades</i>.</p> <p>Initiates go to five different <i>dubushas</i> in Shale, and drink a little beer in each. They sing <i>wosolesole</i> in one. Then they go to Zurgo <i>dubusha</i>, in Zolo, where they meet with initiates from Elo, Zolo and Kale. In the evening they return to Gots'olo <i>dubusha</i> in Masho, where they meet with initiates from Masho.</p> <p><i>Sofe</i></p> <p><i>Dortane</i> gives the initiates a stick, known as <i>gatuma</i>.</p> <p>Sacrifice: the <i>maaka</i> passes a sheep over the shoulders of the initiates and slaughters it. Then the <i>ek'k'a</i> slaughters a bull. After that the <i>Dortane</i> gives the initiates their <i>horoso</i>, and the initiate makes his first blessing.</p> <p>Seniors' Feast.</p>

along with the five other *deres* of Doko Masho, differs from Masho and Shale in that their *halak'as* do not have to be married. Likewise, Masho and Shale are the only two *deres* where the sheep-over-the-shoulders ritual is done, and correspondingly, they are the only two *deres* where all *halak'as* must leave office if one is expelled. And so on.

Even to list these small variations between only three *deres* is a lengthy process. There are many more such variations between all eight *deres* in Doko Masho, but nonetheless it is possible to see a common pattern. This pattern can be schematically represented as in Diagram 4, and described as follows:

Before the process starts the man is a *k'ach'ina*, a social child, not yet a full member of the *dere*, and unable to eat at most *dere* feasts. The *lazantsa* tells him of the *dere's* intention, and on the day of the Beer Feast he enters the house of the *dere*, as a bride enters her husband's house at marriage. Nine months later, at the next *Mesqalla*, he symbolically gives birth and is born. He has now entered the *dere* as a baby. The erection of *gazo* in his compound later mark his maturity as a youth, and he then kisses the ground in front of the *dere* to show his obedience to them. His new status as *halak'a* is then marked by his *sofe* in the market place. He is presented with the *horoso*, and 'herds' the community, as a son herds his father's cattle. Later he gives the Seniors' Feast, proving that he is a provider, and thus he becomes an *ade*. At the next *Mesqalla* he exits his ritual state, and becomes a *dere ade*, a full member of the *dere*, able to partake in all the feasts.

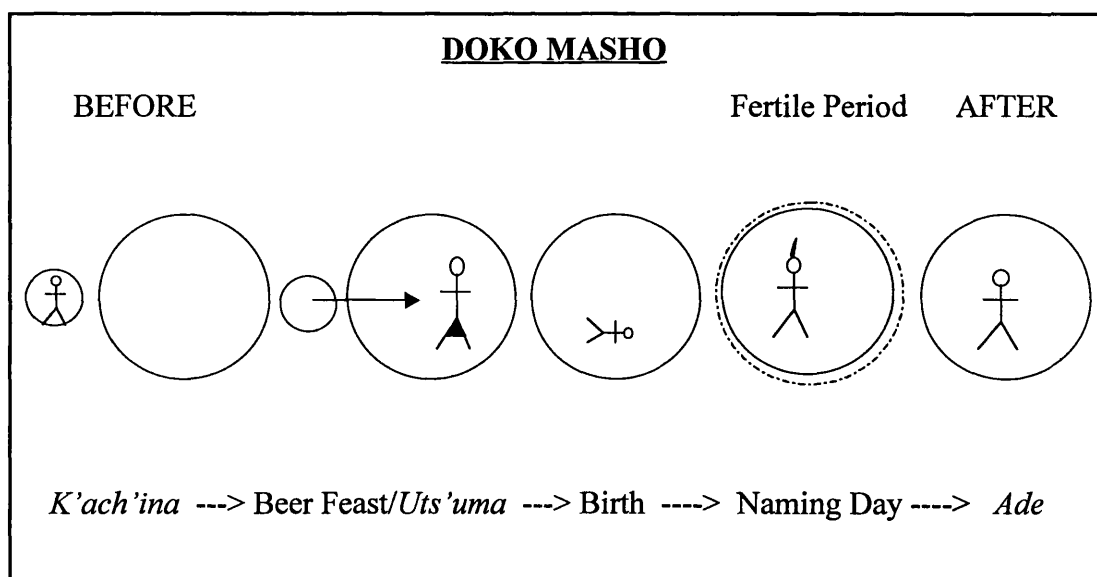


Diagram 4: *Halak'a* Initiations in the *Deres* of Doko Masho.

4.3.3 The *Halak'a* in Upper Losh

This general schematic model of initiations, though, does not apply to all initiations in Doko. In the *deres* of Doko Gembela the initiations take a quite different form, and in this section I will sketch in outline the form of the initiations in the *dere* of Upper Losh. Initiations do not take place every year in Upper Losh, and the last *halak'a* was made in 1992. The *dere ek'k'a* has now joined the Protestant church, and no longer performs his traditional role. So unless he decides to leave the church, future initiations will certainly not be performed exactly as they were in 1992, and as described below.

(1) Arrangement and Announcement

The *dere ek'k'a* and the elders go to Mago *dubusha* and discuss who should be made *halak'a*. Only one *halak'a* is chosen at a time, and he must be a married man of fairly advanced age. When they have reached their decision, they send a messenger to tell him. This messenger is called an *u?e*, which is also the name of the little flies that buzz around piles of cow dung. In Upper Losh it is not important whether he is an *ade* or a *k'ach'ina*.

The *u?e* goes to the home of the *halak'a*-to-be and stands outside his house. If the name of the *halak'a*-to-be and his wife were, for example, Sando and Ts'altamo, the *u?e* would then call out "Losh *halak'a* Sando!" Assuming Sando agrees to become *halak'a*, he then replies "yeh." The *u?e* repeats his call a second and then a third time, and each time the initiate responds "yeh." Then the *u?e* calls out "Woman of Losh Ts'altamo!²¹", and Ts'altamo replies "yeh." Again this is repeated three times. The *u?e* then enters the initiate's house and tells him and his wife to wrap their cloth shawls to the right from now on. He then spends the rest of the day at their house, eating and drinking with a few neighbourhood people. On this day the initiate is said to be a like a newborn baby. He enters the state of *gach'ino*, and stops work.

²¹ The phrase in Gamo is 'Losh *ishire*'.

(2) Seclusion

For the next seven days the initiate and his wife remain in seclusion and must not leave their house.

(3) *Uts'uma*

On the seventh day the *ek'k'a* comes to the initiate's house, and does *uts'uma*. The initiate and his wife sit on the bench by the centre-post of the house and the *ek'k'a* puts some *uts'uma* grass mixed in butter on their heads. From now on they must not cut their hair. He then feeds them each with three mouthfuls of barley and milk paste (*gabula*), and the initiate and his wife together drink three mouthfuls of wheat beer from the same gourd. This feeding is known as *kacha*. Finally the *ek'k'a* presents the initiate with his *horoso*, and the rest of the day is spent eating and drinking with the initiate and his kin and neighbours.

(4) Presentation of *lashuma*

A few days later the initiate takes some butter, barley and wheat beer to Kasha *dubusha*, and gives it to the *ek'k'a*. Once this is done he goes to join the *dere* elders at Mago *dubusha*, and the *ek'k'a* presents the initiate with a stick, known here as *lashuma*. The *Dorane*²² then picks some grass and hands it to the initiate. Holding the *lashuma*, the initiate throws the grass on the ground and makes his first blessing.

(5) Work Days

The initiate has still not started to herd the *dere*, and he must now finalise his preparations for the feast he must soon throw on his Naming day. He will generally hold a small feast, where people are invited to come and eat and to pledge *woito* gifts, and a couple of work-days, during which kin and neighbours spend the day at his house,

²² *Dorane* and *dortane* are localised variants of the same word.

chopping firewood, grinding grain and generally preparing for the feast. The initiate must provide food and drink for these days.

(6) Naming Day

A few weeks later it is the Naming Day, which is always on a Saturday in Upper Losh. Early in the morning *k'ach'ina* boys from the neighbourhood go to cut bamboo. Only two or three bamboo are cut, and thus people do not feel the need to guard their bamboo, as they do in Masho. The first bamboo pole, or *gazo*, must be erected in the initiate's compound by the *ek'k'a*. After this the others are erected by the *k'ach'ina*. One will always be placed either side of the compound entrance, and the others can be placed anywhere. They are, however, generally not placed by the house entrance, as in the *deres* of Doko Masho.

Later on in the morning there is a small feast at the initiate's house, and kin, in-laws and neighbours are invited to come and eat. In the early afternoon the men parade the initiate to Gad'a *dubusha*. All the *dere ades* sit inside, and the exiting *halak'a* sits on the special *halak'a* stone. The initiate waits outside while a close kinsman holds up the butter that he is presenting to the *dere*. If the *ades* decide that it is sufficient, it is then unwrapped and distributed to all the *dere ades*. The initiate is then brought into the *dubusha* and blessed by the *ades*. He is held on each side as he bends down to kiss the ground, and accept the authority of the *ades*.

Then the initiate goes over to the exiting *halak'a* and together they drink three mouthfuls of wheat beer from the same gourd. The exiting *halak'a* then gets up from the *halak'a* stone, and the new *halak'a* takes his place. He now officially starts to herd the *dere*.

The rest of the day is spent drinking wheat beer that the *halak'a* has provided. This Beer Feast takes place in the same *dubusha*, and large quantities of beer are consumed. *K'ach'ina* men are also invited to participate in the drinking, although separate pots are

allocated to them. There will usually be seven pots for the *ades* and seven pots for the *k'ach'ina*.

(7) *Sofe*

The next day, Sunday, is the *sofe*. In the morning the feasting continues in the *halak'a's* house. Then in the afternoon the *halak'a* and his wife get ready to *sofe* in the two main *dubushas* of Doko Gembela. The wife's hair is done in the special quiff-like style, called *ante*, and a generous amount of butter is rubbed over it. Some white chicken feathers and some red *kets'a* feathers are tied onto two small sticks and tied on either side of her head. She wears a new white shawl, wrapped to the right, and many necklaces. The *halak'a* also wears a new white shawl wrapped to the right, plus the striped *k'ole* cloth over his shoulders, and the loin-cloth, *assara*, tied round his waist with a cloth belt. The *ek'k'a* ties a large white ostrich feather to the back of the *halak'a's* head, and on his forehead he ties a *kallacha*, a metal phallus. The initiate rubs some butter on his head and he carries a spear. Thus decked out he and his wife parade to Alipango *dubusha*, accompanied by their neighbours and relatives.

The whole crowd parades around Alipango *dubusha*, singing and chanting, while the *degala* blow their horns. Then the *halak'a* and his wife sit down at a special place and drink wheat beer together three times. After more singing and dancing, the crowd moves on to Indota *dubusha*. Here they do much the same. After more singing and dancing everybody goes home. The *halak'a* now ends his period of *gach'ino*, and can resume work. The whole process, from announcement to *sofe*, takes only two to three months. The *halak'a* is now in his ritually active state and is thought to be good for the fertility of the community. He is symbolically a warrior, the ideal brave young man protecting his community. I was told that his maleness is shown by the *kallacha*, his maturity by the ostrich feather, and his bravery by the spear.

(8) Sacrifices

Over the next few months both the *ek'k'a* and the *halak'a* must perform a number of animal sacrifices. The *ek'k'a* must slaughter a bull and two male sheep at Mago *dubusha*, and the *halak'a* must kill a number of male sheep at certain places around the *dere*. Most importantly he must slaughter sheep at the borders with other *deres*, such as Lower Losh, Shaye and Chenchä.

During this period the *halak'a's* wife must also kill a sheep. She should slaughter a female sheep that is itself a mother in the *enset* plot outside her home. Only women may eat meat from this sheep, and neither the meat nor the knife that is used in the slaughter may be brought into the house²³. Afterwards she gives her husband a male sheep, and he slaughters it inside the compound.

(9) Seniors' Feast

Some time later the *halak'a* must throw the Seniors' Feast. This is a large feast that really tests the *halak'a's* resources. In Upper Losh both *ades* and *k'ach'ina* are fed, although the *k'ach'ina* will only be feasted for about two days, while the *ades* will be feasted for several days more.

(10) Exit

The Upper Losh *halak'a* can stay in office for any period of time. The entrance and exit of *halak'as* is not linked to the annual calendar, or to the festival of *Mesqalla*. The *halak'a* will continue to herd until the *dere* decides to change him, either because some problems have befallen the *dere*, or simply because there is another man ready to become *halak'a*. On the Naming Day of the new *halak'a*, the old *halak'a* gets up from the *halak'a's* stone and lets the new *halak'a* sit down. After that he may cut his hair, put his shawl back to the left, and resume normal life as a *dere ade*.

²³ See chapter three, p106 fn6.

4.3.4 The *Halak'a* in the *Deres* of Doko Gembela

As will be clear, the initiation of the *halak'a* in Upper Losh is structurally different from the equivalent initiation in Masho, and it cannot be subsumed within the generalised model of the initiations. However, Upper Losh is not a lone oddity, and most of the other initiations in the *deres* of Doko Gembela conform to a similar general pattern. I will sketch out versions of the initiations in the *deres* of Kale and Shaye, and then present a generalised model for Doko Gembela initiations.

A new *halak'a* was initiated in Kale in 1997, but the last Shaye *halak'a* was initiated in 1974, just before the revolution.²⁴ Accounts I was given of these initiations are shown in the table below, and I will only point out a few variations here. Kale is unusual in that it is the only *dere* in the whole of Doko where a man cannot become *halak'a* while his father is still alive. It is also unusual in that the Kale *halak'a* is referred to as *gondale atuma*, and is given a special shield, or *gondale*, that he keeps at home while he is herding the *dere*. Both Kale and Shaye differ from Upper Losh, and the rest of the *deres* of Doko Gembela, in that the *halak'a* does not start herding the *dere* until after the Seniors' Feast. In all the other *deres* he starts herding on the Naming Day. Shaye is unusual in that there is no seclusion period, and that the *kallacha* is tied onto the initiate's head by a *degala*. In Kale the initiate is not given a stick, known in Doko Gembela as *lashuma*, as well as a *horoso*, while in Shaye the *lashuma* is presented before the *horoso*, although in Upper Losh the *horoso* is presented first. While only *ades* are fed at the Seniors' Feast in Kale and Shaye, *k'ach'ina* are also fed in several other *deres*. And so on.

²⁴ In general, the initiations in Doko Gembela are in state of decline. Several *deres* have not performed the initiations for many years and they are not currently the focus of interest and discussion to the extent they are in Doko Masho.

Kale	Shaye
<p>One <i>halak'a</i> at a time. <i>Halak'a</i> must be married. Cannot be initiated while father still alive.</p> <p>Announcement: <i>Ek'k'a</i> and elders choose an initiate and send a messenger called <i>u?e</i> to tell him. The <i>u?e</i> must be a <i>k'ach'ina</i>. He goes to the initiate's house and calls out "<i>gondale atuma* X</i>" and "<i>gondale ishire Y</i>" three times. They reply "yeh". Enters and puts their shawls to the right. Spend day eating.</p> <p>Seclusion: The initiate and his wife stay in their house for seven days. Have entered the state of <i>gach'ino</i>.</p> <p>Uts'uma: Three <i>ek'k'as</i> come to house and put <i>uts'uma</i> grass on heads of initiate and wife. Feed <i>kacha</i>. Presents the <i>halak'a</i> with <i>horoso</i>.</p> <p>Work-days: Kin and neighbours work and pledge <i>woito</i> at small feasts.</p> <p>Naming Day: On a Saturday. Bamboo poles cut by <i>k'ach'ina</i> and erected in initiate's compound in the afternoon. First one is erected by one of the <i>ek'k'as</i>. One is placed on either side of the compound entrance. Later in the day, initiate gives a female sheep and some butter to the <i>ek'k'a</i>, and then goes to the <i>dubusha</i>. Butter distribution to the <i>ades</i>, and blessed by them. Drinks beer with exiting <i>halak'a</i> and then takes his place on the <i>halak'a</i> stone. An unmarried boy presents him with the special <i>halak'a</i> shield. Beer Feast for <i>ades</i> and <i>k'ach'ina</i>.</p> <p>Sofe: with ostrich feather, <i>kallacha</i> and spear.</p> <p>Sacrifices: many animal sacrifices by the initiate and the <i>ek'k'a</i>, including one where they hold the knife jointly and slaughter together. The initiate's wife kills a female sheep in the <i>enset</i> plot.</p> <p>Seniors' Feast: Only the <i>ades</i> are fed. Afterwards the initiate goes to the <i>dubusha</i> and makes his first blessing. Now he starts to herd the <i>dere</i>.</p> <p><small>* <i>gondale</i> is the word for a shield. <i>Atuma</i> means 'male'.</small></p>	<p>One <i>halak'a</i> at a time. <i>Halak'a</i> must be married. Can be initiated while father is still alive.</p> <p>Announcement: <i>Ek'k'a</i> and elders choose an initiate and send a messenger called '<i>ek'k'a</i>' to tell him. The '<i>ek'k'a</i>' must be a <i>k'ach'ina</i>. He goes to the initiate's house and calls out "Shaye <i>halak'a X</i>" and "Shaye <i>ishire Y</i>" three times. They reply "yeh". Enters and puts their shawls to the right. Then the '<i>ek'k'a</i>' takes the initiate back to the <i>dubusha</i> and the <i>dere ek'k'a</i> puts <i>uts'uma</i> on his head and presents him with the <i>lashuma</i>. Then the <i>ek'k'a</i> goes home with the initiate and they spend the day eating.</p> <p>Work-days: Kin and neighbours work and pledge <i>woito</i> at small feasts.</p> <p>Initiate gives a female sheep to the <i>dere ek'k'a</i>, and is presented with the <i>horoso</i>.</p> <p>Naming Day: On a Saturday. The <i>dere ek'k'a</i> puts <i>uts'uma</i> on heads of initiate and wife. Bamboo poles cut by <i>k'ach'ina</i> and erected in initiate's compound in the afternoon. First one is erected by a <i>k'ach'ina</i> from the neighbourhood of Goch'. One is placed on either side of the compound entrance. Later in the day, the initiate goes to the <i>dubusha</i>. Butter distribution to the <i>ades</i>, and blessed by them. Beer Feast for <i>ades</i> and <i>k'ach'ina</i>, although <i>k'ach'ina</i> sit in a different <i>dubusha</i>. (Initiate does not sit on <i>halak'a</i> stone).</p> <p>Sofe: with ostrich feather, <i>kallacha</i> and spear. (<i>Kallacha</i> is tied on by a certain <i>degala</i> man, whose ancestors were brave in war.)</p> <p>Sacrifices: many animal sacrifices by the initiate and the <i>ek'k'a</i>, including the initiate killing sheep at the <i>dere</i> borders.</p> <p>Seniors' Feast: Only for the <i>ades</i>. Afterwards the initiate goes to the <i>dubusha</i> and drinks beer with exiting <i>halak'a</i> and takes his place on the <i>halak'a</i> stone. Makes his first blessing. Now he starts to herd the <i>dere</i>.</p>

Despite these myriad small variations, a general picture can be seen. Its basic outline would be like this: before the process starts the man is *k'ach'ina*, a social child. In Doko Gembela he is considered as a child in the *dere*. He still gets to partake in the *dere* feasts, such as the Beer Feast and the Seniors' Feast of new *halak'as*, as a *k'ach'ina*, as a child. Then, when the *u?e* comes to his house, he is suddenly reborn. After the first seven days he has grown into a young boy, active and helpful around the neighbourhood. On the Naming Day he matures into a young man, obedient now to the whole community. And the next day this change of state is marked socially by his *sofe* in the main *dubushas* of Doko Gembela. He is now the ideal young man, mature, virile and brave. Thus he herds the community for a period of time. At some point he gives the Seniors' Feast, proving that he too is a father, a provider, an *ade*. And then, when he hands over to a new *halak'a* and cuts his hair, he fully becomes a *dere ade*, a respected elder. This is shown below schematically.

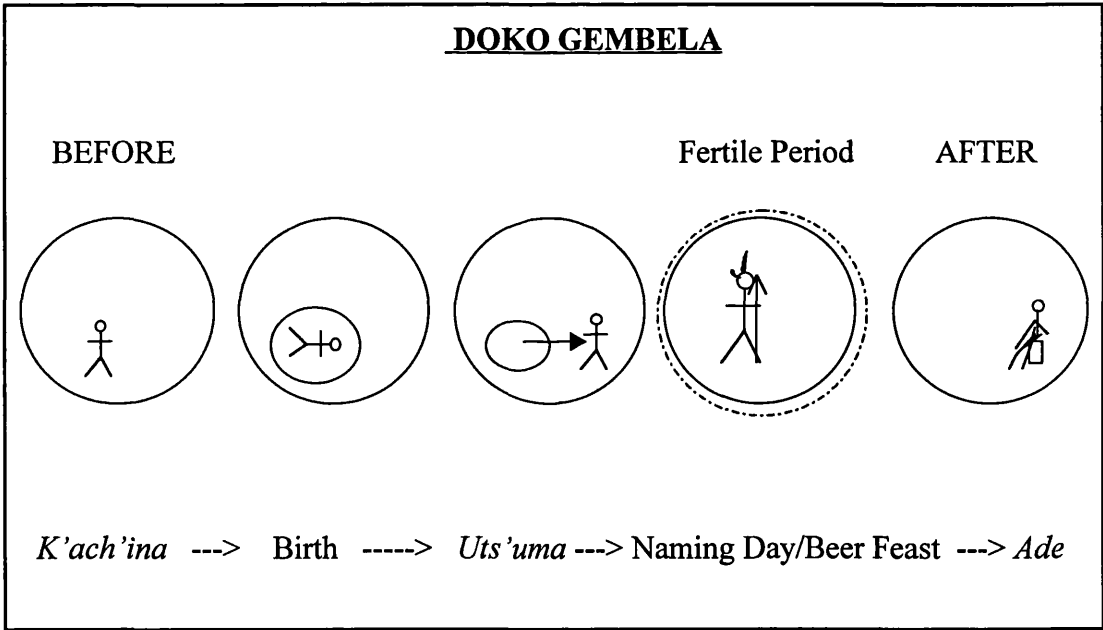


Diagram 5: *Halak'a* Initiations in the *Deres* of Doko Gembela.

4.3.5 Discussion

The considerable variation between all the initiations should now be apparent. The instantiation of the initiatory system in each of the *deres* is a little bit different. Moreover, there is a pattern in the variations. Between the eight *deres* of Doko Masho, and between the nine *deres* of Doko Gembela, the variations are rather small. Many of them are quite inconsequential, although some of them seem rather more significant. However, there is a far greater variation between the *deres* of Doko Masho and those of Doko Gembela, whose general versions of the initiations could be called the ‘wife form’ and the ‘warrior form’ respectively. At this level the variations are such that no overall generalised schema of the initiations can be distilled, other than that initiated men go through a change in status from *k’ach’ina* to *ade*, however conceptualised, in a process which involves providing large feasts. Beyond this, both the form and the meaning of the initiations are markedly different. In short, there is significant structural variation.

Why there should be such variation in the initiatory system is something of a puzzle. As discussed in chapter three, there is no such variation in the sacrificial system over the same small area. In fact, there is very little other cultural variation in Doko at all. Marriage systems, house styles, relations of production, and much more are all fairly constant, and there is no ecological difference between Doko Masho and Doko Gembela. The degree of variation in the initiations is thus quite surprising. There was no local explanation, or interest, in the variation between the different initiations, and many people in Doko Masho did not even know how initiations were performed in Doko Gembela, and vice versa. With the lack of both local explanation and environmental difference, then, the variation in the initiatory system seems perplexing. There seems to be no way to understand it with only the synchronic data presented in this chapter.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented the initiatory system as it existed in Doko in 1995-7. Many of the variations have been pointed out, and particular attention has been given to the significant structural variation that is found between the Doko Masho and the Doko Gembela forms. The ethnographic reality behind the research questions outlined in chapter one has thus been made explicit, and the two questions at the centre of this thesis now stand out as a grounded, ethnographic problem. How do we explain the variation in the initiatory system? And why does it vary so much more than the sacrificial system?

Along with the ethnographic detail, though, some more specific and detailed questions have emerged: why does the sacrificial system appear to be devolving? And what are we to make of the fact that the initiatory system seems to challenge and contradict the sacrificial system on both a conceptual and practical level? Neither the synchronic data of this chapter, nor the diachronic data of the previous chapter, present any answers to these questions. The focus on structure that has guided this part of the thesis can only take us so far.

In Part Two the focus will shift to history, process and mechanism, and more analytic consideration will be given to the workings of Doko culture through time. In order to understand these variations in Doko, though, it is necessary to first understand some wider dynamics that are going on all over the Gamo highlands, and have been going on for some time. Thus in chapter five the ethnographic and historical frame will be broadened beyond Doko, before we return to the specific discussion of this *dere* in chapters six and seven.

PART II - SYSTEMIC HISTORY

CHAPTER FIVE: WAR, TRADE AND REGIONAL HISTORY

5.1 Introduction

Part One of this thesis has provided a series of snapshots of Doko in the late twentieth century, contextualised a little by locating the community as one of several Gamo highland communities, and sketching recent historical events. In these narrow ethnographic and historical contexts, the variations described in that part of the thesis cannot be understood. This chapter marks the beginning of Part Two of the thesis, and seeks to broaden the picture, both in time and space. In order to understand the present situation in Doko we must consider its position among other communities, both in the highlands and in the region more generally. We must also consider how interactions between these and other communities have influenced Doko over time. This chapter, then, contains a discussion of regional history from around the fourteenth century to the present.

As noted in chapter one, however, there is very little mention of the Gamo highlands in historical documents. Other than a few brief mentions in fifteenth and sixteenth century texts, and the oral histories of the nineteenth century discussed in chapter two, firm historical data about the Gamo highlands is non-existent. This poses some quite severe methodological problems, and it may seem more wise to concentrate on well-founded ethnographic data than to engage in speculations about the past. Such a view is, of course, well known in anthropology, having been most strongly formulated by Radcliffe-Brown and upheld implicitly or explicitly by generations of fieldworkers. However, there have also been several historically oriented anthropological studies (eg. Bloch 1971a, James 1979), and on a more general level Nicholas Thomas has recently discussed how the exclusion of history from anthropology leads to a highly questionable

formulation of the anthropological object as a structure or system “out of time” (Thomas 1989). By ignoring history, or mentioning it merely as background contextualisation, its significance in the analysis of a social system is overlooked, and the links between the routine functioning of a system, temporal change, and historical transformation cannot be effectively theorised (ibid:120). It is clear, then, that whatever the difficulties, some discussion of systemic history is necessary for the analysis attempted in this thesis.

This theoretical justification, however, does not solve the methodological problems of reconstructing a history with very little data. In this chapter I combine two approaches in order to speculate about history in a careful and controlled way. Most of this chapter takes the form of a regional systems analysis. From this perspective social formations are seen to “depend on the internal properties of local systems, upon the local constraints and upon their place in a larger system” (Friedman and Rowlands 1977:205). Chapters three and four have given us some indication of the local systems in the Gamo highlands, and this chapter focuses on their place in the larger regional system. By using historical data from other communities in the region, I try to sketch the more important regional dynamics over a long time scale, and then try to place the Gamo highlands within the patterns of these larger events. To support some of the claims made by these means, I then use a detailed analysis of local myths and oral histories, plus a historically informed look at comparative ethnography. In this way I hope to use various forms of indirect evidence to reconstruct some of the major historical dynamics in the Gamo highlands over the past five centuries. The result is admittedly still speculative, and it may be that some of the details will need to be modified in light of subsequent historical research. The overall trends, however, seem highly plausible, and are sufficient to reorientate the general perspective with which one views the Gamo highlands.

Unlike most African countries, Ethiopia does not have a long history of European colonisation, and was only briefly occupied by the Italians during 1936-41. It does, however, have a long history of regional war and internal ‘colonisation’, and has been influenced by ‘global’ events for at least as long as it has been involved in the Red Sea

trade with the Mediterranean, Arabia and India. The analysis of this chapter thus attempts to show some of the dynamics of Ethiopian history not in terms of the effects of European colonial contact, but in terms of a regional system that has 'a history' of its own.

In brief, I suggest that throughout what is now southwest Ethiopia control over trade has been extremely important in the centralisation of certain societies¹ and the relative decentralisation of other societies on the periphery of these larger polities. I suggest that political evolution and devolution in the Gamo highlands has been partly dependent on the relative strength of its northerly neighbour, the kingdom of Wolaita. As well as trade, though, patterns of conquest and population movement have been important in shaping cultural life in the Gamo highlands. In particular, contact with the Oromo and other lowland peoples in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries appears to have led to the 'borrowing' of the *Gada* generation-grading system and its gradual transformation into the Gamo initiatory system. The story of this chapter is thus rather complicated, and although based on the regional systems approach of Friedman and Rowlands, diverges from their essentially linear model of social evolution.

5.2 The Gamo Highlands before the Sixteenth Century

Very little is known about the Gamo highlands prior to the sixteenth century. They are first mentioned in a fifteenth century text of a song of glory to King Yeshaq, leader of the northern Abyssinian empire (1412-1427), in which Bahr Gamo and Suf Gamo are cited as people who pay tribute in horses (Guidi 1889, Huntingford 1989:94). Oral traditions from Wolaita suggest that before that, in the fourteenth century, Gamo had been tributary to the small kingdom of Wolaita, then known as Aruje (Tsehai 1975:42).

In order to try to understand the position of the Gamo highlands in the fourteenth century it is necessary to look at broader regional events and historical dynamics. The

¹ This point has also been made by Abir (1965, 1970, 1975) and Donham (1985:19-32).

whole area of the horn of Africa had been involved in, and influenced by, the lucrative Red Sea trade for many centuries. The Axumite empire of the North had flourished between the first and seventh centuries, and its growth and development were attributable to a large degree to wealth generated from trade with the Mediterranean (Abir 1970:119, Bahru 1991:8). The most important of Ethiopia's exports at this time were gold, ivory, precious skins, spices, incense and, of course, slaves. Most of these items came not from within the borders of the Axumite empire, but from the 'savage' lands to the south and west (Abir 1970:119). These lands, including the Gamo highlands and most of what is now southwest Ethiopia, had thus been involved in long-distance trade well before they had any direct contact with the northern Empire. Merchant caravans travelled into some of these areas, while local traders carried out exchanges in the more remote reaches. The currency used in most transactions was the *amole*, a salt bar about 20cm long and 2.5cm thick, and weighing around half a kilo (Abir 1970:2). The source of all *amole* in the area was the coastal salt plains of northern Ethiopia, where Tigrean traders went yearly to extract salt and mould it into the accepted shape. From there they circulated around the empire, down at least as far as Kafa (ibid:1)

The importance of this trade in the rise and decline of local polities is readily apparent. When Axum's centrality in the Red Sea trade was disrupted by the rise of Islam in the middle of the seventh century, the empire went into decline (Bahru 1991:8). Overthrown in the eleventh or twelfth century by the Zagwe dynasty, the Axumite empire came to an end, and no strong state developed in the North until the Amhara came to power under the leadership of Yekuno Amlak in 1270. The strength and longevity of this state was in part dependent on its control of the vital trade route linking the Gulf of Aden port of Zeila to the lands in the south. The Amhara had wrestled control over this trade route from the Muslim principalities that had emerged at the turn of the ninth century (ibid:9), and by controlling this lucrative trade, the northern empire became increasingly wealthy and was able to considerably expand its power and influence.

