

## 16. Clashing values

### The 2015 conflict in Hamar district of South Omo Zone, southern Ethiopia

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#### Introduction

Hamar Woreda is a district in southern Ethiopia that has, until recently, been rather detached from the centre. Like most of their ethnic neighbours in South Omo Zone, the Hamar people are agro-pastoralists who have lived somewhat autonomously for a long time in the district. Despite their incorporation into the Ethiopian nation state in the late-nineteenth century, the Hamar were able to continue an independent lifestyle, with limited contact with the subsequent central governments. Since the mid-1990s, the government's attempts to actively include all ethnic groups and develop remote areas have changed many things, and interactions between local communities and government have become frequent. These encounters between different people and their value systems have led to innovations, but also tensions and conflict. In 2014/5, growing tension between the local authorities and the Hamar community over their clashing values escalated into a serious armed conflict. The resolution of the conflict could only be achieved with much effort, concessions on both side, and a better understanding of and respect for some of the key values of Hamar society. This chapter looks at the causes of the tension, the reasons for the escalation of the conflict and the efforts made by both sides to resolve it. In doing so, I explore the differing value positions, perspectives and strategies employed by local government agents and the Hamar people to achieve their goals.<sup>1</sup>

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1 The fieldwork for this research has been done as part of my PhD project at the Max Planck Institute (MPI) for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale, Germany. All fieldwork expenses were covered by the department of Integration and Conflict of MPI. I have conducted fieldwork between September 2016 to September 2017. The data for this research was gathered through structured and semi structured interviews with local people and local government authorities in Hamar.

## The Hamar and their relation with the Ethiopian state

The Hamar are one of the largest groups in South Omo Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State (SNNPRS). According to the Central Statistical Agency, the Hamar population was estimated to be 59,160 in 2007 (CSA 2008). The Hamar speak their own South Omotic language. Their economy combines the rearing of animals (goats, sheep, cattle), farming (sorghum, maize, varieties of beans), apiculture, and hunting and gathering (Strecker 2010:87). They live in mountainous and lowland areas, in settlement areas consisting of several homesteads. Close relatives are usually clustered together within one homestead.

The Hamar social and political organization is rather egalitarian and could be called acephalous or, as Amborn (2018), puts it 'polycephalous', which means that they have no central leader or chief; rather they live a kind of 'regulated anarchy', where seniority and the rhetorical skills of individuals play a role in daily affairs and conflict resolution. The Hamar have two ritual leaders, locally called *bitta*,<sup>2</sup> one from the Gatta clan and the other from the Worla clan, who are responsible for the spiritual well-being of the country, but do not have any political power. They have twenty-four exogamous clans under two moieties (Strecker 2006b:87).

Like the other groups in South Omo, the Hamar were incorporated into the Ethiopian state by Emperor Menelik II at the end of the nineteenth century (Donham and James 2002, Lydall 2010, Strecker 2013, Tsega-Ab 2005). Under the succeeding governments of Ethiopia, they were governed by rulers whose staff consisted mainly of central and northern Ethiopians. As Jean Lydall (2010:322) noted, in the immediate period after Menelik's conquest and also later during Emperor Haile Selassie's rule (1931–1974), the governors made no effort to condemn the culture and tradition of the conquered groups; instead they emphasized cultural difference to justify their dominance. Their relations with the local community were confined to issues concerning the 'adjudication of inter-group conflicts' and the 'collection of taxes' (Lydall (2010:322). With the coming to power of the socialist Derg regime (1974–1991), a few development projects (schools, road, market schemes and relief aid programmes) loaded with 'a civilizational bias' (Abbink 1997:2) were introduced to the Hamar, as well as to other groups in Southern Ethiopia.

After the downfall of the Derg in 1991, the change of government significantly transformed the relationship between the central state and most of the local groups in Ethiopia, including the Hamar. The ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF), adopted the language of democracy, peace and development, and abandoned a highly centralized, unitary state in favour of what is

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2 The term '*bitta*' literally means 'the first' and refers to the first ancestor of the Hamar to settle in the area. It also means 'the first' in authority and 'the first' in transcendental and ritual power (see Strecker 1976:30).

commonly known as 'ethnic-based federalism', giving constitutionally based equal power to all ethnic groups and individuals (Belete 2008:447). Since then, the Hamar, like other groups in Ethiopia, have been exercising the right to govern their own affairs. They are also entitled to the 'right to development', to education, health services, markets and infrastructure.

Although introduced with the objective of improving living standards (FDRE 2015), these development packages contravene Hamar values and have triggered conflicts between the local population and the district administration. Over the past few years, the relationship between the local population and the administration of Hamar Woreda has been increasingly tense. Numerous small and large disputes led to an open and armed confrontation that reached a climax in 2015 when open war broke out between the Hamar and the district police. In its aftermath, the conflict continued to engage local, regional and national officials as well as the Hamar people, and to this day it has not been fully settled.

The issues that led to the outbreak of the conflict have been topics of intense debate among the Hamar community, the local authorities, residents of Dimeka, and others who were directly or indirectly involved or affected by the conflict. The Hamar mention two major issues as the causes of the conflict: the denial of access to the Mago National Park; and problems related to the schooling of girls. On the other hand, the local authorities blame the Hamar for being resistant to modernity, characterizing the communities involved in the conflict as rather 'closed', locked in their own traditions and stubbornly opposed to any change, citing the Hamar people's rejection of education and their insistence on hunting game and grazing in the Mago National Park as evidence.

Having looked deeper into the topic and talked to many individuals on both sides, I will argue here that the main cause of the conflict is the clash between two different value systems: the rather mobile agro-pastoral production of the Hamar and the top-down development approach of the government.

## **Universal human rights, particular cultures and national interests**

Over the past decades, social and economic development programmes aimed at changing the lifestyles of pastoral and agro-pastoral communities have been widely introduced by the Ethiopian government. Education provision and the need to reduce gender disparity in the schooling system and other social service projects are among the key priorities of the government's social development programme. These programmes are usually framed in the context of universal human right discourses, such as the 'education for all' programme established at the Dakar UN Forum in 2000, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979. The implementation of these

social development programmes has generated different responses among local communities, local administrations, national governments and international organizations. To understand these dynamics, it is necessary to contextualize the discussion within the broader debate and negotiation about and legal uses of 'human rights' and their conjunction with 'particular cultures' (Cowan *et al.* 2001:1, Johansson 2017:611). The pervasive use of 'universal rights' and the way these rights are implemented in local contexts, and resisted by and negotiated in particular cultures and societies offers a more meaningful insight to comprehend the applicability of universal rights in local settings.