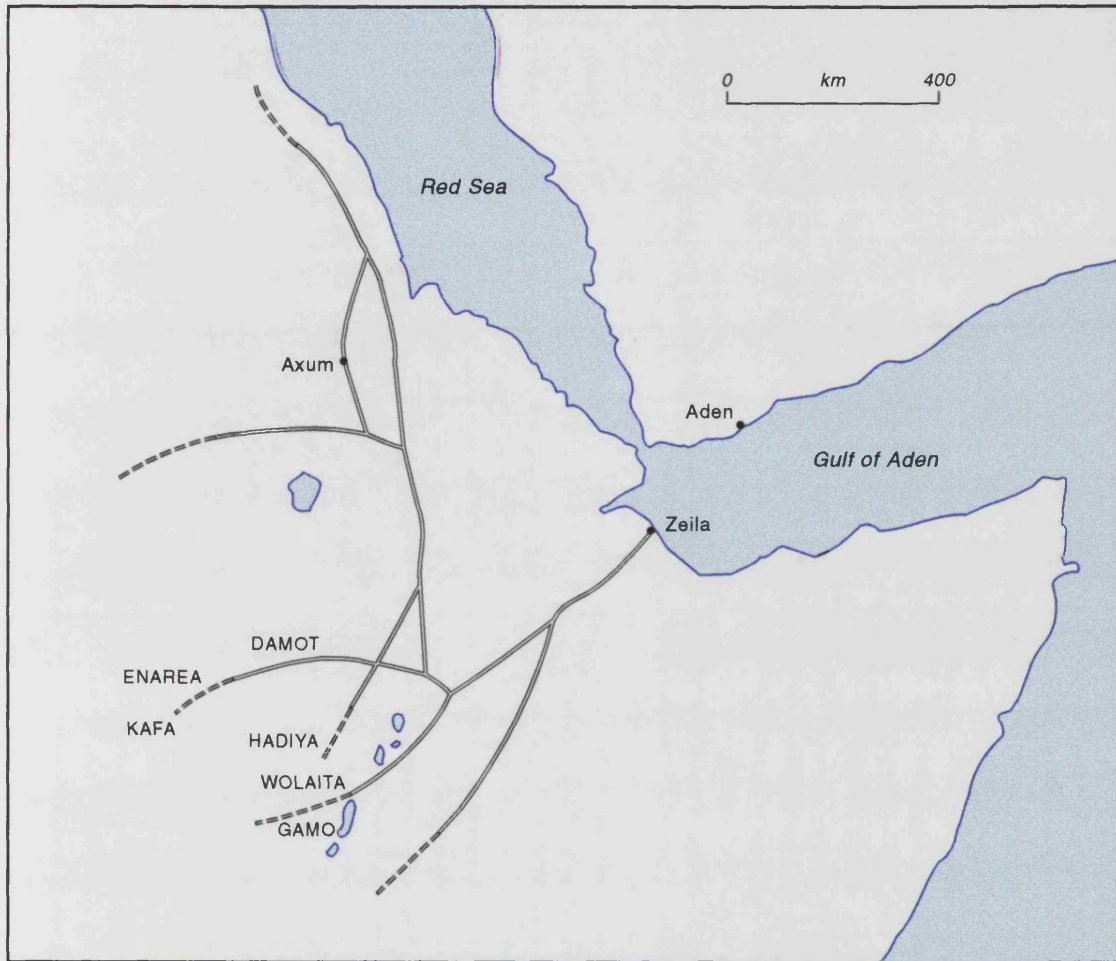
Similar dynamics were at play in the areas beyond the borders of the empire, and smaller kingdoms flourished and declined according to their ability to exert some control over

lucrative trade routes passing through their land. The precise nature of the link between political centralisation and involvement in long distance trade has been the subject of much scholarly discussion (eg. Terray 1974, Bloch 1977, Friedman and Rowlands 1977, Lewis 1978, Rowlands 1979). For our purposes here it is sufficient to note that throughout southern Ethiopia kings and chiefs increased their power through long distance trade in three main ways. Many rulers forbade merchants to advance beyond their kingdoms, and thus insured that important transactions took place in their own markets (Abir 1970:127). Most rulers also imposed a toll on caravans passing through their territory, and found other ways to extract gifts and favours from foreign merchants residing in their land (Lewis 1978:333). Most importantly, though, many rulers imposed a royal monopoly on the trade of many of the items most desired by the foreign merchants (Abir 1970:126). In Maale, for example, only the king and a few other notables could trade leopardskins, buffalo hides and ivory (Donham 1985:32), while in Kafa the royal monopoly extended to the skins of black panthers and lions, ivory and gold (Lange 1982:231)². In this way the rulers had monopoly of access to foreign trade goods which they could use to reward supporters and to make alliances with other rulers.³

The growth of the powerful kingdom of Enarya in the thirteenth century was directly linked to its important position on the trade route to the North, and its being “the key to the trade of the whole region at this time” (Abir 1970:122). Enarya was able to expand its boundaries and to collect tribute from smaller vassal states to its south, such as Kafa and Sheka (Lange 1982:17-18). While there is no documentary evidence about the

² It is interesting that there is no mention of a royal monopoly of the slave trade, and in Kafa at least there is evidence that this trade was dominated by the councillors of state, and not by the king (Lange 1982:30). I will return to the significance of this below.

³ In the nineteenth century external demand for local products became so great that some of the larger polities altered their relations of production in order to produce increased quantities for trade. Gold-panning, elephant hunting and the cultivation of coffee and coriander became increasingly important, and many rulers benefitted by owning large plantations and exploiting slave labour (Abir 1970:126). Smaller polities involved in trading networks to a lesser extent did not centralise to this degree, although the use of slave labour was common. See Terray (1974) and Rowlands (1979) for a more general discussion on these points.



Map 4: Major Trade Routes in the Fourteenth Century (adapted from Tadesse Tamrat 1972:81)

kingdom of Wolaita at this time, its position on another branch of this trade route (see map 4) makes it possible to suggest that its strength was derived from trade in a similar way. The oral tradition that it collected tribute from Gamo and other neighbouring peoples would seem to support this suggestion. If this is indeed so, the tributary position of the Gamo highlands at this time must be seen in this larger context.

As the northern Amhara empire gained power and wealth during the fourteenth century it began to expand southwards, encompassing new territories within its borders and collecting tribute from those a little further afield. During the reign of Amda Seyon (1314-1344) territories as far south as Damot, Waj and Hadiya had become tributaries (Huntingford 1989:86-7). These changes in the local patterns of power would certainly have had repercussions on other areas just beyond the reach of the empire, causing some polities to gain strength as their neighbours lost power, and others to lose power as their neighbours became stronger. The border regions of empires are notoriously unstable places, and although both Gamo and Wolaita remained beyond direct contact with the northern empire during the fourteenth century, they would no doubt have been affected by its gradual expansion southwards.

It was not until the reign of Yeshaq (1412-1427), however, that Gamo and Wolaita finally became tributary to the northern empire. They both make their first historical appearance in a glory song to Yeshaq, where they are grouped together with a number of other peoples who paid tribute in horses (ibid:94, Guidi 1889). Enarya and other more western peoples paid in gold, while others paid on cattle, goats or cotton cloth. In this text Wolaita is referred to as Wolamo and Gamo is referred to as Bahr Gamo and Suf Gamo. This would seem to indicate that Gamo existed as two separate polities at this time, or perhaps as two subdivisions of one larger polity. However, although these terms were still used by Muslim invaders in the mid sixteenth century, two European sources in the 1520s refer to the area simply as “Gamu” (Beckingham and Huntingford 1961:454) or “Gamo” (Crawford 1958:187). This might suggest that Bahr Gamo and Suf Gamo were external administrative groupings used for tribute and taxation purposes by conquerors, and had little internal significance beyond that. The name Bahr Gamo,

where '*bahr*' means 'coastal' or 'lakeside' in Amharic, indicates that this part of Gamo may have been in the lowland area around either lake Abaya or lake Ch'amo.

If it is true that prior to this time Gamo were tributary to Wolaita, then the encroachment of the northern empire would have significantly changed local power relations in the area, as Gamo would presumably have become independent of Wolaita when both of them became tributary to the North. And it is around this time, towards the end of the fifteenth century or the beginning of the sixteenth century, that significant changes in Wolaita led to a new dynasty coming to power. The previous dynasty was known as the Wolaitamala, and oral tradition remembers little about them, other than that they ruled from Kendo hill, in the west of present day Wolaita (Tsehai 1975:41). The last Wolaitamala king was called Motalame, and tradition has it that he was overthrown by his son-in-law, Mikael. Although Mikael is said to have come from Kucha, and to have been aided by mercenaries from Gamo and Borroda, Wolaita tradition maintains that he was originally from Tamben in Tigre (ibid: 41-2).⁴ It is extremely difficult to date the tradition with any accuracy, but it seems likely that the new Tigre dynasty, as it was called, came to power shortly after northern settlers arrived in the area, or perhaps slightly later, during the chaotic events of the early to mid sixteenth century.

Amhara settlers, such as the Orthodox priest Bahrey mentioned in chapter one, also arrived in the northern parts of the Gamo highlands, although their effect on internal politics is unclear. They did, however, bring with them Orthodox Christianity, and they built three churches in Dorze, Ele and Birbira (Bureau 1981:27). Although Orthodoxy has thus been present in the (northern) highlands for considerable time, it seems that it was only taken up by the Gamo people to a small extent.⁵ The Portuguese Alvares, visiting Ethiopia in the 1520s, described them as "pagans" (Beckingham and Huntingford 1961:454), and Muslim invaders a few decades later referred to them insultingly as "brutes without religion" (Basset 1897:396, Pankhurst 1997:210). It

⁴ Beckham and Huntingford suggest that he was descended from northern settlers in Gurage (1954: 1xv).

⁵ Other factors, to be discussed below, make it seem unlikely that Amhara influence reached very far south in the highlands at this time.

seems, though, that the Amhara tended to stick together in the areas where they had built the churches, and it is possible that Orthodoxy was taken up more strongly in those areas than elsewhere. Today those areas are more firmly Orthodox, and the descendants of the early Amhara settlers, visible now as the *Amara* clan, are found predominantly there. Certain religious offices, generally associated with the church and with titles derived from Amharic, are restricted to these clans, most noticeably *k'eso* (from Amharic *k'es*, meaning 'priest'), and are found only in these few *deres* (Bureau 1981:198).

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, then, the Gamo highlands were home to a few northern settlers and were tributary to the northern empire. Their integration into the empire beyond this seems to have been minimal, and Muslim invaders in the following decades claimed they were only under imperial domination "by convention" (Basset 1896:396, Pankhurst 1997:209). They were involved in the slave trade, although Alvares writes that they were "little valued as slaves" (Beckingham and Huntingford 1961:454). It is not clear whether they were themselves raided for slaves or whether they captured slaves from other groups and then passed them northwards, or both.

The political organisation of the area is uncertain, although Alvares writes on hearsay that "Gamu" is "almost a kingdom in size; ... [but] they have no king, only chiefs who rule separately" (Beckingham and Huntingford 1961:454). This might suggest that the Gamo highlands existed as a number of separate chiefdoms at this time, although since Alvares did not actually visit the area we should be cautious of giving his description too much weight. With similar caution we might notice that he does not mention initiations, or other title- or power-holders, and it is possible that this might indicate that initiations, if they were present at all, were much less important than they are in the twentieth century. The apparent derivation of the titles *halak'a*, *hudhugha* and *dana* from Amharic, however, might suggest that these terms came into use around this time or shortly afterwards.

If the communities of the Gamo highlands were organised as chiefdoms at this time it seems likely that they would have had a form similar to that of the more centralised

polities of culturally and linguistically related peoples in the surrounding area. With the exception of Gamo, all of the Omoto-speaking peoples, and most of the larger category of Omotic-speaking peoples, that have been studied were organised into chiefdoms or kingdoms during the nineteenth century (Huntingford 1955; Orent 1969; Lange 1976, 1982; Todd 1978a; Chiatti 1984; Donham 1985, 1990; Haileyesus 1996; Data 1997; Dereje 1997). Kafa and Wolaita existed as large and powerful kingdoms, while the less-populous communities of Oyda, Maale and their neighbours in the Gofa highlands existed as smaller scale kingdoms or chiefdoms. While there are significant variations in the organisation of these polities, there is an over-arching similarity of form that indeed bears many resemblances to the sacrificial system currently found in the Gamo highlands. It thus seems plausible to assume that, if Gamo communities had been more centralised in the past, their organisation would have been based on a more elaborated form of the sacrificial system that is found today.

Some indication as to what this more elaborated form may have been like can be deduced by looking at the small kingdom of Maale in the nineteenth century. The sacrificial system of kings and chiefs in Maale can be seen to be a logical extension of the sacrificial system in the Gamo highlands. Whereas the senior sacrificer (or *kawo*) in many Gamo *deres* was more a ritual or symbolic position, the senior sacrificer (or *kati*) in Maale was a king, with significant political and economic powers; and whereas the elementary hierarchical units of seniors and juniors were relatively unstacked and non-centralised in Gamo, in Maale they were stacked neatly into a system such that community seniors fitted above genealogical seniors, chiefs fitted above sub-chiefs and the king fitted above the chiefs (ibid:104). For example, as discussed in chapter three, nineteenth and early twentieth century Doko farmers took gifts to their *bekesha bairas* and waited for them to sow some land first, before they started their own agricultural work. But *bekesha bairas* did not have to wait, in turn, for the lineage head, and he did not have to wait for the clan head. In some *deres* the whole process was started by the *dere* sacrificer, but in others it was not. In nineteenth century Maale, by contrast, the system was taken to its logical extreme and was organised so that first the *kati* received tribute and sowed the land, followed by the chiefs and then the sub-chiefs, and so on

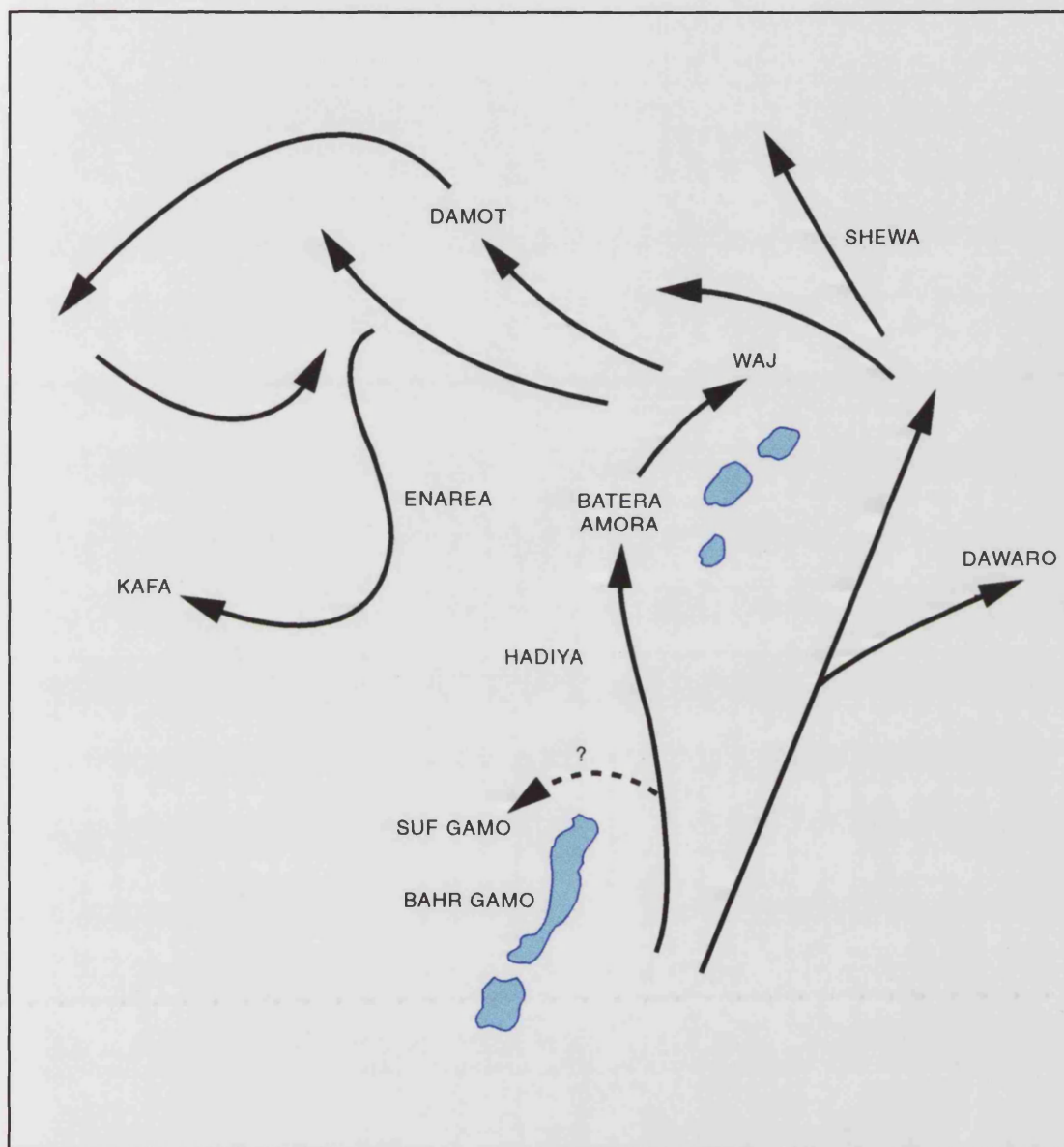
right down to the lineage heads and the Maale equivalents of *bekesha bairas*.⁶ Similar patterns are found in other Ometo communities, and it seems likely that more centralised Gamo communities or chiefdoms, if they existed, would have taken a broadly similar form.

It is also worth noting that initiatory systems are not found in any other highland Omotic society, and that their presence in the Gamo highlands is thus rather unusual. It seems quite likely that the initiations were not a part of the Gamo cultural fabric before the sixteenth century, and that they were only taken up at a later date.

5.3 Events of the Sixteenth Century

Dramatic events in the sixteenth century led to yet another major change in regional patterns of power. The Muslim-Christian struggle in the northeast culminated in the ‘holy war’ between the northern Christian empire and Ahmad Gagn’s Muslim forces from the eastern Harer region. During these battles a number of territories in southern and south-central Ethiopia were devastated, and numerous other groups migrated away from battle areas (Braukamper 1980:431). After the end of the war in 1568 there was thus a vacuum in certain areas east of the rift valley, and in the subsequent decades the Oromo pastoralists spread across this area “like a tidal wave.” In what historian Bahru Zewde has described as “the most significant population movement in the country’s recent history” (Bahru 1991:9), the Oromo expanded out from their territory somewhere to the east of the Gamo highlands, and moved first northwards and then westwards across the region. The weakened northern empire could do little to stop the “steam-roller of the steadily enlarging Oromo nation” (Braukamper 1980:431), and by the seventeenth century the Oromo occupied much of central Ethiopia.

⁶ In the southern parts of the Gamo highlands there is a version of the sacrificial system that is rather closer to the neatly stacked hierarchical system found in Maale. In nineteenth and early twentieth century Balta, for example, men could not sow their land until the senior sacrificer (*kawo*) had first sown his, followed by the local sacrificer (*sagga*). This southern Gamo system seems to be less devolved than the northern Gamo variants, and thus more similar to that found in Maale.



Map 5: The Oromo Migration (adapted from Hassan 1994:26, 28)

These events had a number of consequences for the people of the Gamo highlands. Both Gagn's forces and the Oromo warriors appear to have reached the area. Gagn's forces, under the commandship of Vizier Mojahid, entered the area in 1532 and killed many people. The survivors submitted and agreed to pay a tax to Gagn, and were then left with only a small occupying force of ten cavalymen and one hundred infantry (Basset 1896:xiii, 396; Huntingford 1989:131; Pankhurst 1997:210). Some years later the Oromo reached the area. Bahrey, an Orthodox priest living in the highlands, and writing a history of the Galla (Oromo) "in order to make known the number of their tribes, their readiness to kill people, and the brutality of their manners" (1593, in Beckingham and Huntingford 1954:111), states that a section of the Boran known as Dawe invaded the Gamo highlands, by way of two districts called Batera Amora and Waj (ibid:114). He writes that they "chased this prophet [ie. Bahrey], laid waste his country, which was called Gamo, and looted all that he possessed" (ibid:114). The extent of this invasion is unclear, but since the area did not subsequently become 'Oromo', as did much else of southern Ethiopia, it seems fair to assume that this invasion was not as devastating or as large-scale as some of their other campaigns. It is possible that, just as the Gamo absorbed Amhara settlers into their clan system, so they also may have absorbed some of these Oromo.⁷

The indirect effects of these events were also extremely important. While Gamo appears to have gotten off fairly lightly in these turbulent war years, other polities in the region suffered devastating conquests and subsequent political disintegration. Gagn's forces frequently sacked and burned the rich agricultural areas which they overran, and this had a disastrous effect on local patterns of production (Abir 1970:122). Even more

⁷ It is difficult to work out the precise path of the Oromo into the Gamo highlands. The fact that Bahrey mentions Batera Amora and Waj has led some scholars to suggest that his 'Gamo' does not refer to the Gamo highlands, but to a different place located to the west of lake Awasa (Merid 1971:306-9). However, there is no evidence whatsoever for the existence of this hypothetical community and, despite the discrepancies, it seems more likely that this 'Gamo' refers to the same 'Gamo' as that of Alvares and Zorzi (ie. the Gamo highlands), than to a 'Gamo' that is not mentioned in any other texts. For a fuller discussion of this problem see also Huntingford (1989:118) and Crawford (1958:187).

importantly, the trade routes that linked these areas to the north and to the coastal port of Zeila were severely disrupted, as caravans could not pass through the war zone. With their economic base pulled away from under them, many of the chiefdoms and kingdoms in the southwest disintegrated. The large kingdoms of Enarya and Hadiya went into decline, and the Wolaita kingdom shrank so that it was limited to only the area immediately around Kendo (Tsehai 1975:42, Braukamper 1980:431, Lange 1982: 23). The Gamo highlands appear to have been less central in trade, which had been dominated mainly by their larger neighbours, and thus these events would have been less disastrous for them. If anything, the decline in both Wolaita and the northern empire may have led to a welcome period of relative autonomy and independence for the people of the Gamo highlands.

The turbulent years of the Oromo expansion were also marked by massive population movements, as people in the path of the Oromo had to decide between fight or flight. Whilst many peoples were absorbed into the Oromo, others moved away into safer areas. Thus there was a great moving and mixing of peoples, and many of the present day 'ethnic groups' came into being during this time. For example, the modern day Sidamo people came into existence at about this time, as the combination of two formerly separate peoples who migrated away from the path of the Oromo conquest and into the same area. Oral traditions tell that a group called Maldea left their territory north of the river Wabe Shabelle, at around the same time as a group called Bushe group left their territory west of the upper Ganale, and that they both migrated to present day Sidamaland. There they joined forces and overcame the indigenous Hofa people, and thus became 'the Sidamo' (Braukamper 1980:431, see also Braukamper 1978, Hamer 1978). In this context of mass population movement, it seems unlikely that people did not move into the relatively secure area of the Gamo highlands. On the contrary, many Gamo clans claim an origin outside of the highlands (Bureau 1981:28), and it seems quite possible that the Gamo highlands absorbed thousands, if not tens of thousands, of people during this period. If so, the demographic and cultural ramifications of these events deserve some consideration.

Another consequence of the Oromo expansion, however, was the severance of the Gamo highlands from the northern Empire. Not only did this end the period of Amhara and Orthodox influence in the highlands, but it also resulted in the disappearance of the Gamo highlands from written history for the next three centuries. Oral traditions from the much weakened Wolaita also do not mention Gamo during this time. The reconstruction of the history of this period, then, is extremely difficult and necessarily fairly speculative.

5.4 The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

We can make some tentative suggestions about this period though, by continuing to look at macro-level regional events. In this way it is possible to suggest that two major dynamics may have been apparent during this time. On the one hand this period was most likely one of political independence for the Gamo highlands, and it is possible that with its competing neighbour weakened, Gamo experienced some expansion and centralisation. On the other hand the influx of Oromo and other lowland peoples into the highlands may have brought about some significant cultural changes as new ideas and customs entered the area. In particular, the *Gada* system of the Oromo, or some of its variants found amongst other lowland peoples, may have been ‘borrowed’ and transformed to become the *halak’a* system of initiations.

5.4.1 Political Independence and Expansion

During most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the northern trade routes remained disrupted. The Oromo were not initially accustomed to trade, and they were suspicious of the caravans coming through their territory. It was not unusual for them to forbid caravans to pass, or to wipe out their personnel for no apparent reason (Abir 1970:124). In this situation of chaos and insecurity few caravans made the journey to the south, and eighteenth century maritime reports dismiss Ethiopian involvement in the Red Sea trade as negligible (ibid:123).

With trade so disrupted, the former kingdoms of Enarya and Wolaita remained in a state of decline. By the mid eighteenth century the much diminished northern empire went into further decline, due to complicated internal factors further exacerbated by this disruption of trade. In this political void certain other polities were able to experience independence, and limited growth. The kingdom of Kafa gained independence from Enarya during this time, as Gamo became free of Wolaita. During the reign of king Gali Ginocho (1675-1710 approx), Kafa expanded a little and incorporated the Gimira states of She, Benesho and Mashengo, although further expansion seems to have been limited until the very end of the eighteenth century, when the volume of trade began to increase.

Some trade did, however, continue throughout this period. Salt for human consumption, for example, was still brought from the northern coastal areas and was probably exchanged for gold, ivory, incense or slaves (Abir 1970:122). In the more southerly areas alternative trade routes continued to be plied during this period. As well as small scale local trade, there were also routes leading to Harar, and possibly to the Somali coast (ibid:127-9). Unlike the northern trade routes, these southern routes were limited to trade in objects, rather than in persons, and slaves were not on the agenda (ibid:134).

If the Gamo highlands were involved in either or both of these trade networks during this time, then it is quite possible that the Gamo chiefdoms, if that is what they were, experienced some limited growth and centralisation.⁸ It is also possible that the increase in population from the absorption of lowland immigrants into the relatively spacious highlands could have led to an increase in production and the availability of more surplus. This too may have led to growth and centralisation. Although there is no hard evidence, a historically informed look at some ethnographic differences between the northern and southern parts of the highlands does seem to support this scenario of centralisation and expansion of the Gamo polity or polities in the northern highlands during this period. In short, it appears that they may have expanded southwards and

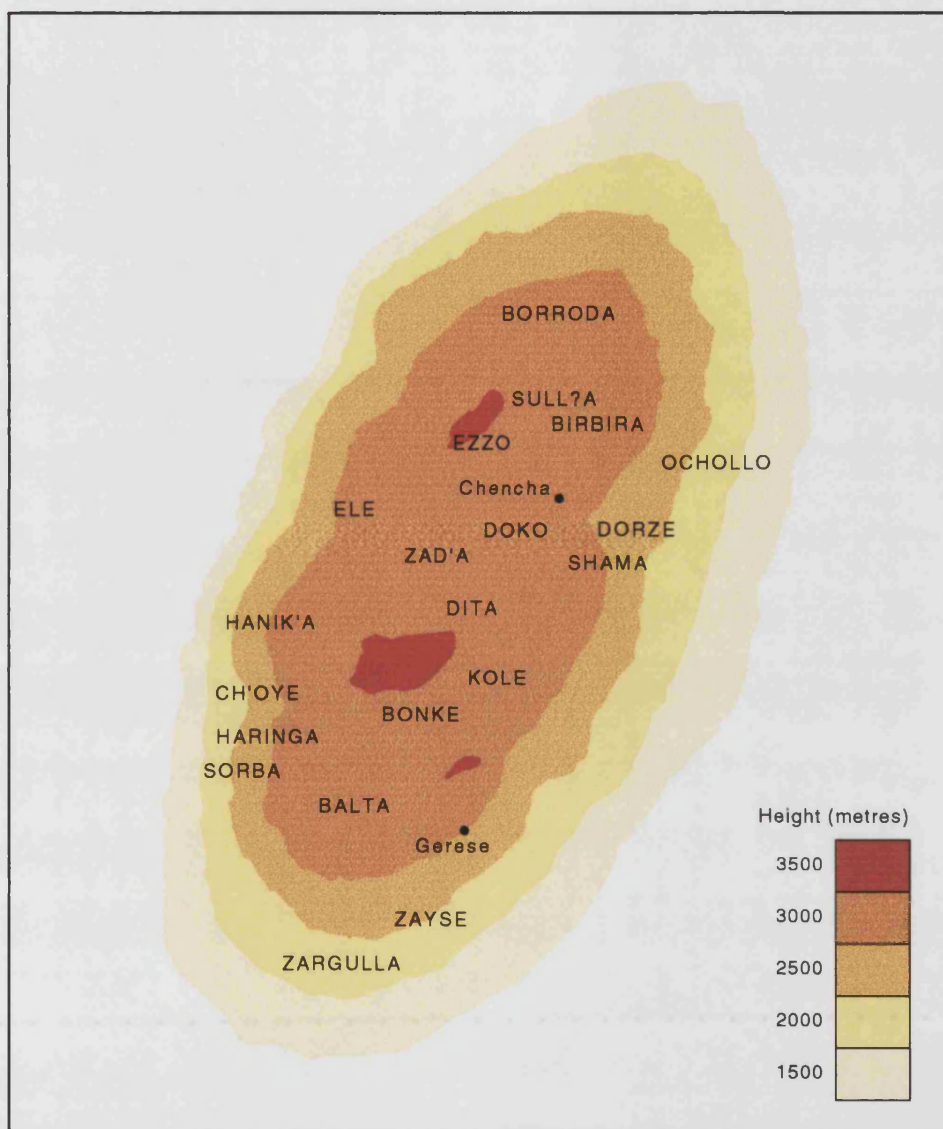
⁸ The Gamo highlands have clearly been involved in local trade with lowland communities, as attested by the presence of ostrich feathers in the highlands. For a preliminary discussion of this local trade see Tadesse Wolde (1999).

westwards, and made tributaries of many communities in the southern parts of the highlands and over in the Gofa area.