According to Johansson (2017:613), the debate between 'universal rights' and 'particular cultures' has existed since the adoption of Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. The preamble of the UDHR affirms that 'Peoples of the United Nations (...) faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small' (UN 1948:1). The assembly also proclaims the UDHR as 'a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations' (*ibid.*). Following the adoption of the UDHR, countries around the world, including Ethiopia, have ratified several human right conventions. Many have even gone further, enacting legislation, creating mechanisms and putting into place a range of measures to ensure the protection and realization of rights within their jurisdictions. Anthropologists and other social scientists have nevertheless criticized this universalistic approach to the implementation of human rights on the basis of cultural relativism.

Cultural relativism, which has been advocated since the early twentieth century by the American anthropologist Franz Boas and his students, has become the core of the human rights discourse. The main argument of cultural relativism is that all cultures and value systems, despite their diversity, are equally valid (Dahre 2017:616), and that culture is a complex whole with parts so intertwined that none of them can be understood or evaluated without reference to the other parts and the cultural whole (Lawson cited in Hossain 2015:3). Hence, according to the cultural relativist view, human rights cannot be universal but are culturally relative. Moreover, advocates of universalism have been criticized for their failure to detail the circumstances of implementation of rights in particular cultures and societies. Hossain (2015:1) for example, argues that 'in states where arranged marriages are common, one would expect clause 2 of Art 16 of the UDHR ("marriage shall be entered in to only with the free and full consent of the intending spouse") to be routinely disregarded'. Thus, some authors argue, as universal rights are unresponsive to cultural differences, they are instruments of oppression (Forst 1999:35). Certain rights – such as women's, marriage, social and economic rights and the right to education – have even been criticized as attempts to universalize western values and impost them on non-western societies (Hossain 2015).

The discussion on universalism and cultural relativism seems to be animated by a contest between the desire to establish universal rights on the one hand, and the awareness of cultural differences on the other (Cowan *et al.* 2001:4). At times, arguments promoting or opposing either universalism or relativism are instrumentalized to advance the political and economic interests of certain groups. In the context of the conflict between the Hamar and the government, for example, one can see the inconsistent position of the government in its advocacy of certain rights over others. For example, the right to education for girls is among the cardinal issues in the rights discourses of the government. As such, it was among the main reasons for the 2015 open confrontation between the police and the Hamar communities. The Hamar refused to send their girls to school due to certain cultural norms, and their resistance was aggravated by serious problems, such as sexual harassment, at the schools in town. The other trigger for the Hamar–government conflict was the government’s restriction of the Hamar people’s right to hunt and graze their animals in the Mago Park and its surroundings. The government considered such behaviour to be damaging to wildlife and biodiversity and did not view it as part of the social and economic rights of the indigenous people, as stipulated in Art. 5 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The lack of uniform positions towards universal rights and particular cultures makes the debate between universalism and relativism more compelling, and shows how both concepts are essentialized by different actors to promote their interests. Hence, as Cowan *et al.* (2001:6) argue, rather than seeing universalism and cultural relativism as two opposing forces, one should see the tension between the positions as part of an on-going social process in which universal and local values are negotiated and evaluated in relation to each other. Furthermore, posing the choices in such a dichotomous way ignores the extent to which the different actors – local people, governments and international organizations – have negotiated these contradictions and redefined both the meanings of rights and culture (Merry 2001:32).

## **Recent national development priorities in Ethiopia**

According to government reports, Ethiopia is working towards achieving broad-based, accelerated and sustained economic growth in order to outpace the predicaments posed by poverty. In the public discourse, poverty is considered as an existential threat to the country and its people (FDRE 2015:4). The only viable option considered by the government to tackle these challenges of poverty was to design a comprehensive national development plan aimed at bringing fast and sustained economic growth. Hence, since 2002, the Ministry of Finance and Economic De-

velopment (MoFED) has implemented four successive national development plans guided by an overall development policy agenda of eradicating poverty. These include the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP), the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), the First Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP I), and the Second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II).

The first, the SDPRP (2002/03–2004/05), emphasized the transformation of the rural economy in general and the agricultural sector in particular. The plan's overriding focus was on agriculture as the engine of growth with a huge potential to fuel the growth of other sectors of the economy by facilitating surplus production, market creation and provision of raw material and foreign exchange (FDRE 2002:iii).

The second, PASDEP (2005/06–2009/10), built on the goals pursued under the SDPRP. The plan was designed to bring accelerated growth to the economy through a particular focus on private sector development and commercialization of agriculture, industry and urban development (MoFED 2007:1).

The third, the GTP I (2010/11–2014/15), was designed with the objective of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It focused on improving the quantity and quality of social services, especially education, health and other infrastructural developments, thereby hoping to achieve macroeconomic stability and enhance productivity in agriculture and manufacturing sectors (FDRE 2010:7). During the GTP I period, several massive development projects were implemented, such as the construction of dams for hydroelectric power, sugar factories and cotton plantations as well as the creation of mechanized agricultural estates, especially along the major river valleys of the Awash, the Gibe-Omo, the Wabe Shebelli, the Beles, and the Abay (Blue Nile). Many of these development projects are situated in the pastoral and agro-pastoral inhabited lowland peripheries of the country, which are considered by the government as 'less inhabited' and endowed with 'abundant' and 'virgin' land.

According to government reports, the main aim of these development projects is to improve the living standards of the pastoral and agro-pastoral population, mainly by integrating them into the mainstream national economy and by facilitating social development through improving pastoral livelihoods and asset bases, basic social services, and institutional setup (FDRE 2008:8). In doing so, various government and non-government organizations (NGOs) are working towards changing the lifestyle of these communities.

Generally, since the introduction of GTP I, and even more so since the fourth national development plan, the GTP II (2014/15–2019/20), emphasis has been given to boosting the national economy and improving the standard of living of all citizens, in order to maintain the vision of Ethiopia becoming a 'middle income country by 2025 through sustaining the rapid, broad based and inclusive economic growth,

which accelerates economic transformation and the journey towards the country's renaissance' (FDRE 2015:2).

The four national development programmes mentioned above share a focus on modernizing agriculture as the main driver for rapid economic growth and development. Additionally, the programmes presume the move toward the middle-income country can be achieved through centrally planned and installed development plans.