There are many significant differences in the cultural life of the people of the contemporary northern and southern parts of the Gamo highlands. Most notable is the distinction between *D'ache* and *Gamo*. Although the northerners do not make much of this distinction, it is pervasive throughout the whole southern area. *Gamo* clans are said to be indigenous, while *D'ache* clans are thought to be conquerors who came from the northern areas. This view is supported by much linguistic and cultural evidence. People from *D'ache* clans speak the same language as is spoken in the northern parts of the highlands, while people from *Gamo* clans speak a rather different, and mutually unintelligible, language.⁹ People from *D'ache* clans are initiated to become *hudhugha*, and wear an ostrich feather on their heads, like the *halak'a* in the northern highlands; while people from *Gamo* clans are initiated to become *maaga*, and wear instead a certain type of grass on their heads. People from *D'ache* clans make offerings to the spirits in their own houses, in a similar manner to the northern highlands; while people from *Gamo* clans group together under a certain senior who offers to the spirits for all of them jointly. And so on.

In the northern parts of the highlands '*d'ache*' can be used as a verb to mean 'acting lordly', and some older men told me that '*Gamo*' meant conquered land. In the past, they said by way of example, the *deres* of Dokkama and Wobera were conquered by Doko. They were *Gamo* to Doko. Then Dita fought Doko and won them back. When I asked about the meaning of '*Gamo*' to some young women from Dorze, while we were living together in Balta, they replied that Dorze was *D'ache* and all the other *deres* were *Gamo*. This was meant as a joke, and is typical of the Dorze view of their general superiority in the highlands, but it certainly helps elucidate the meanings of the two

⁹ In practice all people from *Gamo* clans are bilingual. They call their language *Gamo-tso*, and refer to the other language as *Zegets-tso*. The *D'ache* clans call their own language *D'ache-tso*, while in the northern highlands it is referred to, rather confusingly, as *Gamo-tso*.



Map 6: Location of Gamo *Deres*

terms. When I asked my friends in Doko if they considered themselves to be ‘Gamo’, they almost always replied, “No! We are Doko.” To be *Gamo* appears to mean to be conquered people. And it is the people of the southern highlands who appear to have been conquered by people from the North.

This scenario is supported by further ethnographic evidence. All the *kawos* in the southern highlands belong to *D’ache* clans, and in some cases their clan is the only *D’ache* clan in the *dere*. A common myth, found throughout the whole of the southern area, tells of the origin of the first *kawos*. Born from a girl who was impregnated by the sun whilst out collecting water in the *dere* of Kole, the first *kawos* left Kole, chose their *deres* and went there to rule. Kole is a *dere* in the central highlands, north of all the *Gamo deres* (see map 6). It is itself a *D’ache dere*, and northerners moving south may well have appeared to have come from Kole. A variant of the same myth is found amongst some peoples of the Gofa highlands. In Oyda, for example (refer to map 2), the origin of their *kawo*, or *kati*, is told as follows: A Gamo woman was impregnated by the sun and fled to Oyda, where she gave birth to twin sons. Because she had brought salt with her from Gamo, the Oyda people were very impressed with her cooking, and they decided to make one of her sons *kati*, in place of the currently ruling Shara clan. In order to choose which son, they made them all go through a *kati*-selecting ritual, in which the younger son, Oyda, tricked his elder brother and became the new *kati*, while the elder brother, Debi, took the more junior position of *bitante* (Dereje 1997:152).

The significance of salt in the Oyda myth is interesting, especially when seen in the context of long distance trade involving salt from the coastal plains of northern Ethiopia. Although there are no early records of the *amole* salt bars reaching as far south as either Gamo or Gofa (Abir 1970:3), Chiatti notes that salt bars were used in long distance trade in nineteenth century Wolaita, while iron bars were used in local trade (Chiatti 1984:27). The mention of salt in this myth suggests that salt from this trade might have reached right down into the Gofa area, and that the superiority of the conquering Gamo was somehow linked to their control of it.

Several other communities in the Gofa area have traditions that their ruling clans came from the east, the direction of the Gamo highlands (Donham 1979:22; Fujimoto nd; see also Gebre 1995:14 for a variant on the theme of descent from the sun), and many of them have different names, like *D'ache* and *Gamo*, for conquering and indigenous clans. In Oyda the two groupings are called *Gamitse* and the *Arae*, suggesting, as Dereje points out, origins from Gamo and Ari respectively (ibid:23). It seems likely, then, that some of these communities may have been conquered by and paying tribute to Gamo during this time.

By counting generations it is possible to suggest rather tentatively that the expansion of the northern Gamo polity or polities happened around the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. In the *deres* of the southern highlands there is a rule that genealogical seniority splits after seven generations. Thus the local equivalent of a *bekesha baira* will maintain juniors for seven generations, and not four as in Doko, before there is a split and new seniors are made. Because of this rule the *kawos* whose descendants came from Kole had to return there every year to perform sacrifices together, until seven generations had passed. It seems that the *kawo* of Zargulla, one of the most important *kawos* in the southern area, only stopped performing this sacrifice at Kole three or four generations ago.¹⁰ This would suggest that the original *kawo* came to the area around ten or eleven generations ago. If we take one generation to be thirty years, then we can date his arrival very approximately to the end of the seventeenth century. The precise date is of little importance, but its happening within this seventeenth to eighteenth century period does support the idea that Gamo expansion took place during this time, while the neighbouring kingdom of Wolaita was weakened by conquest and the disruption of trade. Before we consider the effects of the resumption of long-distance trade at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it is first necessary to consider some of the other dynamics that were at play in the Gamo highlands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

¹⁰ Even now, the Zargulla *kawo* must go to Kole during his lengthy installation process, and the new *kawo* did so when he was installed five or six years ago.

5.4.2 The Genesis of the Initiatory System

The initiations of the Gamo highlands are unusual. No other contemporary Ometo-speaking people have initiatory systems as part of their cultural fabric, and even more broadly, initiations are not found amongst any other highland Omotic-speaking peoples¹¹. Where we do find initiatory systems, however, is amongst the Cushitic-speaking pastoralists who live in the lowland areas throughout much of south and southwest Ethiopia¹². Since some Oromo appear to have settled in the (northern) Gamo highlands after their conquest of the area, and I have suggested that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many lowland peoples migrated into this area to escape the turmoil in the lowlands, it seems possible that the initiatory system in the Gamo highlands may derive from the initiatory systems of lowland pastoralists.

This hypothesis would be strongly supported if the Gamo initiatory system could be shown to be a genetic transformation of the Oromo *Gada* system, as it existed in the sixteenth century. Such a task, however, is beyond the scope of my knowledge. If, however, the Gamo initiations can be shown to share some structural similarities with twentieth century Oromo and other Cushitic initiatory systems, then the hypothesis that they all represent genetic transformations of some earlier Oromo, or possibly pan-Cushitic, initiatory system finds some support. This, then, is the task of this section.

5.4.2.1 The Northern Highlands: From *Gada* to *Halak'a*

The details of Cushitic initiatory systems in the twentieth century have been described for many different groups, including Boran (Asmarom 1973), Guji (Hinnant 1978), Konso (Hallpike 1972), and Sidamo (Brogger 1986, Hamer 1970). Amongst many of

¹¹ There are some south-Omotic language speakers who do have initiatory systems, but these people, such as the Hor, are lowland pastoralists.

¹² Similar initiatory systems are also found further afield, stretching into Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, amongst Nilotic- as well as Cushitic-speaking peoples (eg. Kurimoto and Simonse 1998).

these peoples the initiations are organized into complicated age- or generation- grading systems. Whilst varying to a remarkable degree in the details and intricacies, all of these systems mark two major status transitions: from junior to adult, and from adult to elder¹³. Some systems accomplish this in just three grades (eg. Sidamo), while others require anywhere up to eleven grades (eg. Boran). Beyond this, the different systems vary to such an extent that it is very difficult to generalize about them. Instead, I will provide the briefest of sketches of two rather different systems, that of the Boran and that of the Sidamo (refer to map 2). No doubt there are significant internal variations within, as well as between, these two communities but, whilst aware of its inadequacy, all I can do here is to provide a generalized account that itself generalizes from the generalized accounts provided by the respective ethnographers. Such are the limitations of large scale comparison.

The Boran *Gada* System

The initiatory system of the Boran has been extensively described and analysed by Asmarom Legesse (1973). His fascinating analysis goes far beyond descriptive ethnography, but for now I simply draw from his description of the *Gada* as it existed in the 1960s (ibid: 50-117)¹⁴. The Boran *Gada* is perhaps one of the most complicated of all the initiatory systems in northeast Africa, and it consists of both age-sets (*hariyya*) and generation grades (*luba*), into which all Boran men are initiated. For our purposes here it will be sufficient to discuss only the generation grades.

There are eleven grades through which an individual (or an age-set) may pass. However, since individuals do not necessarily enter the first grade at birth, but rather the grade that is five grades behind their father, few men go through the entire cycle. Initiations into

¹³ In some cases the first transition is mediated by another one: that into warriorhood. See the Boran example below.

¹⁴ However, it is relevant to note that Bahrey's 'History of the Galla' suggests that the basic characteristics of the *Gada* system were the same in the sixteenth century as they are in the twentieth century (Asmarom 1973:127).

new statuses are organized such that every eight years there is a big transition where everyone moves up one grade. The eleven grades mark out four major statuses: juniors (*dabelle*, junior *gamme*, senior *gamme*), warriors (*cusa*, *raba*), adults (*gada*), and elders (four grades called *yuba*, *gada moji*). Thus although there are initiations between each grade, there are three major initiations which are the most important: junior to warrior (ie. senior *gamme* to *cusa*), warrior to adult and adult to elder.

The basic outline of the junior to warrior initiation is as follows¹⁵. A red and white flag is hoisted up in the ceremonial camp and the mothers and fathers of the initiates face each other around this flag, while the fathers sing songs of praise to their wives. The fathers then shave the heads of their sons, and each family sacrifices one steer and makes a bracelet for the initiate from a strip of its hide. Then the initiates, wearing trousers, all come together and build a large enclosure, in which they are to remain secluded for four days. After that they participate in some general feasting, and then go into another four-day period of seclusion, this time at the back of their mothers' huts. The emergence of the initiates from this period of seclusion marks their entry into warriorhood, and is described as *ulma bati*, the same phrase used to refer to the emergence of a woman after her forty days of post-partum isolation.

The transition from warrior to adult is a more complicated and drawn out affair, and really consists of a number of different events. At some time towards the end of their time in the junior *raba* grade, men are supposed to organize war campaigns, known as *butta*. This is their occasion to prove their masculinity and strength, and to raid enemy territory and bring back the spoils of war¹⁶.

¹⁵ These ceremonies will be described in a generalised fashion. Asmarom's ethnography is in fact a mixture of accounts of actual events he witnessed in the 1960s and accounts given by elders of recent events that he missed. He discusses particular instances and people in a way that cannot be reproduced here.

¹⁶ It is probable that *butta* wars played a critical role in the evolution and expansion of the Oromo in the sixteenth century.

The next important event is the fatherhood ceremony, known as *dannisa*. In the first stage of this ceremony the initiates are in a state of ritual purity and subject to certain prohibitions: they should not show pain, they should not kill or bring harm to either people or animals, they should not carry spears, they should not herd their animals, they should avoid obscene language, etc. During this period a ceremonial enclosure is built, and at the end cattle are sacrificed. In the second stage of the ceremony the initiates dress like women, wearing a large toga-like cloth wrapped around their bodies. While the leaders of the grade sit by a shrine and pray, the other initiates go out into the bush and bring back branches of the *dannisa* tree. At the end of the day all the initiates go back to their homes and fashion the branches into ceremonial staffs¹⁷. Then some cattle are sacrificed, and the initiates' heads are shaved into a new hairstyle. The final stage of the fatherhood ceremony is a mock marriage, where the initiates' wives return to their own moieties, and the marriage negotiations are briefly replayed.

The event that finally marks the transition to the full adult grade then takes place five years later. The adult, or *gada*, grade is the grade during which its members, or more particularly its leaders, are in power. During this time they take most responsibility in the *Gada* assembly, and they are considered to ensure the general fertility and well-being of the community. The event that finalises the transition into this status is called 'the exchange of sceptres' (*balli walirrafudu*). This ceremony starts with the incoming *abba gada*, the head of the *gada* grade, going into the bush to collect ostrich feathers, which he will wear on his head during the rest of the ceremony. Then, while all the outgoing *gada* grade members stay in their camp, the incoming *gada* grade members approach this camp, blowing ceremonial horns to announce their arrival. The incoming *abba gada* goes ahead and sits with the outgoing *abba gada*. They drink milk together and exchange blessings. Then the initiates return to their own camp, and remain in isolation for four days. When they emerge from this isolation, also described as like a post-partum isolation, they are now *gada*.

¹⁷ Asmarom does not tell us what these staffs are called, but amongst the Guji Oromo they are called *ororo* (Hinnant 1978:228). This is not dissimilar from the Gamo *horoso*.

Because the 'exchange of sceptres' ceremony takes place only five years after the 'fatherhood' ceremony, and therefore in the middle of the regular eight year transitions, it happens that when the *gada* grade reach their third year all the other grades go through transition. At this point, a further important event takes place for the *gada* grade: they have their ears pierced and they are circumcised. After this they remain indoors for a month while the wound heals, and eat only specially prepared food.

The transition from adult to elder takes place at the 'exchange of sceptres' ceremony, when the outgoing *gada* grade hands over power to the incoming grade, and then retires gracefully into elderhood. They can still attend the assemblies, and may even serve on the council. They have both advisory authority and personal input into *Gada* affairs. Only when they enter the final grade, *gada mojjji*, do men retreat from political affairs and enter a more spiritual and ritually elevated existence.

The Sidamo *Lua* System

The Sidamo *Lua* system has been described by John Hamer (1970) and Jan Brogger (1986). Like the Boran *Gada* system, the Sidamo *Lua* is a grading system through which every man passes. However, in contrast to the *Gada* system where men pass through a series of different named grades, in the *Lua* system men are initiated into a certain named class, in which they remain throughout their life. Those initiated into one class are known as the 'fathers' of those initiated into the next class, and 'sons' of those initiated into the class before them. Also, whereas the *Gada* system is closely tied up with marriage and procreation (for example, a Boran man cannot get married until *raba*, or have sons until after the 'fatherhood' ceremony, etc.), such linkages are not present in the Sidamo *Lua*. The central features are the two initiations which all men go through: from junior to initiated member of their named *Lua* class, and then into circumcised elderhood.

The first initiation takes place over a two month period, and is organised by the clan, rather than the local community. The first event is the blessing of the initiates by the

sacrificer, or *morte*, followed by the sacrifice of three bulls. Then the initiates carve two ceremonial staffs, known as *loloko*. One of these must remain in the initiate's home, while the other is carried with him during the two-month initiation period. In the second major event of the initiation the initiates are fed by their 'fathers' (ie. those in the class above them), who each provide a bull for the feasting. There are several periods of ritual feasting, which culminate in a final two-day period of feasting and sacrifice. On the first day the members of the preceding class sacrifice a bull to mark their exiting from power, and on the second day the new class sacrifices a bull to mark their uptake of power. Then the two classes engage in a mock battle, which is kept in order by other senior men. After this formal part of the initiation, the new class receive some instruction in military tactics and horse-riding, and some clans then present gifts of milk and butter to the sacrificer. Once initiated, the new class are considered to be responsible for the fertility and well-being of the tribe.

Twenty eight years later a new class is initiated, and members of the preceding class can be initiated into elderhood. Although this must take place during a certain seven year interval, the date is not fixed and individual men, or small groups of men, go through it when they are ready. These rites are the most lengthy and expensive in the Sidamo ritual calendar, and men must spend considerable time accumulating resources, both from their own production and through a series of exchanges with kin, affines and neighbours. When the man is ready, he organises the building of a seclusion hut, to which he will retire after his circumcision.

A few days before the circumcision, the initiate dresses up in traditional dress (*gonfa*), anoints himself with butter and, carrying a spear, parades around the village inviting everyone to his circumcision. The night before the event young men and women sing and dance in his compound, and just before daybreak the initiate gives large amounts of butter to the now-assembled elders. A sheep is killed, and some of the blood is smeared on people's foreheads. The circumcision itself takes place at sunrise. Straight afterwards another sheep is slaughtered, and then the initiate is escorted into his seclusion hut. Then there is a huge feast in the initiate's compound; Brogger estimates

that two hundred and fifty people were present at one such feast he attended. Such feasting requires huge amounts of the best Sidamo food, and is a real test of the initiate's resources.

After this the initiate remains in seclusion for several months. As his period of seclusion draws to an end the young men of his lineage will go out hunting for birds with particularly colourful feathers. When they return from their hunt, they enter the compound of the initiate, singing a special chant. The initiate hears them coming and leaves his seclusion hut to meet them, and they then put the feathers on his head. A day or two later the initiate formally comes out of seclusion, and is taken to wash in a local spring. Then there is a final feast, in which the initiate sits together with the elders, marking his new status as an elder himself. As an elder he now has increased decision-making responsibilities, and commands the respect of younger men.

Comparison With Gamo Initiations

Before comparing these initiation systems with the Gamo initiations, the differences between these two Cushitic systems must be highlighted. Not only are the number of grades different, but so is their significance, their organisation and their connections to other elements of cultural life. However, notwithstanding all the differences, it is possible to recognise them as forms of the same general kind of system. Those initiated into 'adulthood' are considered to be in power and to have some mystical control over the fertility and well-being of the community, while those initiated into 'elderhood' remain involved in political life and have an advisory role. This indeed is similar to the distinction between *halak'a* and *dere ade* in the Gamo highlands. Furthermore, a number of common themes and symbols are found between them, such as the ceremonial staffs and the form of the handover of power from one grade/class to another. It is interesting that such a handover is only found in Doko Gembela initiations, and not in those in Doko Masho.

The entry into elderhood marked by circumcision is a shared feature for both the Boran and Sidamo initiations, but is not part of any Gamo initiations that I know of, although the seven day period of seclusion in the Doko Gembela initiations takes on new significance in light of the Sidamo circumcisions. Interestingly, groups of men used to be circumcised in Doko every eight years (the same period of the Oromo grade transitions, and thus their circumcisions), and much of the ritual surrounding the circumcisions is similar to that in Sidamo (noticeably in that hunting birds is central in each case).

There are also many continuities in the symbols used in the *halak'a* initiations and those used in the Boran *Gada* or the Sidamo *Lua*. These symbols are objects or activities associated with the lowlands and pastoral life, and seem somewhat out of place amongst the highland agricultural Gamo. Initiates in many *deres* in the northern parts of the highlands wear an ostrich feather on their heads during certain ceremonies, although ostriches are lowland creatures. *Halak'as* are commonly said to 'herd' their *deres* (*dere hemo*), even though highland people are predominantly farmers and keep only two or three heads of cattle. Similarly, the ritual importance of butter suggests some association with a more pastoral set of values.

On a more structural level the resonances between these initiations and the Doko Gembela initiations are clear, with its stress on masculinity and warriorhood. And the importance of feasting to attain elderhood in Sidamo is clearly similar to the importance of the Seniors' Feast throughout Doko. However, the most striking similarities are not with the form of Gamo initiations found in Doko, but with those found in some *deres* a little to the north. For in these *deres*, including Ochollo and all the *deres* of the Kogota (such as Chench, Sull'a, Kogo, Ezzo, Doina, Birbira, and others), there are two-stage initiations, where initiates move through three statuses.¹⁸

¹⁸ Also, although I was not able to pursue it in detail, there is some suggestion that in some of these *deres* there are inter-generational rules, such that if a father takes one title (say, *hudhugha*) then his son must take a different one (say, *atuma/bitane*), and then his grandson will take the same one again (*hudhugha*), and so on. This, however, requires further investigation.

In most of these *deres* the two stages are known as *atuma* (or *aduma*) and *bitane*. The etymology of these words is unclear, but it is possible to note a number of resonances. Most obviously, ‘*atuma*’ means ‘male’ in the (northern) Gamo language. The associations of ‘*bitane*’ are more complicated. ‘*Bita*’ means ‘land’, and in the Ochollo dialect ‘*bitante*’ refers to a district, or sub-community/territory, of the *dere* (what in the Doko dialect would simply also be ‘*dere*’). In Oyda, over in the Gofa highlands, ‘*bitante*’ is the name given to a ritual leader responsible for the fertility of the land, second only in rank to the *kati* (Derje 1997:25-6). In Oromo ‘*bittaani*’ means ‘to buy’ (Gufu 1996:127 fn19), and the economic burdens of becoming *bitane* suggest that this connection may be more than one of coincidence.

In any case, in the *deres* of Kogota and Ochollo *atuma* and *bitane* refer to two different kinds of *halak’a*. In Chenchä the *atuma* and *bitane* are rather like two different stages that a *halak’a* must pass through. First he becomes *atuma*, then he becomes *bitane*, and finally he exits and becomes a *dere ade*. The *atuma* is considered to be senior, and it is he who sacrifices for the *dere* and is thought to be good for its fertility. The *bitane* is his messenger, and the intermediary between him and the *dere*. However, the expensive feasts are required in the transition to *bitane*, and not to *atuma*. While the *atuma* has greater ritual significance, the *bitane* has greater economic significance. In Ochollo there are also *atuma* and *bitane halak’as*. Again, the *atuma* is the ritual senior even though the initiation to *bitane halak’a* requires far greater feasting. However, in Ochollo the two types of *halak’a* are not necessarily sequential stages of the initiation to *dere ade*. A man can stop after becoming *atuma*, or choose to go on to become *bitane halak’a*. Alternatively a man may follow a different route and become a simple *bitane* before becoming *bitane halak’a* (Abeles 1983:61-113). Marc Abeles has described the Ochollo initiations in great detail, and it is worthwhile here to reproduce a brief sketch of them so that some of the similarities become clear.

Ochollo *Aduma Halak'a*

The *dere* meets at the *dubusha* and chooses who should be made *aduma*. They then call the initiate-to-be and tell him, and the initiate then returns home with the *lazantsa*. Shortly afterwards the initiate goes to the sacrificer's house and gives him a full pot of beer, known as *kumets*. Some time later the initiate's lineage head (*angisa*) puts *uts'uma* grass on the centre-post of the initiate's house and blesses him to be well. After that, when the initiate has prepared, he feeds all the *ades* in his district (*guta*) on barley and beer, in a feast known as *ade gado*. Then, a week before *Mesqalla*, there is the first *sofe*. Men and women, kin and neighbours are invited to feast at the initiate's house, and the *degala* are also fed separately. The initiate must give a large lump of butter to the *bitane halak'a*, which is then distributed amongst all the *ades*. Then the crowds accompany the initiate to the *dubusha*, where he drinks some wheat beer together with the *bitane halak'a*. At *Mesqalla* there is more feasting at home, and then a second *sofe* in the market, after which he has now fully become *aduma*.

Ochollo *Bitane Halak'a*

The process of becoming *bitane halak'a* is both more lengthy and more expensive. The first few stages are the same as for the *aduma*, up to and including the *ade gado* feast. At the first *sofe* things begin to go differently. *Dere* men rush to the initiate's house and seize him 'like a bride' and carry him to the *dubusha*. After parading him around, they put him down on the special place of the *bitane halak'a*. Then everyone rushes and tries to pull a thread from the cloth that he is wearing. This is reminiscent, says Abeles, of two things. One is a kind of sacrifice where everyone rushes to cut some flesh of the animal, and the other is the fate of a bride on her wedding night.

Later in the day the initiate must give a second gift of *kumets* to the sacrificers. This time they come to his house, and eat and drink, and receive gifts of butter and money. After that commences a period of seclusion, where the initiate must remain in his house and be fed good food. Continuing one of the themes of the first *sofe*, the Ochollo liken this

to the period of seclusion of a new bride. During this period, however, the initiate's house is a hub of social activity, and he must provide a number of feasts, first for young girls, then for married women, then for the *mana* and *degala*. Then there are two big feasts for the *ades* and their wives, during which the initiate must also give them large quantities of butter, honey and tobacco. Finally, at the end of the seclusion period, the initiate takes a third gift of *kumets* to the sacrificer and then goes to the *dubusha* for the second *sofe*. Dressed in his best traditional clothes, and with a copious amount of butter on his head, the initiate parades around the *dubusha* and then sits on the special *bitane halak'a* stone. When the festivities are over everyone returns to the initiate's house and there is a final huge feast. A bull is killed and the meat is eaten. Now the initiate can sit with his guests, and not in seclusion, and is finally a full *bitane halak'a*. All that remains is to *sofe* one final time at the next *Mesqalla* celebrations.

Now what is most striking about these events is the long seclusion period which the *bitane halak'a* must go through. It seems remarkably similar to the post-circumcision period among the Sidamo, where the house is the centre of activity during the seclusion and the where the initiate comes out of seclusion and sits with the elders at the final feast. All that is missing is the actual circumcision. But the Ochollo liken it instead to the period of post-marital seclusion, although, as pointed out in chapter two, the name for all these periods of seclusion is the name: *gach'ino*. It could be argued that what we find in Ochollo is a version of the initiations that is somewhere between that of the Sidamo and that of Doko Gembela, and that likewise the Sidamo initiations are somewhere between those of Ochollo and those of the Boran. With even this most sketchy of ethnography it is possible to see a pattern.

Atuma and Bitane in Doko

That this pattern in synchronic variation represents a series of temporal transformations can be adduced by looking a little closer at some Doko ethnography. Although the accounts of *halak'a* initiations in chapter four went into a fair amount of detail and included a certain amount of 'mess', there were still plenty of little incoherent details

that were left out. Some of these, when considered in the context of Ochollo ethnography, suggest that there may once have been two-stage *atuma/bitane* initiations in Doko. If this is so, then this would indeed support the hypothesis that the current synchronic variation is a result of temporal transformation.

Firstly, the terms *atuma* and *bitane* do actually crop up in Doko. In Ch'ento, in Doko Masho, there are in fact two *halak'as* each year, one of whom is called *atuma* and one of whom is called *bitane*. The *atuma* sacrifices for the *dere* and carries out the role of the *halak'as* in the other parts of Doko Masho, but the *bitane* is considered to be more important. Here, *atuma* and *bitane* are not sequential roles passed through by one person, they simply exist alongside each other. In Kale, in Doko Gembela, although there is no reference to *bitane*, the *halak'a* is known as *gondale atuma*, where *gondale* refers to the special shield that the Kale *halak'a* keeps while he is herding the *dere*. And although *atuma* and *bitane* are not currently found in any of the other *deres* of Doko, the fact that the large *sofe* where all the *halak'as* of Doko Masho parade together in the market place is generally referred to as *atuma atso*, or 'making the *atuma*', rather suggests that this was not always the case.

Furthermore, by comparing the basic form of the Doko initiations with those in neighbouring *deres*, it is possible to suggest that what is now the Seniors' Feast may possibly have marked the transition from *atuma* to *bitane* in the past. In Chenchu, Dorze and Ochollo there is the basic rule in the *halak'a* initiations that every large feast is followed by a *sofe* - a status-changing event. Where there is one feast there is one *sofe*; where there are three feasts there are three *sofes*. In Doko Masho, and most of Doko Gembela, the position of the Seniors' Feast is thus anomalous. It is the largest feast that the *halak'a* must give, and yet it is not followed by any *sofe* or change of status. Furthermore, in the initiation of the *hudhugha* in both Doko Masho and Doko Gembela there is no Seniors' Feast, suggesting that it is unnecessary for the general form of the initiations. The *sofe*-less Seniors' Feast suggests that there used to be a *sofe* and a change of status that took place after the Seniors' Feast, and this has been dropped.¹⁹

¹⁹ Alternatively, the feast itself could be a new innovation. But comparing with other *deres* suggests that this is unlikely.

By looking at some small variations in the Seniors' Feasts in Doko Gembela, we find that *halak'as* in one *dere* in Doko actually do change status at the Seniors' Feast, and that in at least one other *dere* there is evidence that this used to happen in the past. In most of the *deres* of Doko Gembela the change-over of *halak'as*, where the new *halak'a* takes his place on the *halak'a* stone and officially starts to herd the *dere*, takes place on the Naming Day, and shortly afterwards the new *halak'a* blesses the *dere* for the first time. However, as mentioned in chapter four, in Shaye the *halak'a* change-over and first blessing take place at the Seniors' Feast. And in Kale, although the *halak'a* change-over takes place on the Naming Day, the first blessing takes place at the Seniors' Feast.

Combining all these odd fragments of data, and placing them in the wider context of the Ochollo initiations, it does seem plausible to suggest that some time in the past the herding *halak'as* in Doko were considered to be *atuma halak'a*, and that the Seniors' Feast once marked the transition from *atuma* to *bitane halak'a*. If this is correct, it implies there has been considerable temporal transformation in Doko initiations. Moreover, although the contemporary Doko Masho initiations share the *halak'a*-as-bride theme with the contemporary Ochollo initiations, it seems that overall the contemporary Doko Gembela initiations are rather closer to the two-stage initiations of both Ochollo and Sidamo, than are the Doko Masho initiations. There is stronger evidence of a past two-stage initiation in Doko Gembela, and the seclusion period shows similarities with the seclusion periods in both the Ochollo and Sidamo initiations. The emphasis of the initiate as a warrior resonates strongly with the general Cushitic theme. The Doko Masho initiations lack all these elements, and thus seem to have transformed even further.

I will return to this idea in chapter seven, where I will also consider just how such transformations might have taken place. But for now I hope to have shown two things. Firstly that there is a continuity of form and structure between the Boran *Gada*, the Sidamo *Lua*, the Ochollo *atuma* and *bitane halak'as*, and the Doko *halak'a*. And secondly that this synchronic variation in form represents a series of temporal

transformations. If I have succeeded in this task, then I have also gone some way in demonstrating that the Gamo initiations originate in some form of lowland initiation system which was ‘borrowed’ from incoming settlers and then transformed in the new cultural and agricultural context of the highlands. It now falls to consider whether the initiations of the northern highlands diffused southwards during the period of expansion in the eighteenth century.

5.4.2.2 The Southern Highlands: From *Kawo*’s Assistant to Initiate

In the southern parts of the Gamo highlands the system of initiations shows a number of differences. Most obviously, members of *D’ache* clans and *Gamo* clans are initiated differently, but also the purpose of the initiations and the roles of the initiates differ quite considerably from the northern versions. In this section I will suggest that the initiatory system came to this area with the conquerors from the northern highlands, and I will also make some speculations about what things were like before these northerners arrived.

Throughout the southern highlands initiated men take the titles of *maaga*, *hudhugha* and *dana*. Who takes these titles, and under what circumstances, varies considerably from *dere* to *dere*. In what follows I will sketch the Balta system of initiations. In Balta *D’ache* clans are initiated to be *hudhugha* and *Gamo* clans are initiated to be *maaga*²⁰. To further complicate matters there are two different types of *hudhugha* and two different types of *maaga*. In both cases, one type of initiate actually has an important role in *dere* matters, while the other appears simply to increase his own status. I will first describe the simple status-enhancing varieties of the initiations. The general form of these initiations is quite similar for both *hudhugha* and *maaga*, and I will provide a generalised outline, noting where there are any significant differences.