The type of development approach promoted by the EPRDF basically emanated from and is guided by the developmental state<sup>3</sup> ideology of the government. The developmental state ideology – often associated with the economic policies followed by East Asian governments (e.g. South Korea and Taiwan) – underscores the importance of state intervention, shared vision orientation, central planning, coordination of development projects, and commitment to building human capital (Planel 2014:421). It has been Ethiopia's overarching development approach since 2001 (Fana 2014:67). Under the developmental state ideology, the government has promoted state intervention in economy and society, or 'a revolution from above' (Aaron 2017:48), to transform the economy. This kind of development approach usually disregards local realities, values and complexities and is geared towards securing fast national economic growth.

## Development and related conflicts in South Omo

As mentioned earlier, the government considers the lowland peripheries as important outlets for its ambition to foster fast and sustained economic growth (Markakis 2011:291). In South Omo, recent projects include the Kuraz Sugar Development Project (KSDP) along the banks of the Omo River, and the villagization programme in the *woredas* of Bodi, Mursi, Gngangatom,<sup>4</sup> Dassanech and Hamar. Several other state-backed but privately owned large-scale agricultural investments have also been put in place in the last few years.

Presently, the KSDP is the largest irrigation-based agricultural development scheme in the country, with 175,000 hectares of land and a plan to build five sugar factory units. The KSDP project area encompasses Salamago and Gngangatom Woredas from South Omo, the Surma and Meinit-Shasha districts of Bench-Maji and Diecha district of Kefa Zone. Most of the people living in and around the

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3 Even scholars continue to debate the conceptual understanding of developmental state, following Mkandawire (2001:3), I define 'developmental state' as a state 'whose ideological underpinnings are developmental and one that seriously attempts to deploy its administrative and political resources to the task of economic development'.

4 Also: 'Nyngangatom'.

project area are agro-pastoralists who rely on animal husbandry and flood-retreat cultivation from the Omo River. With regard to the transformational impact of the KSDP project, Kamski (2016:6) has noted two main impacts: 'the alteration of the natural landscape' and the abrupt transformation of the socio-cultural sphere caused by migrant labour workers and the state-directed villagization of local people.

Although the project has so far not been implemented across all 175,000 hectares of land, the land-clearing process and the construction of waterworks and roads have brought new challenges to the local people and their environs. Buffavand (2018:298), for example, has noted with regard to the Mela:<sup>5</sup>

When the bulldozers had just started to raze the bush belt to the ground, large animals in particular were in disarray, having lost their shelter. (...) Mela certainly deplored the loss of their resources: game meat but also diverse edible plants, medicinal plants, trees for house and bee-hive construction, dry-season grazing plants for cattle, etc., were disappearing with the bush belt.

The conversion of riverbank land for estates and the construction of the Gibe III dam have also greatly affected the practice of flood recession agriculture (Turton 2011:166, Kamski 2015:6).

As the construction of the Kuraz sugar factories in Salamago and Gngangatom Woredas is still on-going, everyday resistance in its different forms is arising from the local groups near the project areas. One source of conflict in Bodi and Mursi areas, for example, is the issue of accidents and injuries to people and their cattle caused by the sugar plantation's vehicles on the areas bumpy and damaged roads. On 4 December 2017, for example, twelve truck drivers were killed by the Bodi after a Bodi man was killed in a car accident. Public and private trucks frequently run between Jinka, headquarters of the South Omo Zone, and Hana, the small town near the sugar factory, and factory workers are often the targets for retaliation for accidents on the road.

Privately owned large-scale agricultural investments are another cause of contention, as illustrated by the case of the conflict that arose between a cotton plantation investment near the Woito River, the Birale Agricultural Development Private Limited Company and the Tsamakko community in South Omo. The Tsamakko were dispossessed of their land by the cotton farm and, in the confrontations that resulted, workers from the farm and members of the Tsamakko community were killed (Gabbert 2014:29, Melese 2009:280). Such conflicts between private investors and local communities are also very common in other regions of Ethiopia (for example Gambella).

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5 The Mela people also called under the ethnonym Bodi.



South Omo has also attracted the attention of the government in the area of eco-tourism development, as is evidenced in the strict enforcement of wildlife protected areas (WPAs). These include the Omo National Park, Mago National Park, Tama and Chelbi Wildlife Reserves, Murle and Welishet Sala Controlled Hunting Areas. In order to protect the animal population, the local population are prohibited from entering such areas to hunt or to graze their animals, while tourists are allowed in to both see the animals and sometimes to hunt. The prohibitions have been enforced more strictly in the last decade, which has led to repeated conflicts between WPA scouts<sup>6</sup> and the local communities.

The Hamar, Banna, Bashada, Ari and the Mursi are among the groups who live in the adjoining area of one of the recently contested protected areas – the Mago National Park. They enter the park to hunt wild animals and graze their cattle and the recent stricter enforcement of the law become a source of conflict, causing the loss of human life among the local hunters and the scouts been hired by the government to protect the area. When four scouts in the Mago Park were killed during a clash with poachers in 2015, the relationship between the local communities and the park authorities became very tense and full of ambivalence.

Another area of development intervention in South Omo is the provision of schooling and other social service projects<sup>7</sup> aimed at improving the standard of living of the agro-pastoralists. Numerous primary schools have been built in different *woredas* (districts) of South Omo, and special awareness programmes have been organized to convince parents to send their children to school. Recently, more and more pressure has been exerted on parents who have resisted. This and the issue of the protection given to girls who have run away from home to join school have become another major source of conflict between the administration and some groups in the region (Epple 2012, Maurus 2016). In particular, the campaign to send girls to the boarding schools in town is being more and more resisted, as there have been many cases of undesired marriage with town people (and abandonment of previously arranged marriages), unwanted pregnancies and abortion, and a general abandonment of local values.

## Conflicts between the Hamar and the government

The conflict that arose between the Hamar and the *woreda* administration in 2015 can be considered as the third in a line of wars fought since the incorporation of the

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6 Most of the scouts working in the Mago Park are from the neighbouring groups: Banna, Ari and Hamar.

7 The social service projects being implemented in the region include: primary and secondary schools, public health services, veterinary services, market and rural road construction programmes.

Hamar into the Ethiopian state. The first war was fought with the soldiers of Emperor Menelik's army when they invaded and incorporated the Hamar and neighbouring groups into the Ethiopian state. In an account given by Baldambe, a Hamar elder, of his father's experiences during that time, he recounted how the Hamar had first fought and resisted and were later devastated by Menelik's army (Strecker 2013). Their catastrophic defeat by Emperor Menelik's army cost the Hamar an entire generation, and they were forced to live in exile in the lands of the Dassanech for many years.