²⁰ Poorer *D’ache* men can instead be initiated to the title of *mochona*, which is like the *hudhugha*’s assistant, and requires less expenditure. Similarly, poorer *Gamo* men can become either *gondo* or *tok’k’ame*. (Note that *tok’k’ama* is the title that *degala* initiates used to take in Doko.)

Balta *Hudhugha/Maaga*

The *dere* decides who should be made *hudhugha/maaga*, and sends the *lazantsa* to tell him. Soon afterwards the *lazantsa* returns to the initiate's house with the sacrificer (known as *sagga* in this area) and they spend the day there eating and drinking. At the end of the day they bless him, and give him a special 'name of honour', or *saaro*. Typical *saaro* include *Kalsa* (satisfied), *Yosha* (handsome) and *Zuma* (mountain). Once a man has received such a name it is often used instead of his real name in day to day life, as a mark of respect.²¹

After this the man must save up and accumulate resources. This is done from his own production, and also through a series of exchanges with kin and neighbours. To become *hudhugha* he needs to give the *dere* five cows, or currently the cash equivalent which is set at 180 birr, while to become *maaga* the cost is four cows, or 120 birr. For many men it can take years to save up this amount, and thus there is often a long delay between the early part of the initiation and its completion. It was not clear to me whether the initiate has to provide a feast as well as this large financial donation, but even if he does the emphasis is definitely on the 'payment'. People often referred to the initiation process as that of 'buying a name'.

When this payment has been made, the initiate 'enters the market' (*gia gelo*). He wears a leopardskin and holds a ceremonial staff, known as *ororisa*. In the market place the sacrificer puts an ostrich feather on the initiate's head if he is to be *hudhugha*, or some *ts'ats'a* grass if he is to be *maaga*. Then his clan sisters rub a big lump of butter around his head three times. The day is spent singing and dancing in the market place, and towards the evening the initiate and his wife return to their house and enter a seven-day period of seclusion. During this time the initiate is considered to be like a mother that has just given birth, he is in pain and must be fed well. At the end of the week the initiate leaves his seclusion, and on the next market day he *sofes* in the market place, wearing the leopardskin and holding the ceremonial staff. He repeats this *sofe* for the next two weeks, and then his initiation is complete.

²¹ The teknonym is used rather infrequently in the southern highlands.

Many people are initiated to these positions each year, and most adult men that I met had taken one of these titles and was called by his *saaro*. However, the purpose of these initiations is rather strange. It is not to bring fertility and well-being to the *dere*, but rather to raise funds for *dere* expenditure. These initiates do not have any ritual role, and they are not said to ‘herd’ the *dere*. As initiates they seem to have no special role in *dere* affairs. But they are sometimes referred to as ‘dere saviours’ (*dere asha*), because of the funds they have raised for the *dere*. These funds are used for all sorts of *dere* matters, such as to supply food for meetings at the sacrificer’s house, or to provide for offerings of grain or sheep that need to be taken to the rain *kawo* in Zargulla, or more recently, to pay off bribes to the local government administration. A similar situation is found in other southern *deres*. In Sorba, Haringa and Ch’oye, for example, there are similar initiations that appear to have no ritual importance, but are solely for fund-raising purposes. There the titles of *maaga*, *hudhugha* and *dana* can be taken sequentially by men from *Gamo* clans, as there are no *D’ache* clans except that of the *kawo*.

In contrast to these fund-raising initiates, however, there are also initiates in Balta that do in fact have ritual roles and are considered to be linked to the fertility and well-being of the *dere*. Confusingly, these initiates are also referred to as *maaga*, although they are sometimes differentiated as ‘*halak’a maaga*’ or ‘*baira maaga*’ (senior *maaga*)²². There are two of these *maagas* at any time, and they stay in office until the *dere* decides to change them, which they will generally do if there is drought or illness or some other problem. One of the main roles of these initiates is to act as intermediary between the *dere* and the rain *kawo* in Zargulla. Thus just before harvest time every year they go to Zargulla with a sheep for the rain *kawo*, so that he should control the rains in order that the barley is not spoilt before it is harvested. They also take contributions at other times. For example, in 1994 the rain *kawo*’s son got married, and messages were sent out to various *deres* that grain, butter and money were required for the marriage feast. Everyone in Balta gave something, and the contributions were taken to Zargulla by the two *halak’a maagas*.

²² In Balta there are also *hudhugas* that have important roles in *dere* affairs. However, they do not seem to be associated with the fertility of the *dere*. I will not discuss their role here.

The form of their initiation in Balta seems to be broadly similar to that described before, except that their payment goes only to former *halak'a maagas*, and they have to feast the *dere* as well. There are no doubt many differences in detail, and I was not able to piece together a full account. However, it is interesting to note that although this office is initiatory in Balta, the equivalent office in Zargulla is hereditary. In Zargulla there are twelve *maagas*, linked with specific *deres* or *gutas* within Zargulla, and these offices are inherited, like sacrificer-ship, from father to son. The role of these *maagas* is to act as intermediaries between their *deres* and the rain *kawo* and also to protect the *dere* from disease and problems caused by locusts, birds or other wild animals.

The central feature of their installation is as follows. The *maaga*-to-be brings a heffer to the rain *kawo*, and the rain *kawo* puts some *gata*²³ grass on his head and blesses him. The *maaga*-to-be then returns to his *dere* and kills a sheep. He then takes off his clothes, and wearing just the sheep-skin round his waist, stands on the edge of a small 'cliff'. The *dere* push him over so that he lands on the ground at the bottom. The *tok'k'ame* then follows him, and they exchange clothes (the *tok'k'ame* later takes the original clothes of the *maaga*). There is no feasting or distribution, and the ritual is one of installation, not initiation.

Interestingly, in Sorba, Haringa and Ch'oye, where, as in Zargulla, there are only very few *D'ache* clans, the *maagas* (referred to as 'left' and 'right' *maagas*, to distinguish them from the fund-raising type) are also hereditary. These *deres* do not bring tribute to the Zargulla rain *kawo*, and the main role of these *maagas* is to act as intermediaries between the *dere* and the local sacrificer. Thus when the *dere* wants the sacrificer to bless the land and begin sowing at the beginning of the agricultural cycle, it is the *maaga* who takes a sheep from the *dere* to the sacrificer and asks him to carry out his duty. And when messages or offerings are sent to the *kawo* in Ch'oye, it is the *maaga* who takes them.

²³ I am not sure if this is the same as the *ts'ats'a* grass used in Balta.

Putting these fragments of data together, it seems possible to suggest the following scenario. In the past in many southern Gamo *deres* there was an hereditary office known as *maaga*. The role of the *maaga* was to act as intermediary between the sacrificer and the *dere*²⁴. When *D'ache* clans from the northern parts of the highlands settled in the area and started initiating *hudhughas*, the *Gamo* clans began to copy them, and in areas where there was a heavy *D'ache* influence, such as Balta, they began to initiate their *maagas*. The form of these initiations drew on both the symbolism of the previous *maaga* installation (eg. the grass on the head), and the new *hudhugha* initiations (eg. the *sofe* in the market place). In places with less *D'ache* influence, such as Zargulla, and Sorba, Haringa and Ch'oye, *maaga*-ship continued to be inherited. However, in all these places two features of the initiation system were seen and admired: the ability it gave to men to improve their status through their own achievements, and the possibilities it had for fund-raising. Thus they started to introduce the non-ritual form of the initiations.

The precise details of these events were no doubt far more complicated than the above account, but such a scenario not only explains some of the variations between different *deres* in the southern parts of the highlands, but it also makes sense of the rather greater variations between northern and southern Gamo. It also fits with the broader historical processes that have been suggested throughout this chapter. Furthermore, it offers a way of imagining how the initiations were first taken up in the northern parts of the highlands: as an office that was previously some complement, or assistant, to the sacrificer was transformed first from hereditary uptake to initiatory uptake, and then became an important initiation system in its own right.

²⁴ This broad scenario is further supported by the fact that in Gidole, a non-Gamo community in the next range of mountains south of the Gamo highlands, there is an office known as *maaga*, whose responsibility is to act as intermediary between the sacrificer and individual clans (Hansemo 1992:46).

5.4.2.3 The Form of the Initiations

While it seems extremely likely that the Gamo initiatory system came into being and spread over the area during this period, it is difficult to imagine quite what form it would have had at particular times and in particular places. It is also unclear who became initiated, and how this affected their subsequent life. Assuming that initiation at this time also required the providing of large feasts, then it is important to know how initiates produced the necessary surplus. Was it solely by their own agricultural endeavours, or did it require success in trade, or the ownership of slaves captured through war? If, as seems likely, wealth from trade was crucial, then it is important to understand the articulation of local trade with long distance trade (see Rowlands 1979), and how success in trade connected with the ability to be initiated. It would also be interesting to understand the relation with the Gofa highlands more fully, and how slaves and/or tribute were extracted from the area, and by whom. With the scanty data available, we might imagine that it was primarily those successful in trade and/or warfare that were able to buy status through initiation, but the precise dynamics of this process are unclear.

5.5 The Nineteenth Century

By the late eighteenth century trade was gradually beginning to resume on the northern route, as many Oromo communities made permanent settlements, took up agriculture and became more accustomed to trade. Muslim caravans again began to push through to the south. At around this time the demand for slaves in Arabia grew dramatically, partly due to British interference in the East African slave trade. Thus during the nineteenth century, trade along the northern route was extremely lucrative, and focussed mainly on slaves (Abir 1970:123).

As a result of this trade, many polities expanded at this time.²⁵ At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Oromo conquered Enarya to form the new Oromo kingdom of Limu-Enarya. Four other Oromo kingdoms were formed in the Gibe region at about the same time, and although the factors that led the democratic and pastoral Oromo to form autocratic kingdoms are many and complex, the resumption of the Red Sea trade at this time was no doubt important (Abir 1965:207, Abir 1970:125). During the reign of king Shagi Sherocho (1775-1795 approx) Kafa expanded as far as the Omo river in the southeast and almost to the confluence of the Omo and Dinya rivers in the south, and collected tribute from numerous vassal polities (Lange 1982:193, Pankhurst 1997:351). At around the same time Wolaita also started to expand. During the reign of *kawo* Sanna (17??-1758), some land was won from Kambata, and under *kawo* Oggato (1759-1799) more land was seized from Hadiya. This expansion continued into the nineteenth century, and under *kawo* Amado (1800-1835) land was won from Kucha and Dawro, and Gamo and Borroda again became tributaries (Tsehai 1975:42-3). According to Wolaita oral tradition Gamo was tributary to Wolaita throughout the nineteenth century, with only a brief interlude during the reign of king Damote, when Gamo were tributary to Kafa (ibid:43).

If this is indeed so we must consider the political and economic effects of the loss of independence for the people of the Gamo highlands. By the late eighteenth century Gamo appears to have undergone considerable expansion, and seems to have exerted some influence in the Gofa highlands, probably exacting tribute. But when Gamo itself became tributary to Wolaita, this influence was lost, as Wolaita usurped it (see Tsehai 1975:43). In short, much of the economic underpinnings of the expanded, and possibly more centralised, Gamo communities changed dramatically as Wolaita became the dominant power in the area. A likely result of these changes would be the decline of the

²⁵ Conversely, other communities on the far periphery, such as the Gumuz, were raided for slaves to such an extent that they suffered very great losses in numbers, particularly of women and children. In response, they frequently moved away into even more remote regions and developed new types of defensive social systems (see James 1986).

Gamo polities, and their political devolution.²⁶ Oral histories and myths collected in the highlands during my fieldwork provide some support for this scenario.

5.5.1 Political Devolution in the Northern Highlands

Oral histories that I collected in Doko suggest that the *dere* has been slowly devolving since the end of the eighteenth century. What was then one strong unified *dere* has now almost devolved into the two separate *deres* of Doko Masho and Doko Gembela.

In the past, during the eighteenth century, there was a *kawo* of Doko who came from the *Gaomala* clan and lived in Shale, near Anka *dubusha*.²⁷ This *kawo* was the senior sacrificer for the whole of Doko, and was thought to have the most powerful blessing and curse in the *dere*. He inspired great awe, and was rumoured to have snakes living in his long hair. On his installation each of the seventeen smaller *deres* of Doko brought him a bull to slaughter at Anka *dubusha*, and sat there to eat meat together. Below him the division of Doko Masho and Doko Gembela appeared insignificant, all were junior to him and thus all were simply Doko.

However, six generations ago, sometime around the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the 19th century, one of the brothers of the *kawo* of Shama, a nearby *dere*, left Shama and came to Doko. He settled in Yoira, and claimed that he would be good for the *dere*'s fertility and that they should make him *kawo*. Male, as he was called, was not however made *kawo*, and eventually he died. His oldest son, Dale, moved to Ch'ento, and said that now he would be made *kawo*. However, one of his half-brothers, so the story goes, was so jealous of Dale's wealth and popularity, that he killed him.

²⁶ The increased importance of slave trading will be discussed later, but since it does not appear to have been monopolised by the *kawos* or clan heads, its growth does not contradict the dynamics discussed here.

²⁷ The *kawo* and Shale are connected in many songs sung at ritual occasions, and during the *Mesqalla* celebrations all the people of Doko Masho must rush to 'touch the hands of Shale' because Shale is the *dere* of the *kawo* (even though the current *kawo* does not live there).

This greatly shocked the *dere*, and they decided to make Dale's son, Toito, their new *kawo*. However, just before they could do this, war broke out with the *dere* of Zad'a. Doko was not prepared, and fled for protection to the *dere* of Chench, where they stayed for seven years. Toito was instrumental in making peace and bringing about the return of Doko to their land. Soon afterwards he was made *kawo*, and his descendants have held this position since then. Desta, the present *kawo*, is his great great grandson.

What happened to the previous *kawo* is not at all clear. He and his descendants are now referred to as Gamo *kawo*, instead of Doko *kawo*. The current Gamo *kawo* left Doko in the early 1970s because of some argument with the *dere*, and he has not been seen since. Some people attribute the poor state of the *dere* to his absence, and there have been assemblies to discuss what to do. People have been sent to Addis Abeba and around the country to find him, but none have been successful. So currently there is only one acting *kawo* of Doko, but for the last hundred years or so there appear to have been two.

For our purposes here it is relevant to note that the relation between the Gamo *kawo* and Doko seems rather different from that between the Doko *kawo* and Doko. The former, as described above, united his dependants into one *dere*. The latter, however, is in the position of being *kawo* of both Doko Masho and Doko Gembela, without really uniting them. Whereas the Gamo *kawo* lived in Shale, roughly central vis-a-vis the whole of Doko, the Doko *kawo* has two houses, one in Ch'ento (in Doko Masho) and one in Kale (in Doko Gembela). All rituals to do with the Doko *kawo* are carried out partly in Doko Masho and partly in Doko Gembela; thus when the Doko *kawo* sacrifices he must sacrifice in both Doko Masho and in Doko Gembela. This situation often arouses some competition, particularly when the ritual event in question is one that cannot be easily repeated. Thus when *kawo* Darza died, the issue of where he should be buried caused major furore between Doko Masho and Doko Gembela. Doko Masho insisted that he should be buried at what they considered to be the traditional burial place, in Ch'ento, while Doko Gembela insisted that the traditional burial place was in Kale. The dispute turned into an argument about seniority, which was unresolved when I left the field, and is holding up the installation of Desta. *Kawo* Darza's funeral could not await these

lengthy discussions, and, pragmatically, he was buried in the Orthodox church cemetery in Chenchu town (although technically on Doko Gembela land).

Another strand of oral history recounts that in the past the eight *deres* of Doko Masho performed their initiations separately, until an agreement was made to hold some of their celebrations together in the market place. It is also relevant to note here that there are no hereditary sacrificers (*ek'k'as*) for either Doko Masho or Doko Gembela. Both Doko and the smaller *deres* have such sacrificers, and as I have suggested in chapter three, they are essential to what it is to be a *dere*. But for Doko Masho and Doko Gembela their roles are carried out by other people, and there are no *ek'k'as* at this scale. Putting all this together, it seems that the large *dere* of Doko broke up into its small constituent *deres*, possibly during conquest by the new *kawo*, and then regrouped into the two medium-sized *deres*, Doko Masho and Doko Gembela. Thus here we have a fairly detailed picture of a localised example of political devolution. And as I will show with some more examples, there is every reason to think that similar processes have gone on all over the Gamo highlands during the nineteenth century.

5.5.2 Political Devolution in the Southern Highlands

Further evidence of political devolution can be found in myths and oral histories that I collected in the southern parts of the highlands. Many of these suggest that the political groupings of the past were larger than they are today.

For example, in the southern part of the highlands there is a *dere* called Zargulla, which as mentioned before, is home to a very powerful *kawo*, who sacrifices for rain. There is a myth in this *dere*, shared throughout most of the southern parts of the highlands, that tells of the origin of the first *kawo*. As discussed above, this myth claims that the first *kawo* came from the *dere* of Kole. By analysing variants of this myth in some detail, it is possible to show that many of the *deres* of these original *kawos* used to be grouped together in confederations, and that they have only recently devolved into smaller polities.

The versions of the myth that I collected in Zargulla, Zayse, Balta and Ganta (*deres* in the south and southeast of the highlands, see map 6) all tell a similar story: One day a girl was out collecting water at dawn, in a place called Zihe, in the *dere* of Kole. As the sun rose, its ray rode on the water and the girl became pregnant. Eventually she gave birth to seven sons, and these sons became the *kawos* of seven *deres*.

These seven *deres* are said to have been ‘brothers’, and they used to go to Kole every year to perform sacrificers together.²⁸ Even now, the Zargulla *kawo* must go to Kole during his lengthy installation process, and the new *kawo* did so when he was installed five or six years ago. On the way he paraded through, and sacrificed in, a number of ‘brother’ *deres*, including Zayse, Balta and so on. These *deres* are the ones who used to go together to sacrifice in Kole, and they all continue to take offerings to the Zargulla *kawo* so that he will bring the rain. Thus even now, these *deres* form some kind of informal grouping, and it seems that in the past this grouping may have been a more formal political entity, headed by the Zargulla *kawo* and with more junior offices (such as the *maagas*) in the other locales. Following the approximate dating used before, it would appear that this devolution happened towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Variants of the same myth collected in Balta, Ch’oye and Sorba (*deres* in the south or southwest of the highlands) suggest that in this area there may have been another grouping of *deres* whose *kawo* came from Kole, and also that successive processes of fragmentation may have taken place. The basic form of the myth in these areas tell how the girl was impregnated by the sun’s ray while collecting water in Kole, and then say that she gave birth to just one son. This son then married a woman, and she gave birth to four sons, who then went on to become the *kawos* of four *deres*. In order of seniority these were Dada Arshe who went to Bonke, Dawe Porsha who went to Balta, Boricha who went to Hanik’a, and Allemalle who went to Ch’oye/Haringa/Sorba. Sorba elders told me that these four *deres* had an alliance and were “good in sacrifice and good in war”. Every few years they would go together and sacrifice in Kole, and they used to

²⁸ As mentioned before, the obligation to do this fades after seven generations, and thus the practice has now stopped.

fight together in war. But this alliance broke down some time ago when the two senior *deres*, Bonke and Balta, wanted to dominate the two junior *deres*, Hanik'a and Ch'oye/Haringa/Sorba, and make them labour for them on their land. After a brief period of war a peace pact was made, and since then they have lived peacefully, but separately, side-by-side.

There are a number of points to be brought out here. First, the four initial *kawos* are one step removed from the magical impregnation at Kole. This might suggest that these *kawos* did not come straight from Kole, but were perhaps *kawos* from somewhere else, probably from within the Zargulla-headed polity, who decided to strike out on their own and thus moved to these more westerly areas. Second, the reason given for the break down of the alliance of the four *deres* is that the senior two became too dominant, and exploited the junior two beyond the limits of tolerance. This led to rebellion, war, and eventually fragmentation.²⁹

Thirdly, and finally, there is the business of the *dere* known as Ch'oye/Haringa/Sorba. In the myth there is one *kawo* for this *dere*, suggesting that it was a unified *dere*, such as Balta or Hanik'a, but in the present Ch'oye, Haringa and Sorba exist as three small separate *deres*, each with their own *kawo*. There is still some alliance between them, such that Ch'oye, the senior *dere*, can make decisions of *woga*, impose fines, and clear *gome* for all of them, but for the most part they are fairly autonomous *deres*. This suggests that successive stages of devolution have taken place here, and that polities are fragmenting into smaller and smaller units even in the fairly recent past. Although the local dynamics in different parts of the highlands are likely to be different in their details, it does seem that devolution has been taking place, one way or another, over most of this area.

²⁹ For a similar discussion regarding the Kachin of highland Burma see Leach 1981[1954] and Nugent 1982.

5.5.3 The Initiatory System

The same factors that led to the weakening of the sacrificial system and political devolution would have also affected the initiatory system. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it seems possible that initiates produced the surplus wealth necessary to provide the initiation feasts partly from their own agricultural endeavours, partly from trade, and partly from tribute and slave labour which they acquired through warfare in other areas, particularly the Gofa highlands. Such a pattern would fit with what we know about regional dynamics at the time, and with the pattern of the Oromo *Gada*, where initiations are preceded by raiding and warfare. If this is the case, then becoming tributary to Wolaita and losing influence in the Gofa area would have severely disrupted the ability of initiates to produce sufficient surplus wealth. However, the resumption and growth of the slave trade at this time would have provided an alternative source of wealth. Having lost the ability to raid for slaves in the Gofa area, aspiring initiates may have turned to their closer neighbours as a source of booty and slaves, and raiding and warfare may have escalated within the highlands during this time.³⁰

As mentioned in chapter two, oral histories collected in the 1960s suggest that inter-*dere* warfare was indeed endemic during the nineteenth century, and that slaves and slave labour were the most sought after prize. If this situation was new, or much exacerbated by the reduction of non-Gamo sources of slaves, then it would have a number of consequences on nineteenth century Gamo life. However, although the slave trade was no doubt extremely important during this time, there is scant data on the local operation of this trade in the highlands. The oral histories collected in the 1960s refer to slaves used for local agricultural labour, but not slaves that were sold to traders, or taken to Wolaita.

³⁰ The escalation of warfare in the highlands, driven by the search for slaves, would also have led to increased instability and political disruption, thus furthering political devolution and territorial break up.

If, as seems to have been the case, the slave trade was not monopolised by the *kawos*, then its increase in the nineteenth century may have led to the increasing importance of those who did either control or successfully manipulate it. And as discussed in chapter two, Olmstead's data seems to suggest a link between the initiates and local warfare for slaves and slave labour. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the local organisation of slave trading at this time, and thus the suggestion that it was successful slave traders who had the wealth to be initiated, or conversely, that the slave trade was dominated by initiated men, cannot be firmly substantiated. If, however, this was the case, then the increased slave trade would most likely have compensated for the lack of tribute and slaves from the Gofa area, and allowed the initiatory system to flourish while the sacrificial system devolved. With the minimal data, however, it is difficult to take our analysis further than this speculation. It is clear, though, that nineteenth and twentieth century Gamo life cannot be understood outside of this context.

5.6 The Twentieth Century

Although many of the events of the twentieth century have been discussed in some detail in chapter two, the local happenings of that account need to be seen in the broader regional and historical context being sketched in this chapter.

During the nineteenth century the growth in Red Sea trade had affected the northern Ethiopian empire as well as the more southerly polities. Coming out of the period of decline known as 'The Era of the Princes', the northern empire began again to grow stronger. Its centre moved to Shewa, which was an important point on the route from the south to the coastal ports. The Shewan kingdom effectively controlled this route, by not allowing southern merchants to proceed beyond it to the coast, or coastal traders to proceed any further south (Abir 1970:124). As the northern empire regained its strength it began to expand southwards, competing with European colonial powers for control over the territories to its south.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Gamo highlands and the surrounding region had become part of the new Ethiopian nation state. The slave trade had come to an end, and local warfare was curtailed under the new political order. The base of the nineteenth century economy was thus dealt a fatal blow, as the previous ways of producing a surplus were rendered obsolete.

Agricultural production would also have been affected by these changes. As slave labour became less prevalent in the highlands, men with large amounts of land would have had to find other ways to farm it. It seems likely that share-cropping (*t'e?o*) and mortgaging out of land (*aitsa*) became more common at this time, and it is also possible that land was increasingly bought and sold during this period. Shagire's great grandfather, for example, acquired a lot of land at the beginning of the twentieth century, and although I have not investigated this in detail, it seems likely that this was a shrewd move in a time when much land was suddenly up for sale. The buying and selling of land at this time most likely resulted in a slightly more even distribution.

With the rapid population growth of the twentieth century, the average size of land holdings began to decline. On top of this the arrival of the Amhara *neftenyas* further increased the number of people that had to be fed from the land. Thus the amount of agricultural surplus that people could produce and control began to fall.

Furthermore, as the population density continued to increase, people have begun to increasingly encroach onto pasture land and to space fallow years further apart. This in turn has led to some ecological degradation and resultant lower productivity of the land. The fine ecological balance and the beginnings of degradation in the highlands have been remarked upon in the 1960s and 1970s (Jackson et al 1969, Olmstead 1973:228), and in the 1990s farmers complained of an overall decline in crop yields and soil fertility in the course of their lifetimes (Cartledge 1995:283). All these factors combined to make it harder and harder to produce a large agricultural surplus, and during the twentieth century the average size of this surplus seems likely to have steadily decreased. With the economy much weakened, the devolution of the sacrificial system started in the nineteenth century continued into the twentieth century.

New ways of generating wealth that were opened up in the twentieth century also contributed to this political devolution. With monetisation new forms of trade developed between Addis Abeba and the highlands, and weaving became increasingly popular. There is no indication that either trade or weaving were controlled in any way, and thus young men and genealogical juniors could take up these non-agricultural pursuits and, to a certain extent, escape dependence on their fathers or genealogical seniors. The increasing stability in the area, brought about by the end of warfare, would have further decreased the importance of the clan grouping, as its functions of protecting clan land and seeking compensation in the case of the murder of a clan member would have become less relevant. With access to land becoming less important, and blessings for its fertility less crucial, the sacrificial system became weaker and weaker.

These, then, are the factors that seem to have led to the devolution of the sacrificial system. These dynamics only become apparent when we look at the Gamo highlands in this broad historical and regional context, and appreciate the contingent nature of Gamo cultural life. These same factors clearly affected the initiatory system as well, as it became harder and harder for men to produce surplus wealth in order to provide the requisite feasts. However, the centrality of the initiations in the twentieth century attest to the fact that they have not simply faded away. Rather, it would seem that they have been transformed by these external changes. Quite how they have transformed throughout the twentieth century, though, is the subject of chapter seven.

5.7 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has moved over a broad ethnographic area and a long time depth to show some of the macro-transformations that have taken place in the Gamo highlands over the last four or five centuries. Far from being in some pristine un-touched state, or even in a state of 'stable equilibrium', the Gamo communities of the twentieth century take the shape they do as the result of centuries of continual change and transformation. The analysis presented here has shown how the political-economy of the region, and the pattern of warfare and conquest, have influenced life in the Gamo highlands and have led to all sorts of changes in Gamo cultural practices.

I have argued that the expansion and decline of Gamo highland communities was influenced to a great extent by their peripheral involvement in long distance trade, and their position vis a vis Wolaita. When trade was flourishing Wolaita managed to exert considerable control over it, and expanded in search of slave labour and tribute payers. At these times the Gamo highlands experienced decentralisation and decline. However, in the periods when Wolaita was in decline, either due to conquest or the reduction in long distance trade, then the communities of the Gamo highlands were able to expand and themselves seek slave labour and tribute payers, mainly from the South and West. This analysis follows the general model proposed by Friedman and Rowlands, in which it is considered that:

centres of power expand at the expense of surrounding societies which may have had similar structures but which are reduced in the process to acephalous societies (Friedman and Rowlands 1977:213).

However, my analysis diverges a little from their general model in its discussion of the borrowing of the Oromo *Gada* system and its transformation into the Gamo initiatory system. In their 'tribal system' it is lineage heads or chiefs who appropriate surplus and give feasts, but in post-seventeenth century Gamo communities it appears to have been initiated men who played this role. Conceptually and actually in opposition to lineage heads and chiefs, these men were able to control much surplus wealth and thus challenge, rather than support, the centralisation of the sacrificial system. The initiatory system did not undergo significant centralisation itself because its own internal organisation, or structure, did not lead it in that direction.

In order to understand this final point more clearly it is necessary to return to a more micro-scale analysis of the workings of this cultural system. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, both the internal properties of local systems and their place in a larger regional system are important in the understanding of social formations. In order to take this analysis further, then, it is necessary to try to understand the workings of the sacrificial and initiatory systems over a shorter time-frame, and in particular, to consider how micro-changes actually take place. As Nicholas Thomas has said,

it is the conjunction of ... intimate knowledge [from fieldwork] with short- and long-term history which has great potential in social and cultural analysis, not the pursuit of one endeavour to the exclusion of the other (Thomas 1989:122).

In the next two chapters, then, a smaller time-scale and a focus on micro-events is used to attempt the conjunction Thomas prescribes. Focussing back again on Doko in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I try to discern the micro-mechanisms by which some of these more macro changes would have taken place on the ground. Chapter six considers how external changes would be felt in the lives of Gamo people, and how they would make decisions leading to incremental cultural change on the basis of their experience. Chapter seven then considers how these incremental changes would work through the different cultural systems, according to their different internal organisation. In this way an insight is gained into the way in which some of the macro-scale changes described in this chapter might have actually taken place.

CHAPTER SIX: ASSEMBLIES AND INCREMENTAL CULTURAL CHANGE

6.1 Introduction

In the last chapter the Gamo highlands were seen in the context of the larger regional system and were shown to have experienced considerable cultural change and transformation over the past few centuries. With the large-scale focus of that chapter some of the external causes of local cultural change were highlighted and examined, and general trends and patterns were discerned. The aim of this chapter and the next is to complement that macro-scale analysis with a consideration of how cultural change and transformation takes place at a micro level, in the lives of real people. The focus of this chapter is on how external environmental changes, such as the disruption of long distance trade, incorporation into the nation state of Ethiopia, and ecological degradation, lead to incremental cultural change in the communities in the highlands. The question of overall structural change is left to chapter seven, where the cumulative effects of these incremental changes are discussed in more detail.