The second violent encounter took place in a place called Assile in southern Hamar in 1948. This conflict with Emperor Haile Selassie's soldiers is still fresh in the memory of the Hamar and is remembered as the 'Assile war'. The Hamar's frequent cattle raiding of the Borana and the intervention of Haile Selassie's administration to secure the return of the looted cattle are considered as the causes of the Assile war. The war was devastating and took numerous human lives on both sides. Cattle died and Hamar houses were burnt down. For almost fifty years after the Assile debacle there was not any open conflict between the Hamar and government soldiers. The third and most recent conflict between eight Hamar *kebeles*<sup>8</sup> and the Hamar Woreda administration erupted in January 2015.

According to informants from both sides, the animosity between the administration and the community started in 2012, when the Woreda administration introduced a rifle registration programme with the objective of controlling illicit arm possession among the community. The Hamar were unhappy with the programme, insinuating that the local administration was helping the government to abuse the gun registration and licensing system so that they could later confiscate the guns from the people who had registered. They traced an analogy from Haile Selassie's time when, after much debate, the Hamar had handed over their arms to the governors for registration, only to find the weapons were never returned but sent instead to the central administration in Addis Ababa. They feared the same thing would happen during the 2012 registration programme.

The government considered the resistance of the Hamar to the rifle registration programme as a violation of the rule of law and a sign of disobedience to the government. As higher officials in the Woreda administration told me, because of Hamar resistance, the administration failed to meet its obligations with regard to the registration and licensing programme.

The already unpleasant relationship between the Hamar and the authorities became worse in the context of the open confrontations with poachers in the Mago

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8 The Hamar *kebeles* most vigorously involved in the conflict with the government were Worro, Shanqo Qelema, Shanqo Wolfo, Lala, Achi Mussa, Achi Algone, Kufur and Gedback. The government and the town people alike refer to these *kebeles* as the 'security cluster *kebeles*'.

National Park and repeated cases of Hamar girls running away to the towns for education. In 2015, the Woreda administration's attempt to bring poachers to court and to try to stop any future encroachment in to the park turned into an open confrontation between the Hamar youngsters and the police in a place called Worro. The clash resulted in the deaths of six policemen and one elementary school teacher, and in the destruction of public service centres, including schools and health centres. From January 2015 to November 2017, government activities in these villages were curtailed by the security problem and no public servant dared to work in those villages. In the following, a detailed account of the main conflict will be given, followed by an analysis of the events and circumstances that led to it.

### The armed conflict

The open confrontation between the police and the Hamar took place in a village called Worro on 15 January 2015. On that day, a team from the Hamar Woreda administration that included the police, the vice administrator and the head of security, as well as representatives of local elders from the nearby villages,<sup>9</sup> went to Worro to bring poachers, accused of poaching in the Mago Park, to the court.<sup>10</sup>

Before that day, the Hamar Woreda administration and the Mago Park Office had held a series of consultative meetings with the community of Worro, Shanqo Qelema, Shanqo Wolfo and Lala *kebeles* on how individual and group-hunting activities in Mago Park were damaging its fauna and flora. In those meetings, representatives of the local administration had asked that the Hamar hand over poachers to the police. In Worro *kebele* alone, the local administration had listed seventeen suspected poachers sought by the police. After a long discussion, the elders of the village through their *bitta* (ritual leader) requested the government to let the poachers pay fines instead of going to court. However, the government rejected the appeal and instead to send the police into the villages.

The team went to Worro with the aim of peacefully negotiating the issue of poachers and girls' education with the community. However, the police officer I interviewed from the team explained to me that, since the Hamar in Shanqo Qellema village had severely beaten the Chief Administrator and other officials at a previous

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9 Community elders included in the team were from Bashada, Errä Qaisa, Errä Umbule, Shanqo Qelema and Lala *kebeles*. The elders were selected on the basis of their closeness to the *kebele* administration and their perceived community influence.

10 According to my informants from the Mago National Park Office, in the years from 2012/13 to 2014/15, of the 65 registered poaching cases, 43 were from Hamar *kebeles*, mostly Dimeka Zuria, Worro, Shanqo, and Lala.

meeting,<sup>11</sup> the security office found it necessary that the team go with an armed police force, carrying Kalashnikovs and machine guns.

Two days before the team went to Worro, the police fired machine guns in the outskirts of Dimeka town. The sound of the gunshots was heard all over Hamar. According to the police, the machine guns were fired for two reasons: to see if they worked, as they were remnants from the Derg's regime and had not been used for the last two decades; and to intimidate the people in Worro and neighbouring *kebeles*, who were known to be resistant, and convince them to hand over the poachers to justice. Having tested the machine guns, the team entered Worro *kebele* in the evening of 14 January 2015. One of the policemen who was part of the group remembered the situation as follows:

We arrived in Worro at 4:00 pm in the afternoon. We wanted to spend the night in some of the rooms at Worro Elementary School. Soon, our members (the police members) went to fetch water in the nearby river to cook food for dinner. At that time, we were in peace. Later when it got darker, we sent those elders who were with us to the village to inform the community about the arrival of the team and a plan to hold a meeting the next day. But the elders who carried our message were chased away by the Worro community who told them that they were *gal* (literally: enemy), not Hamar. Shortly after, a woman from the village came and told us that we were surrounded by armed Hamar men from the village. She said, 'You have to go...you have to escape...go...go...!' But the higher officials from the *woreda* administration refused the woman's advice. We spent a very tense night. Outside, we heard shouting, war songs and the firing of rifles by the young Hamar.

The next morning, we woke up early. Again we sent the elders to the village to appease and persuade the people to come talk with us. When some members of the police went to the river to fetch water and prepare breakfast, the Worro youngsters started firing at them. The elders were also chased and even beaten up by the 'resistant fighters'. Everything went out of control. Our police members flew into the bush and escaped to Dimeka town. The elders also ran to other villages. A few policemen, including me, and the *woreda* authorities remained in the school. There followed a time of shooting with the Hamar during which two policemen were killed and four highly wounded. We were encircled from all sides. Of course, we did not have the basic knowledge of the terrain. The 'resistant fighters' came and said 'put down your rifles!' When we put down our rifles, they

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11 The beating of the Chief Administrator and other officials happened shortly before the Worro conflict. According to some Hamar and government official informants, the beating was attributed to the grievances that the Hamar have in relation to the pressure of girls' education and the problems in the park. Some informants also told me that the beating was started by some drunk Hamar youngsters in the village.

took our Kalashnikovs and our machine guns and then we remained alone. To be frank, the police did not shoot at the people, we were actually firing into the sky. The authorities who were with us ran to one elder's house, near the school. Around 12:00 am, a special police force came from Jinka, the headquarters of the South Omo Zone administration. First, they took the wounded policemen to hospital. The bodies of those who had been killed were down at the river area. When the special police force asked the community to give them the bodies, the Hamar refused. Then, the Special Police Force and the Hamar fought in the afternoon and four more members of the police and one female teacher from the village were killed. The day passed without any achievement on the side of the police. At night, it was decided that all of us should retreat to town. We dispersed in different directions, left the dead ones in the village and returned to Dimeka (to the town) during the night. (Interview, 4 December 2016, in Dimeka)

Soon after, the Hamar began to destroy all public centres in Worro, including schools, health centres and veterinary service centres. Properties were taken. The news quickly spread all over Hamar, and people in other places, such as Shanqo (both Shanqo Qellema and Shanqo Wolfo), Lala, Achi Mussa, Achi Algone, Kufur, also started destroying public service centres. All the government workers fled to the towns and the eight villages remained inaccessible to the government until Feb 2017.

## **The roots of the conflict**

### **'Territorialisation of conservation space' versus local economy and social identity**

As mentioned above, one of the contested arenas for the Hamar and the local government is the 'territorialisation of conservation space' (Robbins 2004) in the Mago National Park. The Park, with 2,162 km<sup>2</sup>, was established in 1978 with the assumption that the area was 'uninhabited' and 'free from human activity' and therefore required protection from human and animal encroachment (Turton 2011:166). In reality, there are six groups – the Banna, Hamar, Kara, Muguji, Mursi and Ari – living in and around the Mago Park (Nishizaki 2005:32, Turton 2011:150). Others, such as the Tsamakko, Konso, Arbore and Dassanech, come from further away to hunt animals for trophies and meat, place beehives, and extract timber (Strecker 2006b:135).

As part of the current government's commitment to promoting eco-tourism development and building a climate-resilient green economy, laws prohibiting entry to and hunting in the park are being enforced more strictly than at any time in

the past, and sanctions range from the financial to imprisonment. The strict enforcement of the law collides with the interests of the pastoralists, who feel that not only their livelihood but also the key values of their culture are under threat. One Hamar elder explained:

We have a long tradition of going to the bush to hunt game. In the past, when our sons herd cattle, they used to go with spears, nowadays they have guns [...]. They need them for two reasons: first, to protect the cattle from raiders and from dangerous animals such as hyenas; and second, to prove their manhood by killing trophy animals so that the community knows they are ready for marriage.

We were told that our boys are killing animals and that these animals are sources of income for the government. So, the government is very concerned about them. They (the government) told us that tourists from far away are visiting to take photos of these animals and that they are paying money for that [...]. We have no problem with that. Our problem is the grazing land. We worry about where to graze our cattle and goats. That is why our boys travel such a long way to Mago. (Interview, 2 December 2016, in Lojera)

As the account shows, hunting plays an important role in the socialization of Hamar men, who want to prove their manhood by killing game – a venture a male should go through in order to become a *donza*, a married and ‘competent adult man’ (Lydall and Strecker 1979b:77). Though not a compulsory precondition for marriage, hunting is considered important in the eyes of the community. Successful hunters of big game are given special recognition and celebrated for a whole season, during which they adorn themselves and paint their foreheads with clay.<sup>12</sup> While men traditionally go on special hunting trips, herders also kill wild animals to protect their herds and their own lives from dangerous animals, as I was told by Hamar herders I spent some days with in their cattle camps near the Mago Park and the adjoining area of Omo river.

The Mago Park is used to graze cattle especially in times of drought. According to the Hamar Woreda Pastoral Affairs Office, the dramatic increase in the encroachment of herders into the park seen over the past 10–15 years. This has been caused by a shortage of grazing land resulting from an increasing cattle population, drought and the allocation of land to investors. In the past, when they had fewer cattle, the Hamar used to graze their animals near their homesteads, and only seasonally took their animals to places further away. Over the past two decades they have started to travel with their herds to Kizo, an area near the Omo River, close to the Karo community settlement area. As the Kizo area has been under the control

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12 For example, when someone kills a hyena he shaves off all his hair. He takes some pure white paint and smears it on his head. When a person kills an elephant, lion, leopard or buffalo, he smears red ochre on his forehead (see Lydall and Strecker 1979b:78).

of the Ethiopian Rift Valley Safari (also called the Murle Controlled Hunting Station) since 1984, the Hamar face difficulties grazing and watering their cattle in the area. The scouts and manager of the hunting station told me that when the herders encroach on the controlled hunting territory, they sometimes shoot game indiscriminately, which causes disputes between the scouts and the herders. Moreover, the size of the Kizo area was reduced in 2012 by the allocation of 10,000 hectares of land to foreign investors, who established the Omo Valley Cotton Farm.<sup>13</sup> Since then, the Hamar have had little access to the grazing land in the area and to the Omo River to water their animals. Even worse, many goats, sheep and cattle have fallen into the large ditches dug by the investors to fence their farmland. This all led to disputes with the investors<sup>14</sup> that eventually forced the Hamar to move their animals further, to the Mago Park, and led them again into conflict.

In the Park, as I observed, the Hamar have recently begun to build cattle camps and live there more permanently. Repeated attempts to remove herders and hunters from the Park territory has resulted in conflict and the deaths of some scouts.

The *woreda* administration and the Mago Park authorities organized several meetings with community elders and herders during which they suggested the destocking of cattle and promoted other income-generating economic activities. In an interview, a local expert of pastoral affairs told me:

The Hamar give high value to the size of their herds. They do not worry about the quality of their cattle. What they worry about is to maximize the herd size and thereby increase their social status. We told them to decrease their herd, to sell some and diversify their income strategies outside the pastoral economy. Recently, we have been observing a change in climate, and there is a lack of grazing land and water [...]. Some people have accepted our advice and started to live a 'modern life'. You can see, for example, Hamar guys transporting people from their village to the town by motorbike. But these are only few. Most still continue to keep their cattle [...]. Because of the lack of pasture, they recently moved their herds to Mago National Park. It is this encroachment to the park, which later caused the Worro conflict. (Interview, 16 May 2017, in Dimeka)

13 The plantation was established in June 2013 by Turkish investors, mainly to supply cotton to a sister company called ELSE Addis Industrial Development PLC, located in Adama town. When I arrived in Hamar for fieldwork in September 2016, the investors had been expelled by the government for issues pertaining to their failure to repay a loan they had received from the Ethiopian Development Bank.