The model of cultural change presented in these two chapters is based on a combination of 1990s ethnography, what is known or can be guessed about local and regional history, and imagination. The aim is not to reconstruct the actual processes of temporal change in all their detail as they happened in Doko, but rather to present a hypothetical scenario which can be tested against the ethnographic and historical evidence. Since a fieldworker cannot spend a hundred years in the field, and even if they could they still could not be everywhere at once, it is extremely difficult to describe long-term change. One way in which one can attempt to model the mechanisms of cultural change, however, is to look at processes of change in action during one's own fieldwork, and then to imagine how such processes would work in particular circumstances known to

have been present in the past. I believe that the sociological insights facilitated by such an approach outweigh the risks and pitfalls that it involves.¹

In order to attempt this analysis it is necessary to narrow the focus back to the small community of Doko, and limit the time-scale to the past one hundred and fifty years or so. With the more reliable historical and ethnographic data from this period, it is possible to examine the workings of cultural change in a reasonably thorough way. The general mechanisms discerned, however, should also be relevant for other Gamo *deres* and other historical periods, and thus this analysis should provide some insight into the micro-processes of cultural change in the Gamo highlands in general.

The analysis begins with a discussion of how external environmental changes are experienced in local lives. Particular consideration is given to how environmental changes affect the ability of individuals to produce surplus wealth, although some consideration is also given to the experience of authority relations, and the consequences of political stability, and so on. The analysis then considers how these changes affect particular social relations, such as those between father and son, or clan head and clan member. I try to demonstrate that, one way or another, changing tensions in these social relations end up being discussed at local assemblies.

After discussing the form and functioning of these assemblies in some detail, I then show how discussion at these assemblies can have a number of types of outcome, leading to cultural stasis or particular forms of incremental cultural change. In this way I try to show how assemblies mediate the causal link between external environmental factors and internal cultural change. The chapter ends with a brief digression from the Gamo highlands in which I discuss the implications of this suggestion at a more general

¹ Although this approach may appear to be unscientific and lacking in analytic rigour, it has much in common with computer simulation approaches that are used increasingly in the natural sciences (especially with regard to quantum mechanics and complex dynamic systems), where abstract models are invented and then tested against reality, as opposed to methodologies which, (focussed more on Newtonian mechanics), try to measure reality and then explain it.

level. If assemblies do in fact mediate this external-internal link, then it is likely that societies with different forms of conciliar organisation will change in different ways when influenced by similar external factors. I consider this general hypothesis at an abstract level, and then test it with comparative ethnography from southern Ethiopia.

6.2 The Local Experience of External Change

It is impossible to describe how all the changes in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries would have been experienced in the lives of the people of Doko. Instead I will focus on a number of examples that I think are particularly important, and use these to give an indication of how external environmental changes are felt in individual lives.

Many of the external changes in the early twentieth century combined to make it increasingly hard for people in Doko to produce surplus wealth. As discussed in chapter five, the end of the slave trade marked a significant loss in local wealth-generating potential, and the abolition of warfare under Amhara rule further led to the decline in the use of captured slaves for local agricultural labour, and thus the decline in the area of land that could be cultivated by one man (or household). On top of this, there was also the presence of Amhara *neftenya* settlers who, as described in chapter two, had to be fed from local produce. All these factors combined to reduce the amount of surplus wealth that most men could produce and use for their own purposes.

In such circumstances men would have found it increasingly hard to become *halak'a*, as raising the required funds to provide the feasts would have become more and more difficult. They would have also found it increasingly difficult to contribute to clan and lineage sacrifices, to provide large marriage feasts, and to make the *kumets* payments to their fathers-in-law after the birth of their children. Their dwindling wealth would have had to be disposed of carefully and strategically in order to gain the greatest possible advantage from their limited resources. The strategies of different categories of people would have been rather different, and in conflict. Genealogical seniors, for example, would have encouraged participation in sacrifices and the correct order of ritualised

cultivation, while juniors might have considered it less important and preferred to use their limited wealth to gain status by becoming *halak'a*. Fathers-in-law would have tried to ensure that sons-in-law kept up prompt payment of the *kumets* gifts, while sons-in-law might have tried to delay them for several years. And so on. In this way external changes would have become manifest as tensions in particular types of inter-personal relations.

Other factors would also have added to these tensions. The increased stability and security in the area after the abolition of warfare would have diminished the importance of the clan and the clan head in protecting land and collecting compensation after the murder or injury of clan members. As the benefits of having a strong clan head became less important, the costs involved would have begun to appear to be too great and juniors might have considered their wealth better invested elsewhere. The overall context of increased exploitation by the *kawo-balabbat* might have also led to an exaggerated resentment of authority which juniors could translate into the resentment of their immediate seniors.

In the mid to late twentieth century external factors continued to change, as the growth of trade and weaving in particular provided a new source of wealth. However this wealth was not controlled by elders or genealogical seniors, but was open to all. Young men and genealogical juniors had independent access to this source of wealth and thus became less dependent on their fathers and genealogical seniors. Many of them travelled outside the highlands, learned to speak Amharic, and returned home more knowledgeable than their fathers about national affairs. But they continued to live with their fathers in family compounds, and thus father-son tensions became much more central around this time. Some sons used their wealth to become *halak'a* in a bid to elevate their position and diminish the status difference between themselves and their fathers. Others joined the Protestant church for similar reasons. In later years, when external goods such as radios and cassette players became available, the latter option appeared increasingly appealing as it did not involve the disposal of large amounts of wealth, which could then be more readily spent on such consumer objects.

These changes are just some of the many changes that have taken place this century. All of them lead to particular tensions in certain social relations. This much is obvious. It is now necessary to consider how these tensions are then dealt with in social life. How do individual agents address the tensions they are experiencing with other people? And how does their particular cultural background influence this process?

On a very general level, there are a number of ways that individuals in Doko are likely to deal with these tensions, and these are represented schematically in diagram 6. As will be apparent, all the different options lead to discussion in assemblies.

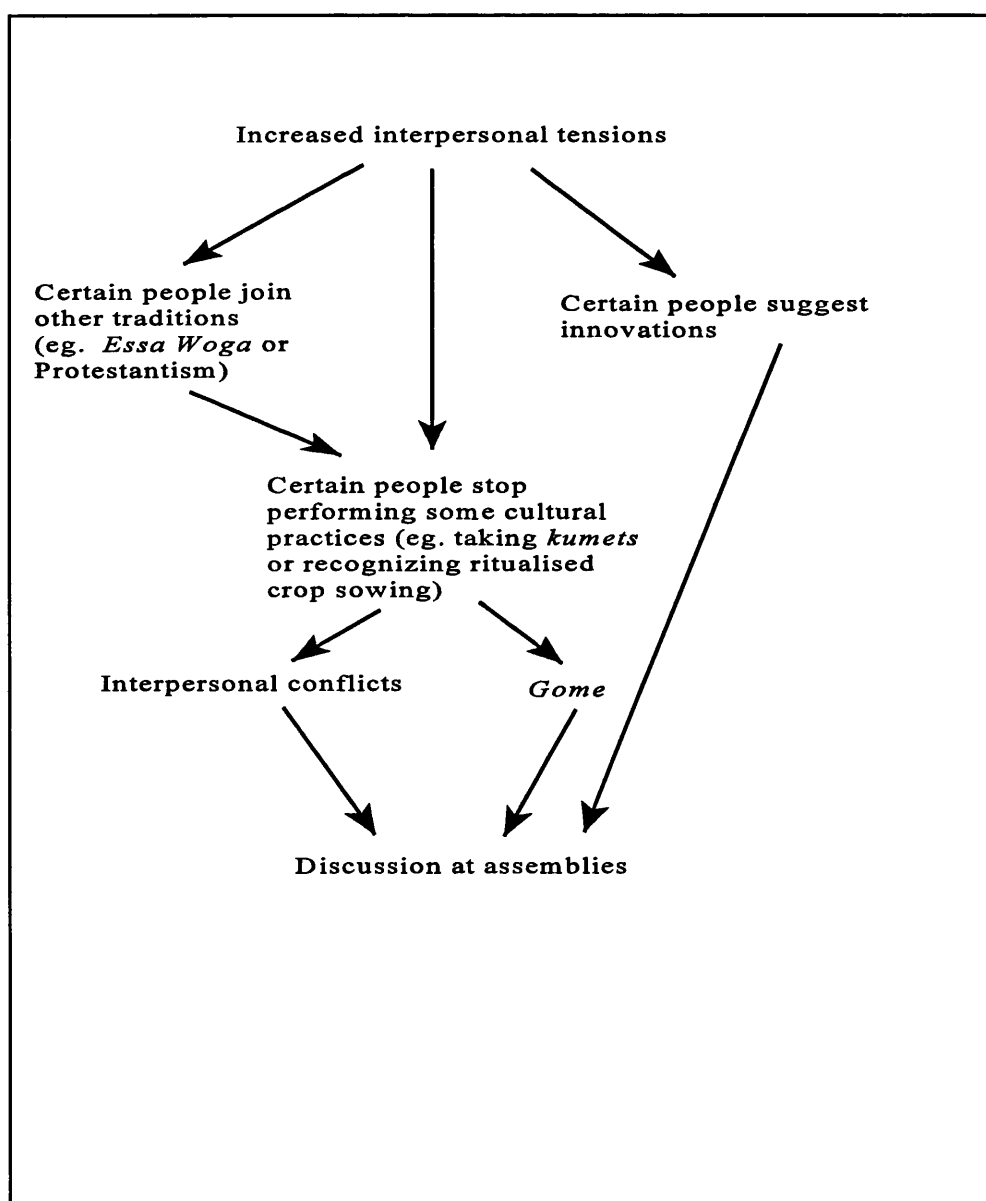


Diagram 6: How Interpersonal Tensions come to be discussed in Assemblies.

One possible way that juniors might deal with their situation is to simply stop taking the *kumets* gifts to their fathers-in-law, or asking their genealogical seniors to sow for them, or what have you. In this way they seek to resolve the problem to their best advantage, but anger their seniors. Such action would lead to one or both of two possible outcomes. One possibility is that it would lead to severe interpersonal conflicts between the seniors and juniors in question. These conflicts, whether explicitly about this action or not, would be taken to local assemblies and discussed at length until consensus could be reached and the disputants reconciled. Another possible outcome is that in a year of bad weather, crop disease or other misfortune, the fact that, say, juniors had not asked their seniors to sow their land, could be suggested as the *gome* that had led to these problems. Such a situation would be discussed at an assembly, until a solution could be agreed upon unanimously.

It is also possible that certain people might try to improve their situations by suggesting particular innovations. People might suggest that the cost of the *halak'a* feasts should be reduced, or that the organisation of a sacrifice be changed. Such suggestions will always be discussed at an assembly, and may or may not then be accepted.

A final way of dealing with these accentuated interpersonal tensions is to 'opt out' of the system, and join another tradition. The development of *Essa Woga* is an example of this, as is conversion to the Protestant church. In either case, people who 'opt out' of (aspects of) the local tradition will invariably stop performing certain activities, such as asking their seniors to sow for them. This in turn will lead to interpersonal conflicts and/or accusations of *gome* infringement, which will end up being discussed in a local assembly.

Thus the organisation of Gamo cultural life is such that, one way or another, the changing tensions in interpersonal relations produced by changing external environmental conditions will always be discussed in an assembly. The point of this section has not been to elucidate all possible causal effects and all possible tensions, but simply to show that whatever the cause of an interpersonal problem and whatever the

action taken to deal with it, most such problems end up being discussed in an assembly. In order to take the analysis further, it is therefore necessary to look at the workings of the assemblies in some detail. After that we will be in a position to understand the types of outcome that can be generated by these discussions.

6.3 Peace, Fertility and Reconciliation

Before looking at the form and functioning of the assemblies, though, their centrality in Gamo life requires some explanation. It is necessary to consider how assemblies are seen in the Gamo worldview, and to understand why people go to assemblies with such frequency, and what they think they are doing there. The point may sound obvious, but the conceptual importance of the assemblies is not as apparent as we might think. When I asked people why they were going to an assembly, they did not reply that they were going to discuss a case about some stolen sheep, or that they were going to decide what to do about a certain *dere* problem, but instead they would say something like, “We are going to the assembly to bring reconciliation to the *dere*. For the grain, for the milk, to make the *dere* well.” This conceptual association between a state of reconciliation and the fertility of the *dere* deserves a little attention.

Despite all the interpersonal tensions that have been discussed, peaceful living is very highly valued in the Gamo highlands. It is considered to be a prerequisite to all the other good things in life. Fertility, the life force that energizes human, animal and plant reproduction, is considered to flow through the channels of social relations. Harmonious social relations are thus considered necessary not simply to ensure a good atmosphere, but also to make the crops grow, the cattle calve, and people give birth and be healthy. When social relations are not harmonious, when there are arguments and disputes, it is as if there is a blockage in the channel and the fertility cannot flow through. If relations between people remain in such a state for long then it is considered likely that either one or all of the disputants will become ill or face some other misfortune. John Hinnant describes a similar ideology among the Guji Oromo:

An individual who experiences misfortune, such as chronic illness in the family, cattle disease, poor crops, or involvement in frequent disputes, believes that it is because he is not in God's good grace. The afflicted must take action which usually begins with a consultation with an adept. One of the questions the adept asks is whether the afflicted has an unresolved dispute. If so, the afflicted person should first seek reconciliation with the one he has offended and then seek reconciliation with God through a ceremony of propitiation. Reconciliation with both man and God is a prerequisite for well-being (Hinnant 1978:210).

The logic whereby misfortune is explained as being the result of unresolved disputes is also found in the Gamo highlands, where it is part of a broader set of ideas that sees improper behaviour in social relations as blockages in the channel through which fertility flows. Thus if a man were to slaughter an animal while his father was alive, this would affect the relation of dependency between him and his father and would conceptually block the flow of fertility from father to son. Such a transgression of *woga* is known as *gome*, and when misfortune next befell the son he would most likely understand it in terms of his former actions, and would then seek to unblock the channel and clear the *gome*.

However, in the Gamo highlands this same logic is used not only in reverse, to explain present misfortunes in terms of past actions, but also as a preventative measure. Keeping peace and reconciliation in the *dere* is an important part of Gamo cultural life, and is seen as a sacred, as much as a political, endeavour. This is why assemblies are so central to Gamo life, for it is at the assemblies that conflicts are resolved and the flow of fertility is facilitated. And this is why all *dere* assemblies are preceded by blessings for fertility, and most assembly places are sacred spaces where sacrifices and other rituals are also performed.

In Doko assembly places are known as *dubusha*, but there is another term that is also used, and that is used more commonly in some of the *deres* further north. This term is *ch'ere*, which literally means 'swamp'. A swamp is a damp place and, as I elaborated

in chapter two, dampness is associated with growth and fertility in the Gamo conceptual worldview. Thus while assembly places are never literally swamps, they are swamp-like in that, by bringing peace and reconciliation to the *dere*, they facilitate growth and fertility.

Assembly places are thus the obvious places to carry out sacrifices and perform other rituals which are considered to stimulate the flow of fertility. As described in chapters three and four, most *dere* sacrifices are carried out in *dubushas*, as are many of the various rituals that make up the *halak'a* initiations. Several *dubushas*, in fact, are used only for such rituals and not at other times. And the discussion of the Beer Feast of the *halak'a* initiation in chapter four shows that the line between such rituals and *dere* assemblies is itself a blurred one. While the men sat in the beer *dubusha* drinking the beer of the new *halak'a*, they spent most of the day discussing *dere* affairs and resolving conflicts between *dere* members. Most rituals, in fact, either include or are preceded by a period of discussion and conflict resolution. The period before *Mesqalla* is characterised by a particularly intense spate of discussion and reconciliation, because this is the time of communal fertility, and there is little point in stimulating the flow the fertility if the channels through which it flows are blocked.

The importance of assemblies for the fertility of the *dere* is further explicated in the blessings that must precede all formal discussions at *dere* assemblies. These blessings are not for good judgement or calm discussion, but rather for the fertility of the *dere*. Thus before discussing cases of stolen cattle, or disputes about people not turning up to work for a communal work group, or what have you, the following blessings will always be made:

May God's blessing reach us!

May the *dubusha*'s blessing reach us!

May the *ek'k'a*'s blessing reach us!

May the *halak'as* be fat and fertile!

May the *k'ach'ina* have plenty to eat!

May wealth and fatness reach the fathers!

May butter and the *ochi* fruit reach the women!
May the *degala* initiate their *halak'as*!
May the barley sprout!
May the wheat sprout!
May the bamboo grow!
May the *enset* grow!
May the cows give milk!
May the sheep have twins!
May the barren woman give birth!
Give birth to boys and girls!
May the full blessing reach us!
May God and the hoe bless what I have left out!!

These blessings serve to focus everybody's attention on the greater purpose of the assembly and to remind participants that the successful resolution of conflict between *dere* members is to the benefit of the *dere* as a whole. This raises the importance of apparently trivial cases and makes them relevant for everybody. The association between peace and fertility, then, brings a communal aspect into most social relations.

6.4 The Assemblies

Because conflicts and quarrels are thought to affect the well-being of the *dere*, they are never allowed to fester over long periods of time, and there is much communal pressure to swiftly bring conflicting parties to terms. After reconciliation there should be no remaining bad feeling, and to hold a grudge (*lancho*) is considered totally improper. Since it is thought to be extremely difficult for people to resolve conflicts between themselves, it is common practice to involve a wise and neutral third party as an arbitrator (*ganna*). People with a reputation for good arbitration are much respected, and may be asked to help resolve conflicts rather frequently. There is little privacy in quarrels and anyone may feel that they have a right, or a duty, to resolve other people's arguments. Thus it was a fairly typical occurrence that I would be walking down the path in the neighbourhood with someone, on the way to market or to conduct an interview,

when we would pass a group of people discussing a case in a neighbour's compound, and my companion would immediately go and join in. No-one ever complained about such behaviour, and there was no notion that conflicts should be hidden away behind closed doors.

Assemblies, then, take place on all scales, and in varying contexts. Small, local disputes are handled in small assemblies in a neighbour's house or compound. Discussions after someone has died are also held in the house or compound of the deceased. Larger assemblies are held in proper assembly places, or *dubushas*. There are clan assemblies in clan *dubushas*, and *dere* assemblies in *dere dubushas*. *Dere* assemblies can take place at any scale of *dere*, and there are *dubushas* for small *deres* such as Dambo and Kale, for the medium-sized *deres* of Doko Masho and Doko Gembela and for the large *dere* of Doko. All these types of assembly share much in common, most importantly that all decisions are made by unanimous agreement.

The general format of all these assemblies is the same. Participants speak one at a time, and if people interrupt they will generally be told to wait their turn. Only if someone repeats themselves endlessly, or goes way off the point, will interruptions be allowed. First the two disputants present their sides of the story, and then other people ask questions, make suggestions and give advice. There is no hurry to these discussions and they often continue for several hours, until everybody is ready to agree on an outcome. If an agreement cannot be reached, then it is usual to set a date to meet again, until reconciliation is finally possible. When consensus emerges, the person in the wrong gets down on their knees and asks for forgiveness (literally, mercy). The person who has been wronged must first give forgiveness, and then the whole assembly extends mercy to everyone else. At this point the change in atmosphere is palpable, as people let go of their grudges and relax into friendly relations. The detailed form and functioning of the assemblies, however, can best be illustrated by a number of examples that took place during my fieldwork.²

² See also Bureau (1981:141-182) and Abeles (1983:41-56) for descriptions of assemblies in other *deres*.

6.4.1 Non-*Dere* Assemblies

Minor arguments between household members and neighbours are common, and are usually resolved quickly by other household members and neighbours in informal assemblies at the house of one of the disputants. The following case is typical:

Kamba³ and Kaltsa are father and son who live together in one compound. Kamba is a traditional elder, while Kaltsa is a Protestant who works as a carpenter. One day Kamba walked out of Kaltsa's new 'modern-style' house and slammed the door. Kaltsa told him not to break the door that he had worked so hard to make and implied that Kamba was stupid in not knowing how to open and close such 'modern' doors properly. Kamba was angry that his son should speak to him in this disrespectful way and hardly spoke to Kaltsa throughout the next day. There was bad feeling in the house, and Assani, Kaltsa's wife, noticed it and asked what had happened. The next day she brewed coffee and invited around two or three of the close neighbours to make peace. Over coffee the neighbours first asked Kamba what the problem was, and he told his side of the story. Then Kaltsa got a chance to tell his version. Whenever one of them got off the point, perhaps bringing in old quarrels, the neighbours would bring them back to the case at hand. This case was simple and the discussion was quick. It became clear that Kaltsa was in the wrong to have spoken to his father in such a way about something so trivial. As this consensus began to emerge, it was somewhat thrust on Kaltsa, who accepted it quickly, if somewhat begrudgingly. The decision was unanimous, as it must be, and Kaltsa was found to be in the wrong. He got to his knees and asked his father to have mercy on him. Kamba replied by saying that he forgave him and that he had stopped being angry with him. Then everyone generally forgave everyone else and the tense atmosphere dissolved into friendly relief.

These types of minor disagreements happen all the time, and are always quickly resolved in this manner. I was not spared this procedure and, on the few occasions when I got into

³ For obvious reasons, all names in this chapter have been changed.

arguments with my family or neighbours, I would always come home in the evening to find a crowd of people sitting around waiting to resolve the problem and restore peaceful relations. Stressful as this was at the time, it did mean that problems never blew up and got out of hand.

Arguments that are slightly less trivial are also discussed initially on a small scale in someone's house, and only if they cannot be resolved will they be taken to a more formal assembly. Good arbitrators, though, pride themselves in being able to bring even the most heated disputants to terms. Discussions will be longer and people can become angry, distraught and upset. But still the process of discussion until unanimous agreement is followed, as another case will show.

Adole, Gafo and Zida are all close patrilineal kin (second cousins). Gafo had accused Adole of hitting his wife, and had taken him to the local *k'ebelle* court, which had briefly locked him up. Zame, Zida's son, had heard of this and had got Adole released. As an ex-president of the *k'ebelle*, he had assured the current president that the family would sort it out. Thus a family *dubusha* was held one night at Zida's house, as he was a senior kinsman and a respected elder and arbitrator. Adole came with his mother, and Gafo came with his wife. Teferi and Amano, two other close kin, also came, and so did two neighbours. Zida, his wife, and Zame were also present. Initially Gafo's wife was asked to present her complaint. She said that while Gafo was away weaving in Wolaita, Adole had come round to her house and had hit her and torn her cloth shawl. When she had finished Adole was asked to speak. He said this was completely untrue. He had gone round to Gafo's house to borrow something. He had called from outside and, when he was told it was not there, he had not even entered the house. Everyone listened carefully to the two conflicting stories and Zida began to probe a bit. They knew of previous ill-feeling between Adole's mother and Gafo's mother, and as they questioned this indeed began to enter the picture. The discussion became extremely heated, Gafo started shouting and Adole's mother, an old woman, started crying. Adole kept protesting his innocence, and once or twice got up and tried to leave. The arbitrators tried to stay calm and to keep everyone involved in the discussion.

After three hours a consensus was beginning to emerge. Gafo's mother had been ill and Adole's mother had gone to visit her. There had been some quarrel and Gafo's mother was very angry. Then Adole had arrived, coming to borrow an axe. He had heard the women quarrelling and he had not entered the house. He had called out his mother and they had left together, the women's argument having not been resolved. Gafo's wife had been so angry at some of the things Adole's mother had said, that she made up the story about Adole hitting her. (It was easier for her to accuse Adole, a young man in his early twenties, than his mother who is an old and well-respected woman). Thus it was clear that Gafo and his wife were in the wrong. They both got down on their knees and asked forgiveness. Adole, still angry, had to be shouted at before he gave it. But eventually he did, and again the whole group generally forgave each other. Gafo and his wife sat down again. The heated atmosphere had now cooled down into friendly relief. Everyone sat and chatted for a while, as if there had never been any problem between them, and then got up and went home.

Other informal assemblies are held in the mourning period after someone has died. As kin and neighbours gather to sit in the compound of the deceased, they discuss any outstanding conflicts or arguments between his house and other people. Everything should be put in order after a death, and any unresolved matters are ideally brought to a close. Other non-*dere* assemblies follow the same basic pattern. Neighbourhood assemblies are fairly frequent during the agricultural season, when neighbourhood work groups are organised. These will generally take place at the house of the leader of the work group, or possibly at the house of the *ek'k'a*, if he lives in the neighbourhood. These discussions are mainly attended by men, and often take place in the evening while the women are preparing supper. Practical matters are discussed, such as whose land will be hoed when, and why so-and-so did not show up for work last Tuesday, and fines may be imposed on those who miss work. There are also clan assemblies which discuss affairs particular to the clan. These can involve matters of ritual, such as when or how to perform a clan sacrifice, or can focus on other matters, such as land transactions or conflict resolution between clan members. And nowadays there are also assemblies

organised by Protestants, which deal specifically with conflicts between Protestants and traditionalists. These cases are increasingly common, and are frequently extremely fraught, as the following example shows.

Wolk'a is having a dispute with his neighbourhood in Eleze. He is a Protestant, and the issue is overtly to do with conflicting interpretations of *woga*. There are, in fact, two cases. Wolk'a is refusing to work with the *zurra*, a neighbourhood work group in which one man from every house must participate.⁴ Wolk'a has not worked with the *zurra* this year, although he has done in all previous years and he is refusing to pay the customary fine. He was also asked to donate a sheep for part of the initiation of this year's *halak'a* and he refused. But he still thinks he has the right to eat at the Seniors' Feast, as he has provided the feasts himself in the past when he became *halak'a*, before joining the church. So he is in deep conflict with the *dere*. Recently eleven of his sheep were stolen, and the conflict is escalating. I attended one of the many meetings in which reconciliation was attempted.

Early in the morning I went with the eight arbitrators to talk to Wolk'a. The arbitrators were all young men who are prominent in the church and included the preacher, the chairman of the Eleze *k'ebelle*, the secretary of the Masho *k'ebelle*, the doctor of the Doko Masho clinic, and Zame, the ex-president of the Masho *k'ebelle* whom we have met before. We all sat down in one of the houses in the market place and discussed the case with Wolk'a. The arbitrators had discussed this case before and already seemed to have a clear idea of what needed to be done. They all felt that Wolk'a was in the wrong. He should still work with the *zurra* and he should not eat at the Seniors' Feast anyway if he is a Protestant. But Wolk'a was adamant that he was in the right, and kept going on and on about his stolen sheep as if they weren't connected to anything else. He refused to change his mind, and he began to drive the arbitrators mad. By midday it was time to go to

⁴ The group works on each member's land for a small charge, and this money is then divided among the group. One man has the title of *zurra kawo* and another is the *zurra dana*. These men do not pay the group, but feast it instead.

discuss the case with the *dere*, but the arbitrators were annoyed that they had made no headway with Wolk'a. Two of them dropped out and said there was no point in bringing this to the *dere*. It was a waste of time and they went home. Two others almost dropped out, but were eventually persuaded to give it a try. And thus we went to meet the *dere*.

The assembly was too large to take place in a house, and by rights should have taken place at the Eleze *dubusha*. But since this was over two hours' walk from the market place, a compromise site had been chosen, the mourning ground of Dambo. This is not a traditional place to have assemblies and was not even in Eleze territory, but such matters did not trouble the Protestants. The people of Eleze came and sat in a long line, and after a gap Wolk'a sat at the end alone. The arbitrators and I sat in a line facing them. The discussion got under way, the person speaking standing up in front of the assembly and the others trying not to interject too much. It all became heated very soon and there was clearly a lot of anger. After four hours Wolk'a would still not change his tune and everybody was getting extremely frustrated. The arbitrators did their best to keep things calm, but they too were annoyed. More and more problems between Wolk'a and the *dere* came to light. Some time ago all the people of Eleze had contributed money to buy back some *dere* land that had been sold. Wolk'a had refused to contribute and eventually the *dere* had just let him remain apart. More recently, when the *dere* had called him to discuss the case about the *zurra*, he had refused to attend the assembly. After that the church called him and told him to attend the assembly and he still refused.⁵ The list of complaints grew and grew. The arbitrators, all school-educated, tried to take each case in turn, while the *dere* men kept bringing them all together. Reconciliation seemed impossible.

Then the arbitrators threatened to leave. The case was impossible and this was useless. Only when they were on their feet did Wolk'a admit that perhaps he was in the wrong just a little bit. The arbitrators sat down. He

⁵ It is possible to refuse a call to an assembly, but as this case shows, people will use all sorts of methods, such as stealing sheep, to ensure that the disputant finally attends.

should have come before when he was called to the assemblies and he was wrong not to have come. He got down on his knees, and asked for forgiveness. The *dere* gave it and the discussion changed gear. Eventually the case over the Seniors' Feast was dropped, and Wolk'a agreed to pay the fine for not working with the *zurra*. The matter of the *zurra* feasts came up. Wolk'a said he had not been called to eat, and that he had the right to because he had worked with the *zurra* in previous years. The *dere* agreed that this was so and said that he had been called. Wolk'a said he was only called by a small boy, and not in the appropriate manner. They argued for some time over this point of etiquette and eventually moved on. What about Wolk'a's stolen sheep? Everyone knew that the *dere* had stolen them because of Wolk'a's behaviour, and the arbitrators reckoned that now it was resolved they would be returned. They also knew that because they were officials of the *k'ebelle*, people would not admit anything in front of them, in case they got taken to prison for theft. They stressed that this discussion was for reconciliation and nothing else, but still the *dere* was silent. So the arbitrators suggested that they should meet among themselves and discuss the matter of the sheep. After they have done this they should come back to the arbitrators in a few days' time. Wolk'a was not very happy about this. He'd admitted he was in the wrong and had knelt down before the *dere* to ask forgiveness. He'd got forgiveness, but not his sheep. Still, there was nothing more to be done today and the assembly disbanded and people went home.

The openness and flexibility of these assemblies contrasts only a little with the *dere* assemblies which I will now describe. Although subject to more conventions, *dere* assemblies share the same basic format as these non-*dere* assemblies.

6.4.2 *Dere* Assemblies

Dere assemblies are larger and a little more formal, and they take place at special assembly places, or *dubusha*. *Dubushas* may be fenced or open, and some have little stone seats arranged in lines for people to sit on. Many *dubushas* have big old trees growing there, and in general they are seen as sacred spaces. *Dere* assemblies are open to all male *mala*. Women and *degala* may sometimes participate from the edges if they have something important to contribute, but they cannot bring their own cases to these assemblies. *Dere* assemblies generally take place once a week. The Doko Masho assembly takes place in the *dubusha* in the market place (Pango) every Sunday, while the Masho assembly takes place at Bulogars *dubusha* most Fridays.

Dere assemblies are more formalised than non-*dere* assemblies, and there are certain ritualised conventions that must be gone through before the discussions can start. Men come to the *dubusha* carrying their *horoso*, or if they have not yet become *halak'a*, their walking stick (*gufe*). As they enter the *dubusha*, they will stand their *horoso* or *gufe* in the ground in a designated space, and then pick a few pieces of grass and throw them in the direction of the assembled crowd and make a suitable blessing, such as 'be many!' (*dara!*), or 'sprout!' (*ach'a!*). The crowd will then reply 'welcome!' (*ahe!*). This blessing and response is common in everyday discourse, such as when entering a house or joining a group of people in a bar in the market place, but the throwing of the grass is extra, and links in with the fertility symbolism of the *dubusha*. As more and more people arrive, this blessing and response continues, even once the formal discussions have started. People take their places, sitting in rows. The *ek'k'a* and one or two elders may have set seats at the front or at the side, but everyone else just sits where they like. In practice older men sit nearer the front, while younger men stay at the back. While people wait for proceedings to begin, they talk quietly amongst themselves. The atmosphere is calm and serious. Some of the younger men will make a fire, and hot embers will be used to light the bubble pipes that have been brought from nearby houses. The pipes are passed around the senior men, and smoking is considered an essential part of *dubusha* activities.