14 Government officials from Hamar Woreda told me about a case from 2014. Hamar herders were grazing their cattle near the farm when some of the animals entered the farm territory. The cattle were detained for a day and this caused an open clash between the farm's guards and the herders. The dispute was only settled by the intervention of the *woreda* administration.

This account shows that authorities accuse the Hamar pastoralists of having ‘irrational’ cultural norms related to their cattle that drive them to own large herds as a symbol of wealth, status and prestige. This is a common misconception held by many policy makers in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere in the world. The government, on the other hand, argues in terms of market economy and financial benefit, encouraging the Hamar to reduce the size of their herds, start ranching, fatten their animals and supply them to the market. This, it is argued, is the best way to diversify their means of income, which would improve their standard of living. In addition, it would reduce the damage done to the Park and the surrounding environment by the cattle. During meetings, I heard government officials addressing notable cattle owners among the Hamar, asking them why they did not sell some of their cattle, build dorms for rent in the town, buy motorbikes, and wear clothes like the town people. However, the Hamar, particularly the older generation with whom I held focused group discussions, are reluctant to take such advice from the authorities.<sup>15</sup>

One of the reasons for this reluctance is the wide-ranging social, economic, and ritual importance livestock has among the Hamar. For example, besides being used for food in the household (for milk and meat), cattle serve an important function in social bonds and networks. A typical kind of social relationship in South Omo is the institution of bondfriendship (Girke 2010), in Hamar called *beltamo*. Among males, bondfriendship exists over territorial and even ethnic boundaries. Bondfriends exchange and herd each other’s cattle, and support each other in difficult times.<sup>16</sup>

For the Hamar and other neighbouring groups, sharing animals has a number of advantages over the cash economy. Hence, the institution of bondfriendship plays a significant role in maintaining social and economic cooperation and solidarity among the community and beyond. For cattle owners, it is an opportunity to establish a widespread social network on which they can fall back in times of need. It is also a mechanism for spreading one’s cattle over a wide territory and thereby making it less vulnerable to epidemics affecting only one area. For poorer or young men, it provides a means of establishing their own herd, or overcoming

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15 There are a very few Hamar who have built houses, bought motorbikes, and wear clothes like the town people. Most of them are close to the administration and are mentioned as positive exemplars during such meetings.

16 The cattle exchanged are called *bannewak*. Often, such an exchange begins with someone asking a cattle owner to give him a cow so his children can drink milk. The person making the request may give a gift such as honey in return. If the owner agrees to give a cow, the receiver has an obligation to look after the cow well. He is not allowed to slaughter or sell the cow or its offspring, but he may use the milk. Some of the calves will go to the owner, others are kept by the receiver.



difficult times, for example, when someone who owns no cattle needs to feed small children.

The economic system of the Hamar is thus very different from the government's market-oriented system. It is not, as Jean Lydall (2010:315) noted, primarily intended for commercial exchange, but rather has an equalizing effect: poor families receive cattle from the rich, and 'any produce in excess of domestic needs is used for special events (e.g. initiation or marriage), celebrations (e.g. harvest festival), exchange (e.g. goats for grain in time of hunger) or marriage (e.g. bride wealth)'.

### **'National educational' imperatives versus the place of girls in Hamar**

Modern education in Hamar and in most of southern Ethiopia was introduced during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie (1931–1974). The Emperor placed a strong emphasis on the expansion of education to strengthen the national unification project and to bring about the country's development. In southern Ethiopia, the establishment of schools was mainly targeted towards educating the children of administrators, police and settlers from the north. Sending children from local communities to school was not common except and only a few children of local dignitaries (such as ritual leaders) went to a boarding school in Addis Ababa (Epple 2012:198, Lydall 2010:7).

During the Derg regime (1974–1991), there was an emphasis on the expansion of education in rural areas. As Lydall (2010:15) pointed out, 'one of the first things the Derg did after taking power was to establish schools in rural towns where previously there were none. In Hamar, for example, schools were set up in Turmi and Dimeka'.

The EPRDF government has labelled education as one of the fundamental human rights of school age children in Ethiopia. Education is considered a key to development, democracy and peace-building within and among the Nations, Nationalities and People of Ethiopia. The emphasis on the expansion of education is evidenced in the construction of numerous schools even in remote areas. In Hamar, there are twenty-three primary schools in five clusters (Dimeka, Turmi, Shanqo, Kara, and Arbore), and two secondary schools in Dimeka and Turmi towns. The current Hamar local administration is committed to the expansion of education and other social services in the *woreda*. One of my informants from the local Education Office explained the office's recent efforts in Hamar Woreda as follows,

For a long time the Hamar were among the less privileged and disadvantaged groups in South Omo. Most of them are still illiterate and only look after the cattle. They do not have educated boys and girls; they do not really know the world outside their own [...].

With our developmental government, a new hope and vision is in the making.

The government is committed to expanding different infrastructures in the whole country especially to benefit groups that were disadvantaged under the previous regimes [...].

In Hamar, we are working hard to implement the 'education for all' programme of the government. Education is a key to the development of a community and it broadens the horizon of people's life. We are building schools, health centres, and veterinary posts with the aim to improve the way of life of our community. (Interview, 10 November 2016, in Dimeka town)

The five-year education plan<sup>17</sup> (2014/15–2019/20) of Hamar Woreda shows that the administration is striving to expand the coverage of primary school education to all the *woreda's kebeles*, and to reduce gender disparity in the enrolment children to schools. To attain its vision, the office has been undertaking a series of awareness raising activities, including meetings with the community and campaigning about the importance of education for the future of the country, the pastoral and agro-pastoral community and their children.

From these campaigns, it is obvious that education has become loaded with expectations of a good life and well-paid job in town. When I asked my host brother, a Hamar schoolboy, to explain what modern life means to him, he told me it meant 'to be able to wear *gal*<sup>18</sup> clothes, to ride a motorbike, to have a mobile, to eat *injera*,<sup>19</sup> to live in Dimeka town and to get a government salary'. At the same time, among those who are educated and close to towns life allegiance to the Hamar way of life has become stigmatized as 'traditional', 'backward' and 'resistant to development and modernity'. My informant from the Education Office stated:

The Hamar are conservative and stick to their traditional way of life [...]. One manifestation of this is their lack of interest in sending their children to school, especially the girls. They don't know the value of education. For example, they don't send boys (especially first born sons) to school because they believe an educated boy will not bury his father, inherit his father's property and continue the Hamar way of life. With the girls, the problem is even worse. The Hamar believe that if a Hamar girl moves to a town, she will never come back. They also use their girls as a means to accumulate wealth through bride wealth, which often enables them to get many cattle and goats [...].