Assembly Place (*Dubusha*), with Stone Seats.



Halak'as Blessing an Assembly.

Once there are sufficient people present, the blessings will begin. First the *ek'k'a* gets up and collects his *horoso*. Standing in front of the assembly and holding his *horoso*, he then blesses for the fertility of the *dere*, as described above. At the end of each line everyone responds 'amen'. Then the *ek'k'a* returns his *horoso* and the herding *halak'as* collect their *horosos* and make the same blessing. After this a few elders will collect their *horosos* and they too will make the same blessings. Only after this can the discussions begin.

The person bringing the case will get up, collect his *horoso* or *gufe*, and stand calmly in front of the assembly. Speaking slowly and evenly, he will begin to bring his case. Most men will begin by praising the *dere* or the assembly before coming to the point, but the degree of circumlocution varies from person to person and from case to case.

If the case is a conflict between two people, the man will then return his *horoso* or *gufe* and sit down, and the second disputant will have his say. If other men have long speeches to make, they will take their turn standing in front of the assembly, holding their *horoso* or *gufe*. If they have smaller points or questions then they will call them out from their seats. If the discussion is about setting a date for a sacrifice or ritual, then first one person will stand up and make their suggestion, then another and so on. It is extremely rare for more than one person to be standing in front of the assembly, although people may hover in the wings waiting to make their rejoinder. The case will be discussed until a unanimous decision is reached. If this is not possible, another date may be set and other relevant information may be asked for on that day. One of the herding *halak'as* may be asked to bring a new witness, or to take a message to some relevant person who was not present. If the assembly decides that a diviner needs to be consulted, or a sacrifice made to clear *gome*, then one of the herding *halak'as* may also be asked to do this.

Once the case is over for the day, the next case will begin. The next disputant will walk to the front, take his *horoso* or *gufe*, and begin. Some clever timing is required to get your case heard if there are many people with cases, and there seems to be a tendency

for simpler cases to be heard at the beginning and more weighty cases to be discussed later on. In one sitting all manner of cases will be discussed. One Friday at Bulogars, for example, the Masho assembly discussed a suggestion about buying wood to repair the fence round the *dubusha*, and a case about someone cutting down trees from someone else's land in Yoira. Then a young Protestant brought a case, asking why the *dere* had taken some of his land last year, and the *k'ebelle* secretary, also a young Protestant, told the assembly that a new doctor was coming to the Doko Masho clinic and he needed a house to live in, so could the *dere* arrange for contributions of wood, thatch, labour etc. Finally the senior herding *halak'a* reminded people of the *gome* that had been found when reading the entrails of a sheep sacrificed for the *dere* a fortnight ago, and there proceeded a long discussion about what this *gome* could possibly be and how they should clear it.

The Sunday assembly in the Doko Masho market place often deals with disputes in the market and also with inter-*dere* affairs. If the case is with another *dere* then the herding *halak'a* of that *dere* will present their case, occasionally accompanied by some *dere* elders. Then the *halak'a* will report back to his *dere*, and come with their new view the next time the assembly meets. One discussion from a case that was on-going while I was in the field illustrates this well.

The line of Doko *halak'as* stands in front of the assembled men, holding their *horosos*. One by one they bless the assembly. Then they sit down and proceedings are set to begin. The good turn-out today makes me think that there must be an important case. There are a number of faces that I don't recognise, and I soon realise why. They are from another *dere*, Ezzo, and they are indeed here to discuss a serious matter. The Ezzo *halak'a* steps up to the front and takes his *horoso* from where it is standing in the ground. He picks up some grass and throws it towards the assembled men. 'Be many!' he blesses. Then slowly and calmly he brings his case. He says that some Ezzo people saw a Doko man doing bad things in Ezzo. He gently comes to the point. This man was leaving a curse (*bitta*) and was seen putting down twigs and grass in Ezzo territory. The Ezzo *halak'a* sits down and waits to hear what Doko has to say. The case has already been discussed a few times

before and the Doko men have had some time to investigate. An elder gets up, takes his *horoso*, blesses, and begins to talk. He says how good relations have been between Ezzo and Doko and how he hopes they will remain so. The discussion goes on for some time, with both men from Ezzo and Doko speaking to the assembly. Doko explains that it is true that a Doko man went to Ezzo, and does not dispute the witness's allegations. But, they say, it was not *bitta*. A short while ago the young man had hit a sheep too hard and it had died. This was *gome* for him and he had to 'clear his hands'. So he took seven pieces of sheep excrement, seven pieces of a certain type of grass and some salty earth and mixed it all together. He then fed this mixture to a sheep in a different *dere*, Ezzo. This is all correct procedure to clear the *gome* and was not a *bitta* against Ezzo. The Ezzo men asked a few questions about this, and then said that they would have to report back to their own assembly and see what the *dere* thinks. It was agreed to meet again in two weeks' time to continue with the case.

Attendance of assemblies by male *mala* is fairly high, although participation does tend to increase with age. As seen above, even the Protestants will attend the *dere* assemblies if they have a case. They refrain from participating in the blessings and do not smoke, but they respect the etiquette of the proceedings, and will hold their *gufe* while standing in front of the assembly. While all men have an equal right to speak, age, status as either *ade* or *k'ach'ina*, and oratorical ability, influence the extent to which they exercise this right, and certain key figures will generally influence the proceedings more than others. There is no leader, however, and debate is free and open as it is in the smaller non-*dere* assemblies. While language may be a little less direct than it is in general conversation, there is little formalised oratory or conventions of stylised speech.

As well as resolving conflicts and discussing *dere* problems, *dere* assemblies also explicitly discuss matters of *woga*. As mentioned above, an entrail reading may show that there is *gome* in the *dere*, but it is the assembly that decides what has caused this *gome* and how it should be cleared. *Dere* assemblies also set dates for rituals, and discuss whether certain rituals should take place this year or wait until next year. They may also discuss how rituals should be performed. It is to these discussions that I will now turn.

6.4.3 Discussing *Woga*

If there are disagreements about when or how a ritual should be performed, they are discussed in an assembly. If the ritual is a *dere* ritual, then it will be discussed in a *dere* assembly; if it is a clan ritual, then it will be discussed in a clan assembly. These assemblies operate in exactly the same manner as the assemblies discussed above. There is leaderless, informal, open discussion until a unanimous decision is reached. As I have discussed in chapter two, the period when I was in the field was one of great flux, as people were in the process of trying to perform rituals and other cultural practices that had not been performed for twenty years during the restrictive government of the Derg. Thus there were many assemblies taking place during which people were discussing whether or not to perform a certain ritual, and if so, how they should go about it. With increasing numbers of people joining the Protestant church, there was the additional problem of what to do if one of the key participants in a ritual would no longer participate. Could someone else take his place, or would it be impossible to perform the ritual at all. These were some of the central issues in the 1990s. In the 1960s the central issues were rather different. Bureau reports that the assemblies were then dominated by debates about relations with the Amhara authorities, particularly about taxes and public work (Bureau 1981:179). While the organisation of these assemblies stays the same, the types of issue which are discussed change according to local circumstances. This is not to suggest that taxes are not discussed in 1990s assemblies, or that ritual matters were not discussed in the 1960s. It is only the emphasis that is different. Although the frequency of discussions around ritual matters was no doubt unusually high during my fieldwork, it is extremely unlikely that such debates have not taken place throughout all of Gamo history. It is through such debates, I am sure, that the changes discussed in chapter five would have gradually taken place.

Discussions about *woga* can reach the assemblies in a number of ways. As mentioned above, there were two patterns that were most common when I was in the field. One situation was when there were problems in the *dere*, such as poor rainfall and disease. Then a *dere* assembly would be called to discuss the cause of this *gome*. An animal

might be slaughtered and the entrails read, or a diviner might be consulted, but the results of these activities were always discussed in an assembly, and the final decision about the appropriate course of action was taken there. The other situation in which assemblies discussed *woga* was when there was a dispute between participants in the ritual about how the ritual should be performed. These disputes could involve a disagreement about how the ritual has 'always' been performed, or could centre around somebody suggesting an innovation which would make the ritual more effective, or more viable in present circumstances. These two general scenarios are not exhaustive, but they cover most of the discussions that I witnessed during my fieldwork.

One of the most important assemblies in Masho took place before I arrived in the field, and has been mentioned already in chapter two. This was the assembly which met soon after the fall of the Derg, and discussed the *gome* that was in the *dere*. Unfortunately I do not have accounts of what went on at that assembly, but the outcome of the discussions is clear. It was decided that the cause of the problems in the *dere* was the *gome* around the *degala*. During the Derg period they had been given land and had hoed together with the *mala* in the communal work groups. They had been buried together with the *mala* in the communal burial places, and they had had positions on the *k'ebelle* council. All of this was *gome*, and was the cause of the poor rainfall and illness in the *dere*. A decision was made to take back the land from the *degala*, to exhume and re-bury their corpses, and to expel them from the *k'ebelle* committee and the communal work groups. This decision was swiftly enacted, and the changes that the Derg had forced upon the people of Masho were reversed in a matter of days.

What is interesting about this decision is that of all the possible infringements of *woga* that could have been chosen, the matter of the *degala* became the central issue. Most sacrifices had not been performed for several years, men had sowed the land before their seniors, even the *halak'a* initiations had not been performed exactly as they should. With all these plausible explanations for the problems in the *dere*, the final agreement to reverse only the changes concerning the *degala* must be seen as an active decision about the relative importance of certain aspects of Doko *woga*. This was not a straight

forward case of going back to the old *woga*, but a complicated discussion about what *woga* was most appropriate now. And by coming up with a single decision about the *degala*, there was a tacit agreement that the other transgressions of *woga* were not that crucial. It was not too important that juniors were sowing the land before their seniors, or that sacrifices had not been performed. These practices, then, could be allowed to fade away. It is through decisions such as these, repeated in different times and different contexts, that changes took place in behaviour that can be described from outside, and in macro terms, as the ‘devolution of the sacrificial system’.

Given the organisation of the assemblies, it is not hard to see how this particular decision would have come about. It is likely that many possible causes of the *gome* would have been discussed, including the sacrifices, the order of sowing and many others. But while none of the *mala* participants in the assembly had anything to lose by taking back land from the *degala* and expelling them from the *k’ebelle* council and work groups, several of them would stand to lose economically and politically if the ritual order of sowing, for example, were to be re-instated. And after their brush with socialism, these men would have been particularly aware of this. Since decisions are always reached by unanimous agreement, they would have been able to block any suggestions that they felt were disadvantageous to themselves. Their rhetoric would no doubt couch the issue in rather different terms, claiming that problems had only come to the *dere* after the *degala* were buried in the *mala* burial places, and not when the sowing order was changed, or that several *bekesha bairas* were now away weaving so what would become of their juniors, and so on. In this way the discussion would have gone round and round, and it is not hard to see how the decision about the *degala* would finally have been agreed upon.

Had the assembly had a different structure, then a different decision might well have been made. If the *ek’k’a* were the leader of the assembly, for example, or if membership were limited to only lineage heads, or if decisions were made by majority vote, then it is possible that those who stood to gain from the re-instatement of certain traditional practices, such as the ritual sowing order, might have succeeded in pushing through a

decision that the lapse of these practices was the cause of the *gome*, and therefore that they should be followed again. Or, had there been complicated styles of oratory, it might have been impossible for men to find the right terms in which to couch their disagreements with certain suggestions. But with the all-*mala* membership, informal oratory, and decision-making by consensus that characterised the Doko assemblies, quite a different pattern of discussion and decision ensued.

Had the assembly taken place at a different time, it is also likely that a different decision would have been made. Back in the early 1900s, a similar discussion must have taken place during the time of Essa. For three years Doko did not follow traditional *woga*, and then there was a period of drought and poor harvests and the assembly met to discuss what to do. This situation directly parallels the situation in the early 1990s, but the results of the discussion were entirely different. Back then a decision was made to consult a diviner from Dorze Amara, the part of Dorze that had not followed Essa. And when this diviner predictably told them to return to the *beni woga*, the assembly agreed. Why such different decisions were made about similar problems must be understood in terms of the different historical contexts in which they took place. The 1990s Doko men were influenced by socialism and modernity, and were part of a cash economy in which weaving and trading were becoming as important as agriculture. These externally generated conditions influenced the decision they made about traditional ritual, as the rather different local conditions in the early 1900s affected the decisions made back then. It is through the decisions made by the assembly, then, through the interaction between the broad sets of ideas in individual minds, that 'external factors' can impinge on 'traditional practices'.

Assemblies also acted to change *woga* in a different way. Sometimes an individual or a group of individuals suggested an innovation. These discussions were not precipitated by problems and *gome*, but by an often unilateral idea that things were not being done correctly, or could be done better. Just before I arrived in the field, the Woits'o assembly had decided to make a change in how they performed their *halak'a* initiations. Up until then they had not had a Beer Feast in a special beer *dubusha*, but had the *Uts'uma* Feast

in the *halak'a*'s house, as in Shale. In 1995 and 1996 they were drinking in a *dubusha*, like the other *deres* of Doko Masho. People said they preferred this as there was more space in the *dubusha*, and the whole *dere* could come and drink, and not just the *ades* in the neighbourhood. Some of them had participated in the *halak'a* initiations in Masho and other *deres*⁶, and had seen how pleasant it was to drink together in the *dubusha*. So someone had proposed the issue, it had been discussed, and a unanimous decision had been made to instigate the change.

Not all innovations proposed in this way will get accepted, and sometimes the discussions can go on for a remarkably long time. While I was in the field, the Michamala clan were involved in one such protracted discussion. The matter being discussed was the clan sacrifice, as I have mentioned in chapter three. In the last few years certain members of the clan had suggested that the clan head should sacrifice a bull for the clan, according to the traditional *woga*. This sacrifice had not taken place for around twenty years, and they thought it would be good for the clan if it were to be performed now. An assembly had been called, and the suggestion had been made. However, at this assembly the second most senior man in the clan, Sanka, had proposed an innovation which had divided the clan. He proposed that he should hold the sacrificial spear jointly with the clan head and they should slaughter the animal together.

This suggested innovation was still being discussed two years later. Sanka was having a lot of difficulty trying to persuade the others to accept his suggestion, but because the sacrifice could not be performed without his participation, (it was his role to collect the contributions, buy the bull, and present it to the clan head), he was aware that he was arguing from a strong position.

⁶ If you own land in two *deres* of Doko Masho (or two *deres* of Doko Gembela) then you are eligible to become *halak'a* in the second *dere* after you have become *halak'a* in the *dere* where your ancestors lived. Thus after becoming *halak'a* in Masho, Shagire also became *halak'a* in Eleze. You can only become *halak'a* twice though, even if you own land in many *deres*, and a man from Doko Masho cannot become *halak'a* in Doko Gembela even if he owns land there.

One rainy Friday in June 1996 I attended one of the clan assemblies at which the matter was being discussed. Once the pipes had been handed round and the blessings had been made, the discussion got underway. Since this was a continuing debate the problem was only briefly presented, and soon questions were focussed to Sanka, and the legitimacy of his suggestion. Sanka contended that his father had told him to sacrifice in this manner on his death-bed, and that he could not possibly go against his words. It would be *gome* not to respect your father, after all. Another man stood up and said that he had not heard Sanka's father say this, and were there any other witnesses? There was a general grumbling among the men that none of them had heard it, but then a close neighbour of Sanka stood up and said that he too had heard the words. Most of the men remained unconvinced, and argued that such suggestions must be made in front of many witnesses. And thus the discussion went on for several hours. There was clearly a lot of hostility against Sanka, and much resistance to his innovation. But Sanka was remarkably tenacious, and showed no signs of giving up. When dusk began to fall, the assembly had reached no consensus and they agreed that they would meet again to continue the discussion.

This matter had not been resolved when I left the field over a year later. However, despite the resistance to Sanka's innovation, it is clear that this type of innovation has been approved in Doko in the past. In chapter three I mentioned a curious variation in the sacrifice that the *dere ek'k'a* in certain *deres* made before people could start sowing their land. In Masho the *ek'k'a* hoed a little corner of land and then sowed the first seeds of the year. In Kale, however, when the *ek'k'a* went to sow the land, he was accompanied by the *maaka* and the *hudhugha* and they all held the hoe together while working the land. This situation seems almost certainly to be the result of a similar discussion about who should hold the hoe/spear/knife used in a ritual. No-one that I spoke to in Kale could remember such a discussion, so it seems that it must have taken place some time ago. In Kale there are also situations when the *ek'k'a* and the *halak'a* slaughter an animal while holding the knife jointly, and in other *deres* in the highlands there are other instances of such joint ritual performance. So the matter being discussed by the Michamala clan of Doko during the mid-1990s appears to be a recurring theme,

about which both accepting and rejecting decisions have no doubt been made in the past. The stalemate that seems likely in this particular discussion may mean that the sacrifice never takes place, and as such is also a tacit decision. Here again we see a case whose outcome seems likely to contribute to the further devolution of the sacrificial system.

6.5 The Outcomes of Assembly Discussions

From the examples presented throughout this chapter it is possible to make some tentative generalisations about the types of outcome generated by discussions organised in the manner of the Doko assemblies. Despite the substantive differences in the cases, it seems possible to suggest that, with regard to cultural change, these assemblies can basically generate four types of outcome.

One type of outcome is simply the resolution of conflicts and the reconciliation of disputing parties. Such outcomes restore a fragile peace, but have little greater significance for cultural stasis or change. A second type of outcome is the upholding of tradition in the face of challenge, thus resulting in cultural stasis. A third type of outcome is the decision to make some innovation and change some aspect of cultural life. This results in incremental cultural change. A fourth and final type of outcome results in the stopping of a cultural practice, when decisions to keep it the same or to change it are continually blocked so that no consensus can be reached. This also results in incremental cultural change, but of a rather different sort.

The small dispute between Kamba and Kaltsa is clearly an example of the first type of outcome. The tensions that led to this particular argument derive to a great extent from the external changes that have taken place this century, but the resolution of this argument simply restored a fragile peace and did not address the underlying issues. Thus it has little relevance for larger scale cultural change. The dispute between the *deres* of Doko and Ezzo also fits into the category. In this case the causes of the dispute probably lie largely in a slightly antagonistic history between the two *deres*, but the likely outcome - some kind of reconciliation - will have little significant effect on more general cultural change.

The decision by the Woits'o assembly to change the *Uts'uma* Feast in the house of the *halak'a* into a Beer Feast in the *dubusha* is a clear case of innovation leading to incremental cultural change. In the particular instance of Woits'o it may not be that innovative, since most of the other *deres* of Doko Masho already perform the Beer Feast in the *dubusha*, but nonetheless it is a clear example of cultural change in that *dere*.

The case between the Protestant man Wolk'a and his neighbours in Eleze is a slightly different example of cultural innovation. As well as restoring some kind of peaceful relations in the neighbourhood, the outcome of this discussion involved deciding about a novel situation with regard to participation in traditional practices. If a man had provided the Seniors' Feast in the past, but refused to contribute a sheep for the present *halak'a* initiations, did he have a right to eat at this year's feast? And if a man had worked with the neighbourhood work group in the past, but refused this year, did he have a right to eat at this year's feast? These new questions were discussed and debated, and innovations were made and solutions were proposed. It is likely that these solutions will form some kind of precedent when similar cases are discussed in the future, and will thus influence the way that cultural practices change.

Some of the other cases do not fit neatly into one particular category as their outcomes affected different phenomena in different ways. The assembly that took place right after the fall of the Derg, and that discussed the *gome* in the *dere*, had a number of outcomes. With regard to the *degala*, the outcome of the assembly resulted in the upholding of tradition in the face of a challenge. The challenge presented by the Derg's forceful change of the rules regarding the *degala* was countered by the decision to overturn the change and return to the former way. However, a second outcome of this assembly was the tacit decision that many other cultural changes forced through by the Derg were not that bad, and thus could be allowed to fade away.

The protracted discussion about holding the sacrificial knife that has concerned the Michamala clan for several years seems likely to have one of three possible outcomes. If the decision is made to accept the change, then this will be a clear example of

individual innovation leading to incremental cultural change. If, however, the clan refuses to accept this innovation and succeeds in convincing Sanka to drop his case, then the result will be the upholding of tradition in the face of challenge. And if, as seems likely, no resolution can be found, then the tacit decision will have been made to stop the clan sacrifice altogether and to let this particular cultural practice fade away.

The outcomes of all these cases, then, can be seen to fit into one or more of the categories suggested above. Whilst the first type of outcome has little importance for cultural change, the other three types of outcome lead to explicit cultural stasis or to particular types of incremental cultural change. It is clear, in some general way, that the cumulative effects of such incremental cultural change will most likely lead to overall structural change. The way in which this might happen is discussed in chapter seven. Before that, though, this chapter ends with a more general discussion about the way in which the particular organisation of assemblies facilitates particular types of outcome. What is it about the organisation of the Gamo assemblies that leads to this wide array of possible outcomes, including the possibility of deciding to make an innovation? If the assemblies were organised in a different way would it be so easy to make innovations? To try to answer these questions we need to look at the organisation of assemblies and councils more generally, and try to consider how conciliar organisation affects the type of outcome of council discussions.

6.6 Conciliar Organisation and Cultural Innovation

Before considering any more ethnography, the importance of conciliar organisation in the functioning of social systems should be made clear at a general, abstract level. The approach of complexity theory reminds us that the relationships, physical or communicative, between the components of a system are just as important as both the individual components and the system itself. Thus the number, form and variety of interactions between people affect the workings of 'the system'. It is from these interactions that the shared patterns of behaviour we call 'structure' appear as an emergent property. So it follows that the way that interaction and communication

between people is organised in communal decision-making contexts is an important consideration in understanding not only how systems function through time, but also the degree to which they are flexible and open to change. The way that communicative interaction is organised affects both the nature of small-scale, incremental changes, and also the ease and frequency with which they take place. Thus the structure and functioning of local councils is crucial to an understanding of the way in which a cultural system works through time.

In a similar vein Comaroff and Roberts (1981) have remarked that,

instead of isolating dispute processes or rule systems for separate study, anthropologists should study disputes and invocations of rules for what they reveal about systemic processes (Comaroff and Roberts 1981:2).

We need, then, to consider some general points about the organisation of different types of council and how they affect wider cultural or systemic processes.

Audrey Richards has defined councils as institutionalised processes of joint decision-making that persist in time and take place at a fixed location, that are governed by convention, and whose membership is limited by certain rules (Richards 1971:1-2). The Gamo assemblies clearly fit this general definition. Within these broad criteria, however, many different types of council exist and several attempts have been made to categorise them according to various features. One of the most useful categorisations is that by Bailey, in which two types of councils are distinguished on the basis of membership (Bailey 1965). He draws a distinction between elite councils, which consist of a small number of people who effectively rule the public, and arena councils, which consist of representatives of different segments of the public coming together to discuss communal issues. From this he conjectures that differently organised councils will reach decisions in different ways. Elite councils, he suggests, are most likely to reach decisions by consensus, while arena councils are more likely to proceed by majority voting (ibid:13). Such a formulation does not fit the Gamo assemblies, which are clearly of the arena

type⁷ and which make decisions by consensus, but the attempt to link the organisation of councils with the mode of decision-making has many continuities with my attempts in this chapter.

Another approach to councils and decision-making is to focus not so much on the structure and organisation of the councils themselves, but on the cultural norms which define the acceptable behaviour of its participants, both inside and outside the meetings, and on the styles of oratory used during public speaking (Bloch 1971b, 1975b). Most importantly, Maurice Bloch has suggested that very formalised political oratory can limit people's ability to express their views and to disagree with certain types of suggestions. In such cases "formalisation is a form of social control... [because]... it uses a code where one part of the communication can appropriately only be followed by one other instead of a large number of alternatives as in everyday communication" (Bloch 1975b:22). Thus, according to this approach, the degree of formalism and style of oratory will affect the way that decisions are made in councils.

Both of these approaches are useful, but my interest in councils is slightly different. Rather than seeking to correlate various features of the council with the way in which decisions are made, I am interested in linking certain features of the council, including the way that decisions are made, with the extent to which the council is open to change and innovation. My question is whether some types of council are more likely to generate innovative ideas than others. Drawing on both Bailey and Bloch it seems possible to suggest that there are three major factors which will affect the degree of innovation likely in conciliar discussions. These are membership, mode of decision-making and formality. I would suggest that councils are more open to innovation, the more open their membership is, the more they tend to leaderless decision-making by consensus, and the less formal oratorical style they employ. Conversely, councils will be less open to innovation the more restricted their membership is, the more they tend

⁷ Bailey does not in fact include the community-in-council, or assembly, as a type of council, but Kuper argues convincingly that it should be included as a type of arena council (Kuper 1971:14-15).

to decision-making by voting or under the influence of a strong leader, and the more formal oratorical style they employ.⁸

Furthermore, it is also possible to suggest that there should be a good correlation between the degree to which councils promote innovation and the degree of cultural variation in a population. If innovation is easy, then different communities or sub-communities will make different innovations and change along different trajectories, leading to synchronic spatial variation. And if innovations are difficult, then change will be slower, or in a different form (according to, say, the fourth type of outcome mentioned above), and there will be less spatial variation.⁹

According to this formulation the Gamo assemblies are among the most likely to promote innovation. Their membership is open to all male *mala*, decisions are by consensus and stylised oratory is limited. And indeed the Gamo highlands are an area of considerable cultural variation. In order to test this formulation a little further it is useful to consider some other communities in southern Ethiopia. As far as cultural variation goes, there is a general pattern that among the highland chiefdoms and kingdoms there is relatively little cultural variation, whilst among the lowland pastoralists there is a much greater degree of cultural variation, both within and between groups. So, how does this correlate with the conciliar organisation in these communities?

⁸ There are, of course, other factors which I do not discuss here. Ideological factors, such as commitment to revolutionary change or to modernisation, obviously influence openness to innovation in relevant contexts, as does the presence of pressure groups or factions. Particular topics may also be more or less open to innovation, irrespective of the organisation of the assembly. I do not discuss these factors here because they are relatively unimportant in the context of traditional councils in southern Ethiopia, on which I am focussing.

⁹ I do not mean to suggest that this is the only factor that determines the degree of cultural variation, but rather that it is one factor which is important in this particular context.

The ethnographic data about councils in southern Ethiopia is fairly thin, but what there is does indeed suggest the type of correlation I propose. Most of the chiefdoms and kingdoms have (or had) elite councils where a limited number of people made decisions for the whole polity. Thus in the kingdoms of Enarya and Kafa the decision-making process was monopolised by councillors of state (*mikrecho*) and provincial heads (*worafe-rasho*) who sat on their own council. According to Lange, “the *mikrecho* body acted as a judicial, administrative, military, political and economic whole, uniformly supportive of the narrow interests of the .. slave- and land-owners” (Lange 1982:215). In Maale the king’s court resolved conflicts, and it was the king’s role to settle cases and reconcile disputants by washing their hands together (Donham 1985:30). It is not clear whether decisions were made by consensus or by vote, but it appears that the king or chief had considerable influence as the head of these councils, and in most cases this influence was backed up by a ‘police-force’ of outcaste *degala*-like minorities whom, in extreme cases, the king could order to execute offenders and miscreants (Chiatti 1984:237, Donham 1985:28, Lange 1982:265). Oratory seems to have been highly formalised and stylised in the councils because there was a special group of minstrels who sang and spoke only in these courts. In the Wolaita councils these minstrels often had the duty of announcing the law (Chiatti 1984:252).

In contrast, the councils among the lowland pastoralists are arena councils with a much wider membership. In Sidamo, Gedeo and Mursi, for example, the councils are open to all adult males (Hamer 1986:222, McClellan 1988:25, Turton 1971:170), and among many Oromo communities the councils are open to all men of the *gada* grade (eg. Hinnant 1978:224). Decisions are made by consensus, and there is no formal leader of the council. Although public speaking is considered an art, the degree of formalism is not such that special minstrels make announcements on behalf of others. Turton writes that amongst the Mursi “some men appear to excel in the subtlety with which they employ allusions and images in their speeches, ... which is much appreciated by the audience” (Turton 1975:177), but a highly rigid and formalised oratory is not employed.

Although the ethnography is admittedly sketchy, there does seem to be some support for the formulation that I have suggested. Councils which promote innovation by an open membership, leaderless decision-making to consensus, and relatively informal oratory, are found in areas where there is considerable cultural variation; and those that restrict innovation by a limited membership, decision-making by vote or under the influence of a strong leader, and more formal oratory, are found in areas with rather less cultural variation. Thus conciliar organisation appears to be an important factor in the degree of cultural variation found in any one area.

However, this brief look at comparative ethnography opens up another question. While there is a correlation between degree of cultural variation and conciliar organisation, there also appears to be a correlation between the degree of cultural variation and the nature of the cultural system. It seems that in southern Ethiopia societies with initiatory systems vary more than societies with sacrificial systems. And this general pattern is also found in the Gamo highlands, where decisions about both of them are made through the same assemblies.¹⁰ So this brings us back to the second question posed in this thesis: why do the rituals of the initiatory system vary far more than those of the sacrificial system in the Gamo highlands? If it is just the organisation of the assemblies that determines the ability for change and innovation, then why do changes in the sacrifices and in the initiations seem to lead to such startlingly different results? There must be more to cultural change and variation than can be explained by the dynamics of the assemblies alone.

¹⁰ Whilst it might be suggested that lowland pastoral societies exhibit more cultural variation for a number of reasons, such as their continual warfare, movement, and high levels of intermarriage, the fact that the initiatory system also varies considerably in the Gamo highlands, where there is a settled agricultural population, suggests that other factors are also needed to explain this particular type of cultural variation.

6.7 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have tried to understand the macro-micro link by which external environmental changes lead to internal cultural change. I have argued that the effects of external change are manifested as increasing tensions in certain interpersonal relations, which, one way or another, end up being discussed at local assemblies. The organisation of the Gamo assemblies is such that, with regard to cultural change, four possible types of outcome are possible: those that do not influence cultural change, those that promote cultural stasis, those that promote cultural innovation, and those that lead to the stopping of certain cultural practices. Because the Gamo assemblies include innovation as a likely outcome, external environmental changes are often translated into internal cultural change. As different assemblies in different communities make different decisions, the result is considerable cultural variation.

More specifically, because the assemblies have a broad membership, make decisions by leaderless discussion to consensus, and have relatively informal oratory, they provide a context in which individuals can influence the community to make innovations and changes. If the assemblies were organised differently, with a more restricted membership, with a leader or with a system of voting, or with a highly formalised oratory, then such changes and innovations would be much harder to push through, and those changes that were made would most likely strengthen, rather than weaken, a hierarchical cultural system, as decisions would be made and influenced predominantly by those in power.

The nature of discussions in these assemblies show how the cultural system is influenced both by its past and by the local environment. The sets of ideas that people use to discuss particular issues come from the traditional *woga* and also from new ideas and events that changing historical situations bring to the fore. Acting on all of these ideas, the people of the Gamo highlands constantly create and re-create their culture through their decisions in the assemblies. And by solving small local issues, they slowly bring about significant cultural change, as their innovations, and their intended and unintended consequences, cumulatively build up over time.

However, although it seems that such decision-making forums may open the way for a high degree of cultural variation, an analysis of their workings has not helped us to explain why the initiatory system varies far more than the sacrificial system. If decisions about both of them are made in the same assemblies, then this seems a little perplexing. There must be something about the different systems themselves that can explain this difference. In the next chapter I will consider this problem by looking at how micro-level incremental changes affect, and are affected by, the more macro-scale cultural systems of which they are a part.

CHAPTER SEVEN: LINEAR AND NONLINEAR CHANGE

7.1 Introduction

Chapter five has looked at external environmental changes and considered how they affected the Gamo highlands on a macro-scale general level, and chapter six has begun the task of considering how these macro-scale external changes led to internal cultural change on a more micro level. We have seen the ways in which external changes would have been locally experienced in interpersonal relations, and how tensions in these relations would have come to be discussed in local assemblies which sometimes would have decided to make incremental changes in local cultural practices. The task of this chapter is to complete the analysis by trying to imagine how the cumulative effects of these incremental changes might lead to overall structural change. This involves considering the series of intended and unintended consequences that such incremental changes produce, and how they work through the particular cultural sub-system. By looking at the systemic organisation of the initiations and the sacrifices in the Gamo highlands, I hope to go some way towards making sense of their different behaviour over time, and their different patterns of spatial variation.

The analysis starts with a detailed look at the initiatory system. In chapter five I suggested that the Gamo initiations had undergone much flux and transformation over the past few centuries. Whether or not they derive from the Oromo *Gada*, as I argued, considerable evidence was presented for the temporal transformation of the initiations. In particular, a transformatory sequence was suggested for the *dere* of Doko in which a two-stage initiation, similar to the *atuma* and *bitane halak'as* in Ochollo and Kogota, transformed into a one-stage initiation rather like the contemporary 'warrior form' in Doko Gembela, and then, as Doko began to devolve into the two *deres* of Doko Masho and Doko Gembela, the initiations in the *deres* of Doko Masho transformed again into the 'wife form' found there today. The major aim of this chapter is to try to understand how these transformations might have taken place on the ground.

As in chapter six, I will limit the time-scale to the past hundred and fifty years or so when the external environmental changes are known with some reliability. It is in this period that the devolution of Doko into Doko Masho and Doko Gembela began to occur, and thus also the transformation of the Doko Masho initiations from 'warrior form' to 'wife form'. By focussing on this particular transformation in detail, I hope to shed some light on the micro-mechanisms of structural transformation of the Gamo initiations in general.

The external environmental changes during this period have already been discussed in chapters five and six, and do not need to be repeated here. These changes, particularly in the ability to produce and control surplus wealth, seem to have led to the weakening and devolution of the sacrificial system. The first part of this chapter tries to imagine how these same changes could have led the Doko Masho initiations to transform from 'warrior form' to 'wife form'.

In the next part of the chapter I attempt to formalise the discussion, by looking at the suggested processes in the abstract, and using the language and conceptual insights of complexity theory to analyse this type of transformation as an example of nonlinear change. Following that, I return to the sacrificial system and try to show how its systemic organisation leads instead to linear change, and thus to considerably less spatial variation. In this way I hope to give some insight into two rather different kinds of structural change, brought about by the differing effects of the incremental changes discussed in the previous chapter.

7.2 Transformation of the Initiatory System

Before considering the transformation of the Doko Masho initiations, it is necessary to remind ourselves of the general forms of the contemporary Doko Gembela and Doko Masho initiations, and to consider some of the practical and symbolic implications of this variation. After that I will build on the discussions of chapters five and six to try to imagine how changing external environmental factors in the past hundred and fifty years could have lead to the transformation of the Doko Masho initiations from 'warrior form' to 'wife form'.

7.2.1 A Comparison of the Doko Gembela and Doko Masho Initiations

As a brief reminder, the general ‘story’ of the Doko Gembela initiations is as follows: before the process starts the man is *k’ach’ina*, a social child. In Doko Gembela he is considered as a child in the *dere*. He still gets to partake in the *dere* feasts, such as the Beer Feast and the Seniors’ Feast of new *halak’as*, as a *k’ach’ina*, as a child. Then, when the *u?e* comes to his house, he is suddenly reborn. After the first seven days he has grown into a young boy, active and helpful around the neighbourhood. On the Naming Day he matures into a young man, obedient now to the whole community. And the next day this change of state is marked socially by his *sofe* in the main *dubushas* of Doko Gembela. He is now the ideal young man, mature, virile and brave. Thus he herds the community for a period of time. At some point he gives the Seniors’ Feast, proving that he too is a father, a provider, an *ade*. And then, when he hands over to a new *halak’a* and cuts his hair, he fully becomes a *dere ade*, a respected elder.

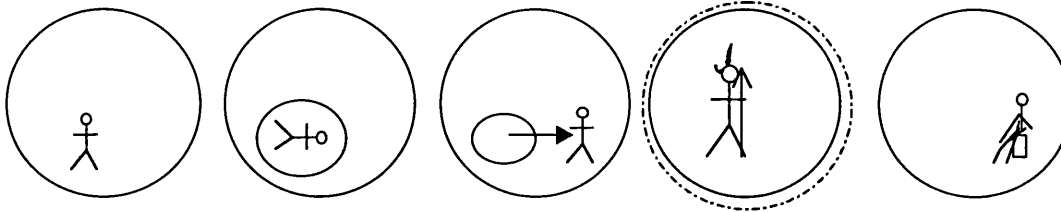
And in Doko Masho the slightly different general ‘story’ is like this: before the process starts the man is a *k’ach’ina*, a social child, not yet a full member of the *dere*, and unable to eat at most *dere* feasts. The *lazantsa* tells him of the *dere*’s intention, and on the day of the Beer Feast he enters the house of the *dere*, as a bride enters her husband’s house at marriage. Approximately nine months later, at the next *Mesqalla*, he symbolically gives birth and is born. He has now entered the *dere* as a baby. The erection of *gazo* in his compound later mark his maturity as a youth, and he then kisses the ground in front of the *dere* to show his obedience to them. His new status as *halak’a* is then marked by his *sofe* in the market place. He is presented with the *horoso*, and herds the community, as a son herds his father’s cattle. Later he gives the Seniors’ Feast, proving that he is a provider, and thus he becomes an *ade*. At the next *Mesqalla* he exits his ritual state, and becomes a *dere ade*, a full member of the *dere*, able to partake in all the feasts. For ease of reference the different parts of the two forms of the initiation can be represented schematically, as in diagram 7.

DOKO GEMBELA

BEFORE

Fertile Period

AFTER



K'ach'ina ---> Birth -----> *Uts'uma* ---> Naming Day/Beer Feast ---> *Ade*

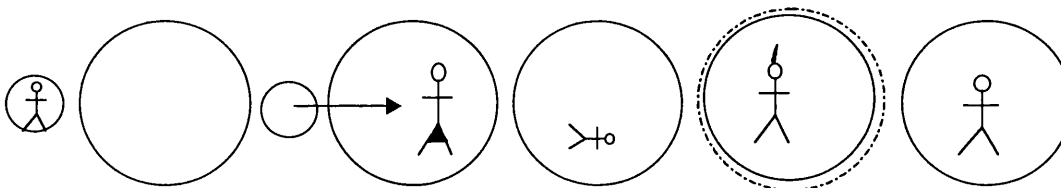
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| - <i>dere</i> child | - messenger | - <i>uts'uma</i> on head | - bamboo poles in compound | - <i>dere ade</i> |
| - part of <i>dere</i> | puts shawl | - small feast | - enter <i>dubusha</i> and present | - an elder |
| - can eat at <i>dere</i> | to the right | - end of seclusion | butter to the <i>ades</i> | - can eat |
| feasts | - symbolically | - symbolically a | - take place on <i>halak'a</i> stone | at <i>dere</i> |
| | born | young boy | - Beer Feast | feasts as |
| | - seclusion | | - start to herd <i>dere</i> | an <i>ade</i> |
| | begins | | - symbolically a warrior | |

DOKO MASHO

BEFORE

Fertile Period

AFTER



K'ach'ina ---> Beer Feast/*Uts'uma* ---> Birth -----> Naming Day -----> *Ade*

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| - <i>dere</i> child | - feast at home and feast | - at Mesqalla | - bamboo poles in compound | - <i>dere ade</i> |
| - not part of | at <i>dubusha</i> | - symbolically | - enter <i>dubusha</i> and present | - can eat |
| the <i>dere</i> | - <i>uts'uma</i> on head | mother and | butter to <i>ades</i> | at <i>dere</i> |
| - cannot eat | - like a wedding | son | - start to herd <i>dere</i> | feasts |
| at <i>dere</i> feasts | - symbolically a bride | - wears red | - symbolically a young man | |
| | | feather | and also a wife | |

Diagram 7: Initiations in Doko Gembela and Doko Masho.

Both the form and the meaning of the initiations are different in Doko Masho and Doko Gembela, despite the obvious similarities. Many of the same events and symbols are rearranged in different ways, so that the overall effect is quite different in each group of *deres*. Although both elaborate the transition from *k'ach'ina* to *ade*, the meaning of this transition is not the same. In Doko Masho the transition is symbolically that from partial *dere* member to full *dere* member, whereas in Doko Gembela it is from *dere* child to *dere* elder. Neither point is lost in either of the versions, but the emphasis is significantly different. This difference links with slightly different models of *dere* (one that includes *k'ach'ina*, and one that does not), and with certain practical implications.

In Doko Masho many *halak'as* are initiated in each *dere* each year. In some *deres* even young unmarried boys become *halak'a*. In effect this means that the majority of men will become *halak'a*, only the very poorest perhaps failing to do so. My own survey of one of the *deres* of Doko Masho showed that 73% of all traditional household heads had become *halak'a*. These men and their wives constitute the *dere*, the community. The majority of *k'ach'ina* are simply people who have not yet become *halak'a*. As such, they are not yet full members of the community, and are not eligible to partake in the communal feasts sponsored by new *halak'as*. Since *k'ach'ina* are not feasted, and the *dere ades* are divided up between the many *halak'as* that are initiated at one time, the relative cost of becoming a *halak'a* is not too high. Compared to Doko Gembela, Doko Masho is cheap.

Given this particular model of community, with *k'ach'ina* as somehow beyond its boundaries, it is not surprising we find the theme of joining the community so strongly played out in the initiation to *halak'a*. The symbolic processes of marriage and birth allow the *halak'a* to enter into the community as a bride and then to be born in the community as a son. The theme of femaleness, of being the community's bride, never quite fades, even when the symbolism of the initiation has turned to concentrate on the growth of the baby to youth and to man. When the *halak'a* leaves his ritual state he is both a full member of the community and a *kerimbo*, a married woman. As a young man he is not yet a community elder, but he is now a community member, and as such is eligible to attend the feasts from which he was excluded as a *k'ach'ina*.

But in Doko Gembela only one *halak'a* can be initiated in each *dere* at any time. The number of *halak'as* initiated per year can be more than one, perhaps two or three, but alternatively one *halak'a* can herd for three or four years, or even more. This links with the fact that only older men tend to be chosen as *halak'a*, and the cost of all the feasting is significantly greater. Combined, this means that in effect very few men become *halak'a*, only about 9% of household heads according to a recent survey (Cartledge 1995 :80, 121,171). Such a small percentage of men cannot constitute a community, and instead we find a model of community that includes *k'ach'ina* as children in the community. Full community members, but children not adults. Thus they get to partake in the communal feasts sponsored by new *halak'as*. Many men will never become *halak'a*, but still they are part of the community.

With such a model of community it becomes clear why the marriage and birth symbolism is missing from the initiation of *halak'as* in Doko Gembela. Community membership does not have to be achieved, the house does not have to be entered anew. Instead the initiation concentrates on the growth of the boy in to a brave young man. There is no marriage, and no gestation period. His birth is not focussed on, there is no red feather, and no linkage to *Mesqalla*, the time of communal re-birth. Instead his social status as a baby is elaborated. Confined to his own house, he is not yet a social person. His growth is shown as his social expansion, from his house to his neighbourhood to the whole community. His maleness and virility are accentuated in a way that would be difficult in Doko Masho, where the gender of the *halak'a* is more ambiguous. Only in Doko Gembela does the *halak'a* wear the metal phallus and carry a spear to *sofe*. And when he exits his ritual state he becomes an elder in that community. As an old man, and one of only a few, he now has the high status of a *dere ade*.

These differences constitute significant structural variation. From a synchronic point of view I can see no way to explain this variation, as in the relatively small area of Doko all the obvious causal variables, such as ecology and production, are constant. It could perhaps be argued that this variation is the result of random changes during cultural

transmission, but such an explanation would not make sense of the pattern whereby the *deres* of Doko Gembela share one form in contrast to those of Doko Masho, instead of ‘warrior forms’ and ‘wife forms’ being randomly intermingled. The people of Doko themselves are not very interested in this variation, and have little knowledge about the initiations in other *deres* and no explanation of why they are performed so differently. By far the most plausible explanation is that this synchronic variation should be understood as the result of temporal transformation. How, though, would this transformation have proceeded?

In what follows I present a hypothetical model of how the Doko Masho initiations might have transformed from ‘warrior’ to ‘wife’. It is a thought experiment, based on what is known about the structure of the initiatory system (chapter four), external environmental changes (chapter five), and the way in which such external changes are translated into incremental cultural changes (chapter six). Given the lack of local historical knowledge about the initiations, this is the best that can be offered. The point of this analysis, in any case, is not to reconstruct the precise details of actual historical transformation, but rather to try to understand the connections and interactions that shape the general nature of the transformatory process. The fact that the intricate details of history are not recoverable should not deter us from this endeavour.

A small point should be made about directionality. The model of change that I present clearly sees the ‘wife form’ of the initiations as a transformation of the ‘warrior form’, and not vice versa. Many of the reasons for this suggested direction of change will be clear from chapter five, and others will be further elaborated on in the course of the analysis. In this context it is also relevant to note that all the other initiations in Doko are done according to the ‘warrior’ style. Thus the *hudhugha* initiations in both the *deres* of Doko Masho and Doko Gembela, and the *dana* initiations for the whole of Doko, are all currently performed in a manner very similar to that of the *halak’a* initiations in Doko Gembela. The Doko Masho *halak’a* initiations are thus the only initiations in Doko that are performed according to the ‘wife’ style. As will become apparent, though, I think that the arrow of change can be most clearly read from the ‘inconsistencies’ that are found when considering the small variations between the small *deres*. The

cumulative evidence of these inconsistencies supports the general hypothesis that change has been in the direction from Doko Gembela form to Doko Masho form.

7.2.2 From Warrior to Wife

As I have suggested in chapters five and six, it seems that nineteenth century initiates may have produced a lot of their surplus wealth by exploiting local slave labour, and possibly by dominating the long distance slave trade. The effects of the end of the slave trade and incorporation into the nation state of Ethiopia served, amongst other things, to reduce the ability of local men to produce surplus wealth. As discussed in chapter six, however, it is likely that men would still want to become *halak'a*, and thus increase their status, even though it would have become increasingly difficult to afford the feasts during this time. Under such conditions it is likely that some people might have suggested innovations that would make it a little easier to become *halak'a*. Whilst some of these innovations might not have been accepted by the assembly, it is quite likely that one or two would have been passed eventually. If, for example, the assembly wanted to change the herding *halak'a* because there was drought or disease in the *dere* but nobody could afford to become *halak'a* that year, then it is quite likely that some innovative solution would be decided upon.

In the context of the 'warrior form' initiations, there is one innovation that seems particularly likely. In Doko Gembela, you may remember, the wife of the *halak'a* has to sacrifice a sheep at one stage in the initiation. Now, as described in chapter two, a woman can only make this sacrifice if she has been fully incorporated into her husband's house, and this can only happen after she has reached menopause and her husband has finished taking a series of gifts to her father. In effect, this means that in Doko Gembela a man cannot use his surplus wealth to provide the feasts and be initiated until he has paid off his debt to his father-in-law. If nobody could be found to become *halak'a*, it seems entirely plausible that the assembly might decide to let someone use his surplus wealth to become *halak'a*, instead of taking it to his father-in-law as *kumets* payments. In other words, the assembly might change the rule and let men be initiated before they

have finished paying the debt to their father-in-law. If this change is made, then there will be a number of consequential changes that follow.

Most obviously, men would begin to put off paying the debt to their father-in-law as it no longer places any serious restrictions on their life. Now that they can be initiated anyway, much of the incentive to get it out of the way would no longer be relevant. And indeed we find that people are much more lax about taking these gifts in Doko Masho than they are in Doko Gembela.

Parallel to this small change, some rather more dramatic changes would take place in the *halak'a* initiations. The first change would be that the *halak'a*'s wife will no longer be able to sacrifice during the initiations, as she is not allowed to do this until after all the gifts have been taken. And indeed women do not sacrifice during *halak'a* initiations in Doko Masho.

Secondly, and more gradually, men would be able to become *halak'a* at younger and younger ages, as they no longer have to wait until their wives reach menopause and all the gifts are taken. Given that affinal relations would be no longer relevant to the initiations, it is plausible that the *dere* could decide that unmarried men could become *halak'a* too. We find that this is the case for six of the eight *deres* of Doko Masho, although Masho and Shale, the two *deres* bordering Doko Gembela, still require the *halak'a* to be married.

Following the gradual decline in the age of *halak'as*, it would be increasingly difficult to consider these men to be '*dere* fathers' or '*dere* elders', and gradually the emphasis might shift to considering them as 'full *dere* members'. Along with this conceptual shift in the meaning of '*ade*' (those that are initiated), would follow a linked shift in the meaning of *k'ach'ina* (those that are not initiated). If *ades* are now *dere* members rather than *dere* elders, then *k'ach'ina* will become non-members rather than sons.

Young *ades* might then complain about sitting with the *k'ach'ina* during the feasts, and claim that they should sit with the other *ades*, despite their junior age. Such a conflict would be taken to an assembly. A plausible solution, especially given the new conceptualisation of the *k'ach'ina* as non-members, would be to limit the feast to *ades* only. In this way young and old could sit separately, and yet the young *ades*' status would be marked as different from the *k'ach'ina*.

This decision would have a number of consequences. The cost of the feasts would become cheaper, as there would be fewer people to feed. This in turn would encourage more men to become *halak'a*. What with the added incentive that if they do not become *halak'a* then they cannot participate in the feasts at all, there would most likely be a great increase in the number of men wanting to be initiated.

In such a situation another assembly might be called to discuss the matter. It might be suggested that there could be more than one *halak'a* at a time, so as not to make the herding time of any one *halak'a* too short if there were a quick swap over. If this were agreed, then batches of *halak'as* could be initiated at the same time, and the cycle could be standardised, perhaps to an annual one.

There are several possible ways that a *dere* could deal with having more than one *halak'a* at a time. They could suggest that the whole batch of *halak'as* is conceptually like one *halak'a*, and thus instigate a ritual to symbolically link all the *halak'as*. This choice is found in Masho and Shale, where shortly after the Naming Day all the *halak'as* stand in a row and the *maaka* passes a sheep over their shoulders and then slaughters it. Subsequently, if any of them breaks a taboo or commits an offense, then all of them will be expelled from office together. Another possibility is not to link the *halak'as*, and simply have many *halak'as*. This is the choice manifested in the other six *deres* of Doko Masho, who do not practise the sheep-over-the-shoulders ritual and whose *halak'as* can be expelled from office individually, without affecting the status of their colleagues.

A consequential effect of allowing more than one *halak'a* at a time would be that the cost of the feasts would again fall, as feeding the *ades* would be shared between the *halak'as* and they would not all be fed by one *halak'a* on his own. This again would encourage more men to become *halak'a*.

All these changes would further emphasise the new meaning of *ade* and *k'ach'ina* as member and non-member respectively. As more and more men become *halak'a*, the *k'ach'ina* will begin to feel more and more like outsiders. Their initiation would thus feel more and more like a type of 'entry'.

This change in the conceptual nature of the transition might become mirrored in the symbolic form of the transition. Since 'entering' is what wives do at marriage, indeed there is no separate word meaning 'to marry', and since *deres* are considered to be like houses, the similarities would be resonating in people's minds.

The small *Uts'uma* feast which marks the end of seclusion, and thus the *halak'a's* transition from his house to his neighbourhood, could begin to change. As the *ades* sit in the best seats in the house, while *k'ach'ina* make do with seats in the other huts in the compound, this division could begin to take on significance, especially given the new member/non-member schema. Probably in a somewhat jokey manner, the *halak'a* could be invited to enter the main house and join the *ades*. His junior status as the latest new entry would then be commented on and joked about. This would all resonate so strongly with the marriage ritual, that either by formal decision, or simply by joking and then continuing with the joke, elements of the marriage ritual could be added during this feast so that the importance of the *halak'a's* entry to the *dere* is emphasised.

Such a situation is currently found in one of the *deres* of Doko Masho, Shale. In this *dere* they have a feast called *Uts'uma*, like the small Gembela feast, but that takes place instead of the Beer Feast. The *ades* eat in the main house, and the *k'ach'ina* eat in the other huts. Late in the afternoon the *halak'a* enters the main house like a bride. The *dere* sacrificer puts some butter mixed with *uts'uma* grass on his head. This is the same

uts'uma grass that is placed on the *halak'a*'s head in Doko Gembela, and poured over the tower of feet formed by the bride and her in-laws just as she enters their house at marriage. Then the sacrificer gives a gourd of wheat beer to the *halak'a* and he drinks together with his wife. This feeding is called *kacha*, like the feeding that takes place when a bride first enters her new father-in-law's house. Finally, to make the structural equivalence with marriage complete, the *halak'a* stands up and puts his right foot forward, over that of his wife, and his parents put their feet above his, and then the *dere* sacrificer puts his right foot on the top and pours wheat beer over them and blesses the *halak'a* to be well. This is what happens when a new bride steps over the doorway into her husband's father's house, and the marriage symbolism is overt. The *halak'a* is often referred to as the *dere*'s wife.

In six of the other seven *deres* the Beer Feast is considered to be the equivalent to the *Uts'uma* Feast, and the marriage symbolism has already been shown. Each of these *deres* has taken something different from the marriage ceremony. Thus in Dambo and Yoiria the *lazantsa* must come and escort the *halak'a*-bride to the assembly place, or house of the *dere*. Notice also that the change in the name of this intermediary from *u?e* to *lazantsa* links with this new emphasis on marriage. In Masho the *halak'a*-bride makes the journey without the *lazantsa*, but on entering the assembly place he is given *kacha* by the *dere* sacrificer.

In these *deres* the feasts are much larger, as the assembly place can hold more people than a house. With the larger number of *ades* in the *dere*, due to the increased number of initiations, a larger feast would become necessary in order to feed them all. If the feast remained small, as in Shale, then it would have to be limited to only those *ades* living in the neighbourhood.

By looking at the details in the eight variants of this event it is possible to discern the arrow of change from the *Uts'uma* to the Beer Feast, thus supporting the general evolutionary model being suggested: namely, from small *Uts'uma* Feast to larger *Uts'uma* Feast-as-wedding to Beer Feast-as-wedding.

In all the Doko Masho variants, certain spaces are used to stand for '*dere*' and 'not *dere*'. In Shale the main house is '*dere*' and the rest of the compound is 'not *dere*'. In Masho, Dambo, Yoirā, Ch'ento and Gedenō and Woits'o the scale is larger, so that the main house and compound together are 'not *dere*' and the *dubusha* is '*dere*'. But in all versions, the *uts'uma* is put on the *halak'a*'s head inside the main house. Looking at the marriage ceremony, we see that the *uts'uma* is poured over the bride's foot just after she has placed it inside the house. It is the first part of her incorporation. Thus the version of events that takes place during the *Uts'uma* Feast in Shale, where the main house stands for the *dere*, is structurally the same. The version in the other *deres* does not really make sense. It would be more consistent if the *uts'uma* were placed on the *halak'a*'s head inside the *dubusha*, but instead it is done inside the house. The most convincing explanation of this is that it is a left-over from when things used to be done as they are now in Shale.

Further support is added to this view in that, as mentioned in chapter six, up until very recently Woits'o used to perform the *Uts'uma* feast, and it is only during the last year or two that Woits'o has decided to copy the other *deres*, and has changed from doing an *Uts'uma* Feast in the house to doing a Beer Feast in a *dubusha*. Thus change is still taking place in this direction, and this step of the model, at least, is clearly grounded in actual historical reality.

If we now return to our thought experiment, we must consider what the consequences would be if the small *Uts'uma* Feast grew in size and turned into a symbolic wedding. On the one hand the increase in size of the feast would lead to a decrease in the size of another feast. The Beer Feast on the Naming Day would shift to that on the *uts'uma* day, and thus beer would become no longer central on the Naming Day.

At the same time, the birth symbolism before the *Uts'uma*, which is now a marriage, would become meaningless, and an assembly would probably be called to discuss what to do about it. One possibility, linking up with the new annual cycle of the initiations, would be for the *halak'a* to be symbolically born at the New Year festival of *Mesqalla*, a considerable gestation time after the *uts'uma*-marriage, and the time of communal re-birth and fertility.

With all the new symbolism of the *halak'a*-as-bride, and the remarks that the *halak'a* is the *dere*'s wife, the male regalia worn during the status-changing parade around the market place would seem somewhat out of place. Either by general awareness, or by formal decision, the spear and metal phallus would be set aside. The transformation of the *halak'a* from warrior to wife is complete, and we have arrived at the Doko Masho version of the initiation.

What I have presented in this section is a model of structural change, or a transformative model for understanding cultural variation. The type of change that I have described is nonlinear, in that small initial changes can have large and unpredictable effects, culminating in an overall change in the state of the system. Through a series of changes, both those caused by formal decisions in the assemblies and those that follow on naturally as intended or unintended consequences, the system undergoes structural transformation. Whilst being systematic, this model is not deterministic because if certain key innovations are not made, then the initiations will remain stable or transform down a different path. The idiosyncrasies of the personalities of particular influential people in Doko Masho and Doko Gembela will have thus played a role in the process which led to the divergence between the Doko Masho and the Doko Gembela initiations.

The ability to transform seems to be inherent in the organisation of the initiations, and is not specific only to the Doko Gembela and Doko Masho cases. As mentioned in chapter five, it is likely that previous versions of the initiatory system in Doko included a two-stage version, and it is no doubt through similar series of changes that that version transformed into something more like the contemporary Doko Gembela form. Similar processes are also likely to have taken place with the initiations in other *deres*, but due to the nonlinear and unpredictable nature of these transformations, the effects would be significantly different in each *dere*. In this way the remarkable variation of the initiations over the Gamo highlands can be understood as the cumulative result of such temporal transformations, which are facilitated by the systemic organisation of the initiations themselves.

7.3 The Initiatory System as a Complex Dynamic System

The type of nonlinear change described in the last section is characteristic of complex dynamic behaviour, as discussed in chapter one. In complex dynamic systems,

relationships between variables are unstable... [and] changes in these relationships are subject to positive feedback in which changes are amplified, breaking up existing structures and behaviour and creating unexpected outcomes in the generation of new structures and behaviour (Elliott and Kiel 1996:1).

This description clearly fits my account of structural transformation in Gamo highland initiations. What remains now is to analyse in more detail the mechanisms that bring about this type of change. The non-rigid systemic approach of complexity theory will facilitate this exploration.

7.3.1 Critical Points, Positive Feedback and Structural Transformation

Complex systems may have both linear and nonlinear phases, depending whether they are near to, or far from, equilibrium. When they are near to equilibrium they are not static, but their general principle is homeostasis and they tend to return towards their general or ground state (Byrne 1998:30). When they are far from equilibrium, however, positive feedback becomes more important, and small changes in input can produce disproportionate outcomes such that the system evolves, or transforms, into a new state. According to some complexity theorists, certain complex systems have a tendency to evolve to a critical state in which a minor event will start a chain reaction leading to transformatory change (Bak and Chen 1991:26, cited in Cilliers 1998:96). So in a nonlinear system there is not necessarily permanent instability, but periods of stability followed by periods of transformation when the system reaches a critical point. The model of transformation that I have suggested for the Doko Masho initiations deals with the situation at such a critical point.

The model of transformation consists of two types of change. Some changes are brought about by people acting on decisions that have been made in the assemblies, and other changes come about as the intended or unintended consequences of those initial changes. The whole process of transformation discussed above can be represented in the flow-chart in diagram 8, where thick arrows represent changes made by assembly decision and thin arrows represent intended and unintended consequences. When put into such form, the series of loops and interconnections can be seen more clearly. Many of the changes that come about as unintended consequences in turn set in motion other changes, and the cascades of these unintended changes often culminate in a structural problem that is then recognised by the participants and discussed in the assembly. A new decision is made, and the process may or may not start over again.

The unintended consequences of initial change, then, feed back to cause yet more change. This amplifying effect is typical of positive feedback loops, and as diagram 8 shows, there are a number of such loops apparent in the workings of the Doko initiations. Two of these loops are particularly important, and diagram 9 highlights their function. These loops both centre around the cost of the feasts, and thus show how economic factors drive the system, although in a nonlinear way. The first loop describes the process whereby *halak'as* are initiated at younger ages, leading to a change in the *k'ach'ina / ade* symbolism from child / father to non-member / member of the *dere*, which in turn leads to the exclusion of the *k'ach'ina* from the feasts, which makes the feasts cheaper, and thus achievable by even younger men, and so on. This loop starts the initial change. As its effects build up, and the average age of the *halak'a* drops significantly and the cost of the feasts becomes noticeably cheaper, it kicks the second loop into action.