17 The five-year education plan was prepared by the Hamar Woreda Education office to attain the vision of the National Growth and Transformation Plan on Education.

18 The term *gal* literary means 'enemy' (see Lydall 2010). It is also used to refer to non-Hamar, mainly highland Ethiopians.

19 *Injera* is a fermented sourdough flatbread traditionally made from teff flour. It is the main staple food in highland and Central Ethiopia, and has recently also become popular in other parts of the country.

Nevertheless, over the past years, the *woreda* administration has been working hard to tackle these 'traditional' attitudes despite resistance and conflict. (Interview, 21 December 2016, in Turmi)

In the discourse of the *woreda's* Women, Children and Youth Office, girls are commonly depicted as 'slaves of their husbands', 'exploited creatures', 'sold for cows' and 'forced by their parents into marriage', sometimes with old men. This representation is presented in opposition to women's rights and the public discourse on gender equality, as prescribed by international human rights advocacy groups and the Ethiopian government.

As part of their efforts to get more Hamar girls into school, annual educational campaigns, led by Hamar Woreda's Education Office, Women Children and Youth Office, and administration, are being organized in all *kebeles*. The main agenda of these campaigns pertains to the right of girls to education. The denial of this right, it is propagated, will result in bad consequences for the parents, such as fines and even imprisonment. Concomitantly, girls are told about their right to go to schools and that they should report any denial of this right to their respective *kebele* administration and/or to the police or the Woreda Court.

This high-level campaign is highly controversial in Hamar and generates much resistance for various reasons. First, girls in Hamar are seen as indispensable to continue Hamar culture and economy. A good/respected Hamar girl is one who is skilful and knowledgeable of all agro-pastoral and household tasks: she collects firewood, fetches water, grinds flour and prepares food and coffee, cleans the compound and, most importantly, cultivates fields of sorghum, beans and other produce. People fear, and experience has shown, that if girls go to school they do not learn to become competent Hamar women capable of coordinating and running an agro-pastoralist household (Lydall 2010:323).

Second, the Hamar are worried about voluntarily and involuntarily pre-marital sexual affairs and pregnancy, which occur in the context of school education, especially among those who live in the hostels at town. While virginity is not a condition for marriage in Hamar, premarital pregnancies are traditionally considered as impure and need to be aborted or the children killed after birth. As abortion and infanticide are prohibited by the law, schoolgirl pregnancies create a lot of problems for the girls and their families. Therefore, parents find it hard to send their daughters to hostels, where they are not properly supervised.

Third, educated girls usually insist on choosing their own partner, which means that Hamar parents are unable to arrange marriages for them and that they will not receive any bride wealth. Such marriages, made outside the agro-pastoral economy, do not bring any livestock to the family, and are less likely to expand the social and kinship network of the household. Moreover, as descent is patrilineal, if a girl

marries a non-Hamar her own children will not be considered as Hamar and are thus lost to the community. One Hamar elder told me:

I have a daughter, she is my second daughter. Now, she is grown up. I raised her like the other small girls in Hamar. She used to fetch water for her mother, clean the enclosure of goats and the homestead. Later, when she became a matured girl she was engaged to a Hamar boy from Assile area [...]. Shortly after her engagement, she joined the school at Dimeka.

I had a difficult time with her future husband and his family, as they were disappointed with her education. Even worse, she is not living in Dimeka anymore. What would you do when your daughter disappear in the bush, in the town? I have lost my daughter. She is now in Jinka, I heard that she is a cleaner of a hotel in Arkesha (part of Jinka). She is neither attending school nor coming back to Hamar. Her family begged her to come back to us, but she is not listening anymore (Interview, 20 February 2016, Lojera).

The above case shows that it is difficult for her parents to stay in control of a girl's life once she has gone to school. Many such girls are regarded as lost to their Hamar families and the community; no longer fully integrated into Hamar society, they are seen as destined to live in the towns. As a counter reaction, some Hamar have become active 'traditionalists', who strongly oppose girls' education.

As became clear during interviews and many informal conversations, it has become common for girls in several villages in Hamar to be sent to school and their resistant parents sanctioned. The pressure put on the families played an important role in causing the 2015 conflict in Hamar. One case in particular aggravated the hostility between the Hamar and the *woreda* administration. Muga, one of the two Hamar *bittas*, told me about the sudden disappearance of seven girls and the shock it caused in Hamar.

In Hamar, we have a special place for girls. You see, the girls are the future mothers. They take care of their children; they are responsible for the continuation of Hamar as a community. We need our young girls to learn about Hamar culture. Recently, the government has been forcing the Hamar to send their children to school. But, it should not be forces. It is our own sons, the educated Hamar men who are now administering the country, who are lobbying and persuading our girls to go to town for schooling against our will.

Within one week, seven girls from my country ran away to Dimeka: three from Buska, three from Lala, and one from Shanqo Wolfo. First, we did not know that they were in Dimeka. We, the Hamar, were worried and started to search for them in different villages. Six of the girls except the one from Buska village had already been engaged and their parents had received bride wealth, from their future husbands (Interview, 8 March 2017, Buska).

When the Hamar requested the return of the girls, they were told that it was the right of the girls to go to school and that they would stay in town to do that. The family's feelings and interests, as well as their wish that their daughters become 'competent Hamar wives and mothers' (Lydall 2010:12) and fit into the local forms of life and obligations to kin were discounted.

Albeit with difficulty, I had the chance to meet and talk to one of these seven girls, who was at the time in the fourth grade at the Dimeka Boarding School. She told me the reasons why she ran away from her family. These included her interest in attending school and becoming a civil servant like Goiti, Head of the Women and Children's Affairs Office and the only Hamar woman in the *woreda* cabinet. She explained that her father had died when she was small, so she grew up with her mother and brothers. When her older brother chose a husband for her, she disagreed and went to Dimeka. Right now, she is the only one of the seven girls attending school in Dimeka. The other girls, as the Head of Women and Children's Affairs Office told me, are in Jinka; some are selling coffee on the streets and others are, according to rumours, working in the hotels as bar ladies. Her office, together with the *woreda* administration, was planning to convince the girls to return to school in Hamar or reunite with their parents.

During the Worro conflict, when the *woreda* police and the security team marched to Worro to bring poachers to the court, the Hamar were already resentful because of the situations of these and other girls, and this fuelled the open confrontation.