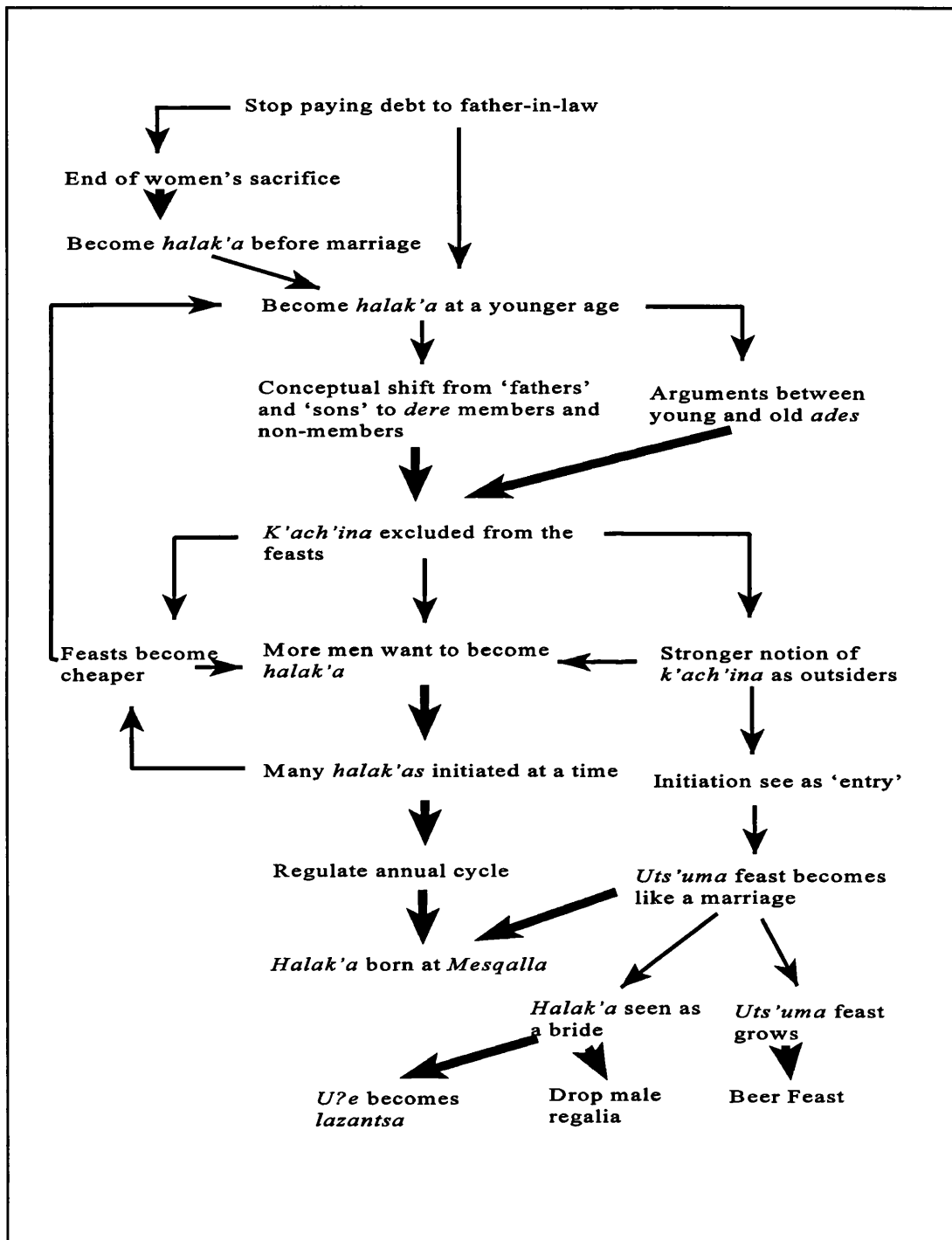


Diagram 8: Structural Transformation I - From Warrior to Wife

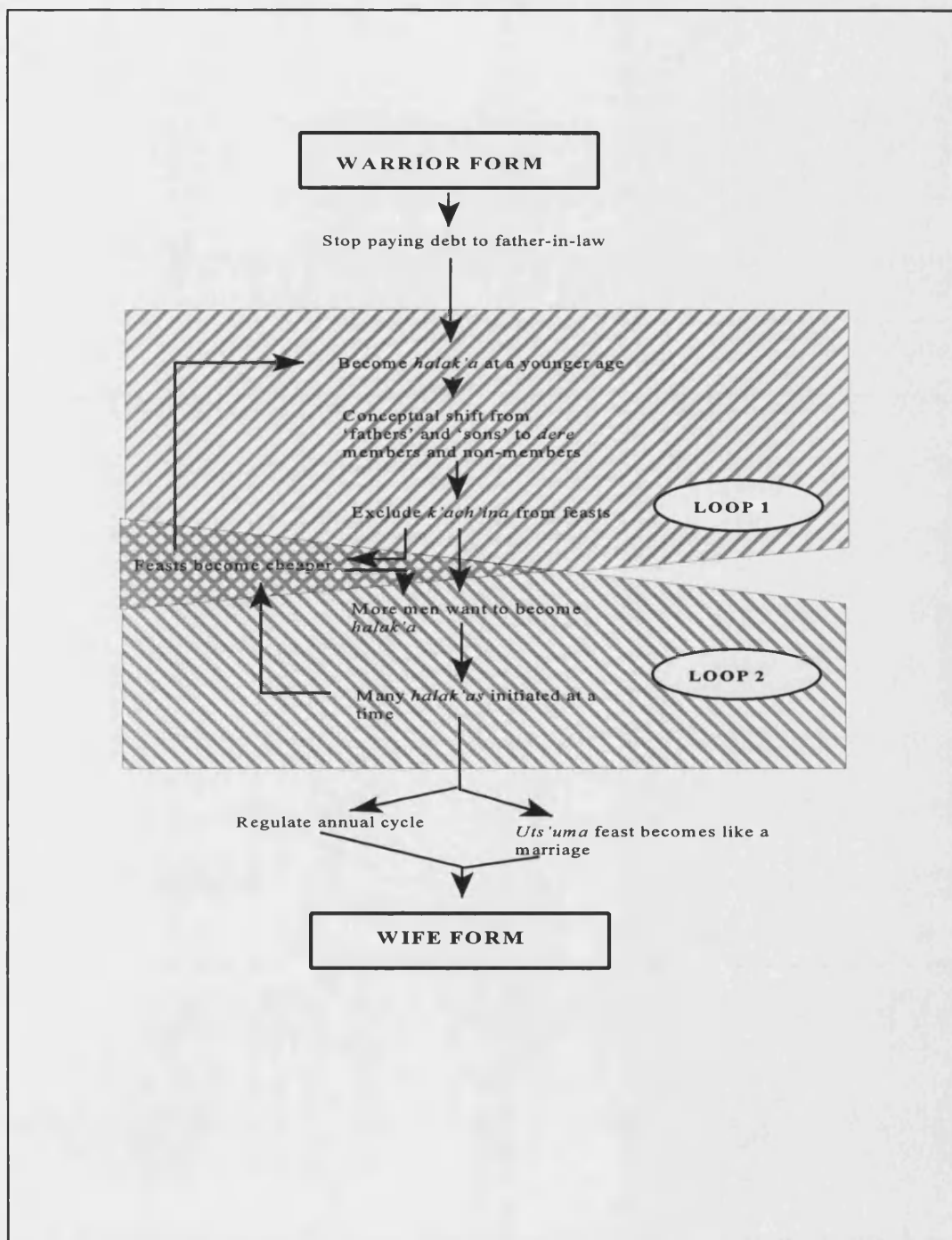


Diagram 9: Structural Transformation II - Positive Feedback Loops.

This loop contains the processes whereby cheaper feasts and the exclusion of *k'ach'ina* from these feasts both lead to more men wanting to become *halak'a*, which leads to the decision to initiate many men at the same time, which further reduces the costs of the feasts, and so on. It is this loop which drives most of the change, as it goes round and round causing the feasts to get cheaper and cheaper and the number of *halak'as* to get larger and larger. This loop, then, amplifies the effect of loop one, and also serves to reinforce it. As feasts get cheaper still, they are achievable by younger and younger men, and thus loop two keeps loop one in motion for a longer time than if it were in isolation. This also serves to consolidate the changes made in loop one, and to render them irreversible.

At the core of the initiatory system, then, there are two interlinked and mutually reinforcing positive feedback loops. The effects of the changes produced by these loops cause other changes outside of these loops. These changes do not feed back into this loop, but they may cause other changes elsewhere in the system, or alternatively act as stable 'dead ends'. But it is the combination of the two core loops that cause fundamental and dramatic change. When they are set into motion, at a critical point, they drive the system to transform such that the initial structure is broken down and a new structure emerges.

As the incremental processes iterate round these loops, they amplify change up to a certain point. After this point, the motion round the loops slows down and may eventually come to a stop. Thus once it is institutionalised that many young *halak'as* are initiated at a time, and that the cost of the feasts is cheap, there will come a point where the number of *halak'as* initiated at the same time cannot increase further, because the overall production levels of the *dere* can only support a certain number of initiates per neighbourhood (since the neighbourhood contributes to the cost of the feasts by giving *woito* gifts). At this point the cost of the feasts will stop falling, and thus the age of the new *halak'as* will also stop falling. This will lead to a stabilisation in the number of *halak'as* initiated at a time, and this particular cycle of change will grind to a halt. Unless this stability is challenged by some changing external factor, a new stable state will be reached.

The other small changes generated by the effects of these cycles of change, and spewed out of the loops, will then come together and become organised into the rest of the new instantiation of the system. Thus the regulated annual cycle and the importance of *Mesqalla* interact with the new *Uts'uma* feast-as-marriage and lead to the subsequent changes in type of messenger, use of male regalia, and so on that give meaning to the overall process of initiation for its participants. Only with a certain degree of coherence in its overall meaning and symbolism will it have relevance for the people of Doko themselves.

The way that this final organisation comes about will be through the same processes of decision-making at the assemblies, followed by intended and unintended consequences. It may well be that the need for these assemblies and discussions is a consequence of some cognitive need for meaning and coherence, because there seems to be no economic or sociological reason for these particular transformations. It is possible that these final transformations are driven by the principle of 'relevance', such that cultural elements, or representations, transform towards contents that are relevant in the context of one another (Sperber 1996:53, Sperber and Wilson 1986). Further exploration of this issue, however, is beyond the scope of this thesis.¹

As the driving force of the central loops comes to a halt and the rest of the changes become organised into some meaningful whole, the system reaches a new stable state. Whatever small changes that do take place do not feed back into the system, and no iterative loops cause further dramatic change. The new state will remain stable until external factors, or chance fluctuations, push it to another critical point. At this point a new positive feedback loop will be set into motion, and another set of iterative changes will lead to yet another dramatic structural transformation. The period of stability, then, is not fixed, but depends on changing environmental factors. In periods of constantly

¹ Although the tying together of the cognitive and the sociological levels cannot be attempted here, the discussion of this section has nonetheless opened up an analytical space in which such complementary analyses could usefully support each other.

fluctuating environmental circumstances, the stable period may disappear altogether and the initiations might be in continuous flux, while in other periods they may remain stable for long periods of time and then suddenly undergo transformation into a new state.

7.3.2 Sensitivity to Initial Conditions

An important feature of nonlinear systems is that they are sensitive to initial conditions. This has been implicit in the discussion above. Most of the external factors that impinged on the *dere* and led the people of Doko Masho to make a decision to allow men to become *halak'a* before they had finished paying off their debt to their fathers-in-law, would have been present also in Doko Gembela. Why a decision to make a small innovation was made in Doko Masho and not in Doko Gembela most likely comes down to individual personalities and characters in the *dere*, or the chance presence of someone who wanted to become *halak'a* and perhaps had some grudge against his father-in-law, or what have you. Such tiny differences in initial conditions then lead to massively different results as cascades of change are set into motion.

The different trajectories created by these small differences in initial conditions do not end with the two different forms of the initiations in 1990s Doko. They in fact carry on, amplifying and amplifying over time. The fact that the *deres* of Doko Masho and Doko Gembela have these different forms of initiations in turn affects how they react to, and interact with, certain new ideas and situations. The different success of the Protestant church in Doko Masho and Doko Gembela, for example, can be seen to be intimately linked to the differences in the form of the initiations.

As mentioned in chapter two, the people of Doko Gembela were very open to the teachings of the Protestant church in the 1960s, and by the time of the revolution a large proportion of the community had converted. In the 1990s people have continued to join the church, and 'believers' quite possibly constitute a majority of *dere* people. In Doko Masho, by contrast, the church has been far less successful. Very few people joined in the 1960s, and there was considerable hostility towards missionaries at that time. Only

in the 1990s have people begun to join the church in significant numbers, and so far it is mainly the young. It is not unusual for people to join the church, and then leave it when a close kinsman dies and they want to mourn him properly, or when their father convinces them they should become *halak'a*, and so on. 'Believers' are still very much in a minority, and it remains to be seen whether or not they will increase in number in the future. I believe this variation is intimately related to the different forms of the initiations in Doko Masho and Doko Gembela, and thus is a further unintended consequence of the tiny difference in initial conditions in the two *deres*.

In order to understand the attraction of Protestantism to people in Doko, we must look at its teachings in the context of the Doko conceptual world. The fundamental teaching of the Protestants in the Gamo highlands is that God is the Father and all people are his children. In the context of both the sacrificial system and the initiatory system, this is an extremely powerful statement. While the initiatory system restructures the father-son relation of the sacrificial system into categories, as described in chapter four, the Protestant ideology takes the restructuring one crucial step further, and suggests that the category 'son' encompasses all people and that 'fatherhood' is shifted away from men and into the sphere of the divine. Fertility then flows directly from God to his children without the need for any mediating hierarchies. In such a system the only legitimate authority is that of God, and beneath God all people are equal.

This ideology of real equality challenges the sacrificial system even more than the initiatory system does. Where the initiatory system limits itself to challenging only the communal fatherhood of the sacrificial system, the Protestant ideology also challenges the more basic genealogical fatherhood. All men are equal beneath God, including a man and his father. As I have mentioned before, the tension between fathers and sons is a general theme in Gamo life, and there is a constant struggle as dependent sons try to increase their status while fathers try to keep them in a junior position. The friction between Kaltsa and Kamba described in chapter six, or between Shagire and Wale mentioned in chapter four, when Wale, a Protestant, joked about becoming *dabo' halak'a* clearly illustrate this tension. Another example will bring out these tensions even more clearly.

On one occasion Wale's wife, Almaz, also a Protestant, was arguing with Shagire about the amount of time she spent trading for her own benefit and the amount of time she spent working in the house for the household members. After a particularly harsh and lengthy telling off by Shagire, Almaz responded that she had been put here by God and not by any person, and that she accepted fully the authority of God. This, of course, left it unsaid, but understood, that she did not accept Shagire's authority. Shagire was furious and bellowed, "Do you dare to bring God onto my land?". This question reminded Almaz that while she might like to think that her fertility and sustenance comes directly from God, in a very practical way it comes from Shagire and the crops which grow on the land that he owns. She was dependent on him, whether she liked it or not, and had better accept his authority.

These very real tensions between the generations, then, are addressed in the Protestant teaching, and give sons and younger brothers a legitimate way to try to claim equality with their genealogical seniors. The teaching also challenges the initiatory system, but less fundamentally. 'Buying' or 'achieving' fatherhood is seen as an arrogance and a waste of time, since only God is truly the Father. The real ideological power, though, comes in its challenge to the authority of genealogical fathers.

In order to see how the different forms of the initiations in Doko Masho and Doko Gembela affect the uptake of Protestantism, then, we must consider the nature of 'fatherhood' in the two *deres*. While the initiatory system provides a way for genealogical juniors to gain some degree of communal equality with their seniors², this is rather limited in Doko Gembela where only relatively few men are able to become *halak'a* and then do so at a rather late age. For the most part then, genealogical juniors have no way to claim equality in any context, and thus the strains in the hierarchical system are particularly tight and ready to snap.

² As discussed in chapter four, if a man and his lineage head have both become *halak'a*, then in the context of the *dere* they are both *dere ades*, and thus of equal status.

In Doko Masho, however, most men can become *halak'a*, and thus in the context of the *dere* there is a widespread sense of equality. Genealogical hierarchies can be downplayed, and communal equality can be emphasised. In this way the tensions in the hierarchical sacrificial system have been relieved to a great extent by the initiatory system. While father-son tensions do exist, they are perhaps not as prominent as they are in Doko Gembela.

Here, then, is the reason why the people of Doko Gembela welcomed the teachings of the church. They offered young people and genealogical juniors an arena in which they could be considered as equals. This happened to be a solution to the most salient problem for many people of Doko Gembela, and thus people joined the church in droves.³ In Doko Masho this same problem had already been addressed to some extent by the transformed version of the initiations, and thus was a less salient issue. Therefore the teachings of the church seemed to offer less, and were only taken up much more slowly and cautiously.

In this way life in Doko Masho and in Doko Gembela is continuing to diverge. The small differences in initial conditions are still being amplified as the two communities evolve along different trajectories. The different impact of Protestantism on these two communities will no doubt affect how they react to other ideas and events in the future, and they will continue to transform and change in different ways as they diverge further and further away from each other. Such behaviour is characteristic of nonlinear dynamic systems, and in this section I have discussed the mechanisms through which this divergent development comes about.

³ It is likely that a similar dynamic explains the popularity of Protestantism in Wolaita, where the sacrificial system used to be even stronger and there were no initiations at all.

7.4 Comparing the Sacrificial and Initiatory Systems

In this chapter, so far, I have offered an explanation of why the initiations vary so much by looking at the way in which they transform. And I have tried to understand the nature of this transformation by seeing the initiatory system as a complex nonlinear system. One question remains. Why does the sacrificial system not transform in this manner, and thus not exhibit a similar degree of cultural variation? It might be argued that the different degrees of cultural variation exhibited by the two systems are simply due to the fact that the sacrificial system is on the decline, while the initiatory system is more central to peoples' lives and thus the focus of more discussion. However, the fact that the Doko Gembela initiations are somewhat in decline and yet still exhibit a similar degree of variation to those in Doko Masho suggests that this is not the case, and in this section I will instead argue that the difference in the behaviour of the two systems is due to the different dynamics that follow from their systemic organisation. I suggest that, unlike the initiatory system, the sacrificial system exhibits linear behaviour, and can be seen as a complex system that is near to equilibrium, or in a linear phase far from any critical points.

If the sacrificial system transformed in the manner described above, then it would exhibit as much variation as the initiatory system. In contrast, though, it shows a remarkable constancy in form, and only varies in the degree to which it is elaborated or weakened. This is because it changes through time in a very different manner, and this, in turn, is related to its different systemic organisation.

If we consider the effect of changes made by decisions in assemblies, we see that there are no cascades of unintended consequences that feed back to amplify initial changes. For example, if the Michamala clan in Doko decides to change the form of their clan sacrifice so that the clan number two can hold the knife jointly with the clan head, then this will not lead to any significant unintentional consequences. It will not affect any other aspect of the sacrificial system. Like the situation with the *ek'k'a* in Kale, it will lead to a variation in the way the ritual is performed, but it will not lead to any other

changes in the system. Change follows, then, in the smooth and proportionate manner characteristic of linear dynamics (Elliott and Kiel 1996:5). It simply happens, and that's that. In fact, as far as I can see, whatever change may be made to the way in which a sacrifice is performed, it will not lead to any other significant changes which will effect the workings of the whole system.

At any one level of the system, then, small changes do not start off cascades of other changes. Between the different levels there is a similar pattern of non-interaction. Changes in the relation between an *angisa* and his juniors, for example, do not lead to similar changes in the relation between a *bekesha baira* and his juniors. The fact that people in Doko Masho do not wait for their *bekesha bairas* to first sow the land does not affect the fact that they still wait for the *dere ek'k'a*. The reason such changes in one level of the system do not affect other levels is that the system is organised such that these levels encompass each other, rather than interact with each other. If one part of the system encompasses another, then the particular form of the encompassed part will not affect the rest of the system. It is as though it were walled off into a little box.

The interconnections between the various parts of the system, then, are far less complex than the network of interconnections in the initiatory system. Processes of change do not iterate, there are no positive feedback loops, and the system is not sensitive to initial conditions. The organisation of the initiations can be seen as a linked chain, while the sacrifices are better pictured as a Russian doll. In the 'linked chain' organisation of the initiations, a change in one link will lead to changes in other links, and thus most changes will have all sorts of knock-on effects. In the 'Russian doll' organisation of the sacrifices, however, a change in, or even a removal of, any one of the dolls will not affect the other dolls. A set of Russian dolls with one broken one is still a set of Russian dolls. Neither the dolls contained within the broken one, nor the dolls that contain the broken one within themselves, will be affected by the change in that particular doll.

There is, no doubt, more to say about the organisation of the two systems, but my purpose here is simply to show that systemic organisation is an important criterion in

understanding cultural transformation and variation, and to point to some key factors in this organisation. My core argument is that more complex organisation will lead to nonlinear behaviour and great cultural variation, while less complex organisation will lead to linear behaviour and less cultural variation.⁴

7.5 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have tried to suggest how the cumulative effects of incremental cultural changes, and their intended and unintended consequences, work through two differently organised cultural systems, leading to different patterns of structural change. I have argued that the pattern of interconnections in the initiatory system leads to complex nonlinear behaviour such that small incremental changes produce dramatic structural transformation. In contrast, I have shown how the more limited pattern of interconnections in the sacrificial system leads to linear behaviour such that small changes have only small effects. The way in which these systems change through time is thus significantly different, due to their internal organisation.

It is for these reasons that the same external environmental changes of the past hundred and fifty years or so have led to such different changes in the two cultural systems that are found in Doko, and throughout the Gamo highlands. The external conditions were causal, but not in a deterministic sense. Both the organisation of the Gamo assemblies, and the organisation of the particular cultural systems, influenced the way in which the external environmental changes were translated into internal cultural change.

⁴ Although the type of change exhibited by the sacrificial system in the twentieth century, and possibly before, is linear, it is likely that the sacrificial system is also a complex dynamic system, but that it is far from a critical point. Should external factors, particularly improvements in technology, drive it towards such a point then it would no doubt undergo considerable structural transformation. It is at such critical points, for example, that state formation seems to take place. As Claessen and Skalnik write, state development “always shows something of a snowball effect: once it comes into motion, it grows faster and faster. This is a consequence of mutual reinforcement in all of the developmental processes, ... [which] we can speak of [as] positive feedback” (Claessen and Skalnik 1978:624, emphasis in original). Limitations of space preclude further discussion of this complex process, and I mention it here merely to indicate that I do not consider the sacrificial system to be a simple linear system.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have tried to write about and analyse Doko culture in such a way that has embraced both flux and variation on the one hand, and continuity and coherence on the other. More specifically, I have tried to explain why the initiations in the Gamo highlands vary far more than the sacrifices, even though they both exist in the same cultural setting. I have explained this difference in terms of their systemic organisation, using the nonlinear systems approach of complexity theory.

After describing the structure of these two cultural systems as they existed in the late twentieth century, I looked at some of the macro-level political, economic and historical changes that have taken place over the past few centuries, and then considered how some of the more recent changes would have been felt in the lives of individual Gamo people, as they lived during that time. I showed how these environmental changes would put strains on certain interpersonal or communal relations, and that people would try to resolve these strains, evidenced as either interpersonal conflicts or communal misfortune, through discussions at assemblies. By considering how small incremental changes made at such assemblies then work through the different cultural systems, I showed how the sacrificial system and the initiatory system behave differently through time.

I suggested that the ‘linked chain’ organisation of the initiations meant that small changes would set off cascades of other changes in positive feedback loops that would result in the destabilisation of the system and its eventual transformation into a new state, while the ‘Russian doll’ organisation of the sacrifices meant that small changes would be absorbed by the system and not feed back or have any destabilising effects. In this way I argued that, although change has been driven by the same external environmental factors, such as the end of the slave trade, incorporation into the nation state, the growth of weaving etc, the way in which these external changes have been translated into internal cultural change has been greatly influenced by the ways in which the particular cultural systems are organised.

This thesis has also provided significant new ethnography. It represents the first detailed ethnographic study of Doko, which had been mentioned before only briefly by a team of geographers (Jackson *et al* 1969) and an ethno-archaeologist (Cartledge 1995). It also includes a lot of new data about other Gamo *deres* that have not been written about before, particularly those in the southern parts of the Gamo highlands. The differences between the northern and southern parts of the highlands have been explicated more clearly than before (see Bureau 1981), and some attempt has been made to understand them.

The ethnography in this thesis also represents the only detailed account to date of life in the Gamo highlands after the 1974 revolution, and thus provides an important sequel to the works of Abeles, Bureau, Olmstead and Sperber. The effects of the revolution and the subsequent years under the Derg government, when traditional practices were officially banned have been discussed and the situation of my own fieldwork, shortly after the change of government in 1991, has been made explicit. I have shown how the people of the Gamo highlands dealt with these new situations and how Gamo culture changed over this period.

As well as these spatial and temporal additions, this thesis also contributes to a widening of subject matter by being the first attempt to deal with cultural variation in the Gamo highland area. In this way it has added a whole new perspective on Gamo culture, and has analysed aspects of its workings through time and over space that have not been previously understood.

Many of the insights refer to the sacrificial and initiatory systems more generally, and thus have a wider application in the broader ethnographic region. Many of these insights are based in a particular theoretical perspective which I will now turn to discuss.

The theoretical approach being developed in this thesis has enabled a preliminary understanding of the processes of cultural transformation that have led to the differential cultural variation found in the Gamo highlands. On a more general level, this thesis is

a first attempt to use the theoretical perspective of complexity theory in the organisation and analysis of ethnographic material. In using complexity theory, I have tried to synthesize some of the more important insights from different anthropological traditions, and to combine them with a systems approach. In what follows I will discuss the ways in which this attempt has been useful, and then point out some of the limitations and shortcomings of my analysis.

In combining both macro and micro scale analyses, and also a focus on both structure and agency, this thesis represents a small step towards a synthesis of the more macro-focussed approaches of Sahlins and Knauff with the more micro-focussed approaches of Barth and Sperber. And in trying to show how macro-level environmental factors influence interpersonal and communal relations, and thus the micro-level decisions made at assemblies, and then how the micro-level decisions made at assemblies affect different cultural systems, I have perhaps suggested some solutions to the theoretical dilemmas that led theorists such as Goody and Leach to have such problems with causality in their models.

I have also tried to combine anthropology and history in a way that not only looks at the dynamics of short-term processes and events or the patterns of long-term trends and developments, but that considers both and also the way in which they impinge on each other. To do this adequately I have tried to model Gamo culture as an open system, and have looked at how local, regional and global factors have all influenced cultural life in the Gamo highlands over a period of time. Within this flux, though, I have also stressed the strands of continuity in Gamo culture and have not succumbed to presenting it as a formless, infinitely malleable jumble. In a similar vein to Bloch's *From Blessing To Violence*, I have provided a sketch of ritual in history, but unlike Bloch I have contrasted two different kinds of ritual, and have thus given more importance to systemic organisation as a factor in explaining stability or instability over time.

The central argument of this thesis has been that rituals change in different ways according to their systemic organisation. The less complex organisation of the Gamo

sacrifices leads them to change in an essentially linear fashion, while the more complex organisation of the Gamo initiations leads them to change in a rather different and nonlinear fashion. The ways in which these rituals behave through time is an intrinsic part of them, just as intrinsic as their structure, symbolism or meaning. From this perspective, variability is an intrinsic part of any cultural system, and it should be possible to predict, from their systemic organisation, what type of systems or sub-systems will exhibit significant cultural variation and what type will exist in more homogeneous forms.

I should point out, though, that I have no intention of setting up sacrificial and initiatory systems as some kind of analytic dichotomy. There are no doubt other types of cultural system - based, for example, on shamanism or spirit possession etc. - which behave according to their own logic. This thesis has been limited to sacrifices and initiations simply because these are the two cultural systems that exist in the Gamo highlands, and in southern Ethiopia more generally. Further research might try to link up certain types of cultural organisation with degrees of variability in a more general manner.

The analysis of this thesis is based on a synthesis of theoretical insights from many different anthropologists and anthropological traditions. I have found that complexity theory, as a general perspective, rather than a formal model, has helped provide an overall framework to hold this synthesis together, and that its vocabulary of critical points, positive feedback, emergent structure and so on, has provided a coherent technical language with which to talk about the dynamics of culture and cultural transformation.

It has also stimulated me to combine traditional ethnography and history with a simulation-type exploration of temporal interaction in order to gain some understanding of social processes on a time-scale greater than that of my fieldwork but less than that of the historical *long duree*. The broader relevance of this type of approach in anthropology, as well as its risks and pitfalls, might be an interesting subject for further investigation.

Jack Goody has remarked that “the explanation of action by means of words is necessarily subject to lineal and often unilineal distortion” (1971:76, fn4), and this thesis has been organised in such a way so as to try to minimize this effect. My analysis has moved from macro to micro levels, and has ranged over many different scales, both temporal and spatial. I have moved from descriptions of structural principles of politico-ritual forms in one community of the Gamo highlands, to discussions of long-distance trade, regional migration and Ethiopian political history; and from a comparative look at cultural institutions in southwest Ethiopia, to an analysis of decision-making processes in Doko. This has been necessary because the differential cultural variation in the Gamo highlands can only be understood in terms of the processes of change and transformation that have taken place, and these changes are the product of many interacting factors. Such a multi-faceted analysis, moving between different systemic elements and levels, can be difficult to follow, but complexity theory has provided an overall framework which, I hope, holds the whole thing together and shows how each of these disparate elements plays an important part in the story I wish to tell.

The shortcomings of this work are readily apparent. Most obviously, the theoretical synthesis that I have attempted is a long way from being complete. The weaving together of macro and micro, of structure and agency, and of anthropology and history, needs to be much tighter than has been achieved in this preliminary work. In order to do this more detailed historical ethnography is needed, in order to ground some of the speculative reconstruction in this thesis. The way that complexity theory has influenced me to analyse my ethnographic material has led to many new questions which can only be dealt with in the field. Only with more data can the transformatory model of chapters six and seven be tested and improved.

I have used complexity theory only in a general way to guide the overall perspective of this thesis, and I have not attempted any kind of formal analysis. Whether or not such an analysis would be useful remains to be seen. Much of what I have said in this thesis could perhaps have been said without complexity theory, and conversely, much which perhaps could be said with it, has not yet been said. My justification for using it is that

it has enabled me to think in a new way and to thus look for connections that I might not otherwise have considered. The end result may not require complexity theory for its presentation, but since it was part of its genesis I have chosen to include it.

Because complexity theory provides a way to combine different analytic levels, it may well help, in the future, to facilitate a useful synthesis of cognitive anthropology with mainstream social and cultural anthropology. While this thesis has not addressed cognitive anthropology in any detail, the analysis of chapter seven opened up an analytic space in which perspectives from cognitive anthropology would be useful to further the argument. Future research from a multi-layered perspective might try to combine these approaches into a more useful synthesis.

Another limitation of this thesis is due to shortage of space. In ranging over such broad temporal, spatial and analytic scales, much traditional ethnography has had to be left out. My discussions of gender, kinship, personhood and identity, for example, have been extremely limited, and I have not had space to use extended case studies or to provide many quotations from informants. While I believe that it is useful, or at least interesting, to cut up the analytic domain in different ways, I readily acknowledge that these omissions are considerable. It remains the task of future work to address these shortcomings, and perhaps to further the limited insights that this thesis has offered.

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