## Efforts to resolve the conflict

A few days after the Worro conflict, the Southern Nations Nationalities and People Government took the initiative to start a peace dialogue with notable elders of the Hamar. The proposed strategy was to persuade the Hamar to attend a peace meeting, and to find a 'trustable' mediator who could serve as a peace broker between the community and the government. The man identified was Awoke Aike.<sup>20</sup> Awoke is among the first educated generation of the Hamar and was Chief Administrator of South Omo Zone from 2000 to 2006 and served as a representative of the Hamar in the Ethiopian Parliament from 2007 to 2016.

In the days after Awoke's arrival in Hamar, he and other government officials started to deliberate on possible ways to convince the Hamar to enter the peace dialogue. They first approached Elto Gino, one of the *bittas*, to help them. After a few

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20 He is the son of Aike Berinas (also called Baldambe), a former spokesman of the Hamar and friend and key informant of the anthropologists Ivo Strecker and Jean Lydall (see Lydall and Strecker 1979b).

days of negotiation, the *bitta* agreed to hold meetings with the government people, who guaranteed him that neither police nor security would make him accountable for the mess in Worro.

The first peace meeting was held between the Hamar *bitta*, some Hamar elders who accompanied him, and government representatives at the Kaeske River, near Dimeka town. The two main issues discussed were firstly, the government's desire that the elders persuade the young Hamar men to stop the war and refrain from destroying further public service centres; and secondly, that the rifles taken from the police and the property stolen from schools and health centres (such as chairs, tables, refrigerators) be returned.

Before entering the discussion, the elders requested that the authorities first talk about who was responsible for causing the war. The *bitta* and his spokespersons argued that the government soldiers who came with machine guns to attack the peaceful community were liable for the trouble. They added that the community, and particularly the Hamar youngsters, did nothing wrong except defend themselves from the bullets of the soldiers. The elders made clear that the government and its police force were at fault. The elders also mentioned that making peace in any way would only be attainable if the government was willing to allow the elders to solve problems in their own way and not insist on 'rigid rules', sending the police to the community and bringing the so-called 'criminals' in to court. As *bitta* Elto recounted:

I said to Berki, then chief administrator of Hamar, and to Burka, head of security, to give us time to talk with our sons, with those they call poachers. I also said to them 'Do not insist on deadlines!', for they gave us a two week time frame to handover the poachers to the police.

We Hamar said to them: 'Bringing peace is not like buying coffee from the market! It requires time and will only be achieved gradually.'

The elders from the far away areas like Assile, Wungabaino, Bashada, Errä Umbule and Errä Qaisa also told them: 'Do not send police to the peaceful settlement areas.' We also told them that the poachers would pay fines in cash but not go to jail. But they (the government officials) did not agree and sent police (Interview, 20 May 2017, in Worro).

The way the Hamar manage conflicts and ensure order is completely different from what the government officials aspired to do. Among the Hamar, any cases of wrongdoing are presented to the *zarsi*, the community of adult men sharing a common residence area. Depending on the issue at stake, after careful deliberation, the wrongdoer might be told to apologize and to give a cow or goat as compensation to the person he has harmed. In some cases, he will be asked to slaughter a cow to the *zarsi* and feed them. The main aim is to restore social peace between conflicting parties and to reintegrate the wrongdoer into the community. As such,

the Hamar practise what is called 'restorative justice' (Damren 2002:83). State law, based on the principle of retributive justice is meant to punish wrongdoers, so that 'the issue of bringing the poachers and others who resisted girls education to the court was a matter of enforcing "rule of law"', as one of my informants from the *woreda* administration put it. It was with this orientation that the police and the security team went to Worro, and this was strongly criticised by the Hamar elders during the peace talks.

Informants from both sides recounted that Awoke and a few government officials accepted the view of the elders and confessed that the administration's decision to send police had been completely wrong. But other officials opposed it and did not show any sense of guilt. Instead, they insisted on identifying those Hamar who had killed policemen and destroyed public property. Therefore, the first peace meeting ended without any meaningful consensus or detailed discussion of the agendas set by the authorities. The officials who felt that their previous decisions had been right later put *bitta* Elto in jail for four months, claiming that he had instigated the Worro conflict. The imprisonment of the *bitta* in Dimeka caused a second violent clash between the Hamar and government soldiers in May 2015, a situation that was only ended when he was freed.

A second peace meeting was then held in November 2015, in the presence of the president of SNNPR. This time, *bitta* Elto refused to attend out of fear and distrust of the government officials. In the meeting, the president openly offered an apology for what had happened in Worro because of the administration's decision to send the police force. He also announced that the government had pardoned all Hamar involved, including those who had killed police officers in Worro and those who had destroyed public service centres. It was also promised that those officials who had given the command to the police would be held accountable for their decisions and removed from their positions. The regional government's vigorous response to the situation laid the foundation for a new administration in Hamar and facilitated a real peace dialogue between the authorities and the community.

Following this meeting, the new administration in Hamar soon organized meetings in the different *kebeles*. The new administrator, Walle Alma, wanted to speak to *bitta* Elto in person, but only managed to do so with the intervention of the *ayo* (spokesman) of Worro.<sup>21</sup> Finally, Walle was allowed to come to Worro on the condition that he comes alone, without any police (security guards) or car. Walle agreed and went the next day, bringing coffee as a gift to the *bitta* to ask him for forgiveness. The *bitta* accepted the apology wholeheartedly and blessed the new

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21 He travelled twice to the village but was not able to meet the *bitta*. Instead, the *ayo* told him to leave a message for the *bitta*. When Walle insisted on meeting the *bitta* personally, with the intention of admitting the mistakes of the government and asking for the *bitta*'s blessings, finally the *ayo* agreed to help him.

administrator. This was the beginning of a new phase in relations marked by real peace dialogues.

I attended several meetings in Turmi and Dimeka during which the Hamar and the new administration agreed to set up a joint peace committee, which included elders, herders, women and local government representatives. Once it had been established, the peace committee agreed to communicate community concerns to the government and to consult one another. Some of the rifles that had been taken during the war were also returned to the administration, and the residents of Worro agreed to restore the public service centres.

However, the main causes of the conflict – hunting and grazing in the Mago Park and the issue of girls' education – remain unresolved. Park authorities continue to blame the Hamar for hunting in Mago Park, even though the Hamar usually express their willingness to stop hunting and tend to condemn poachers in meetings. The Hamar are more concerned about herding and grazing in the Park and are asking the government about the future of their local economy. And, I have observed that the government allowed the Hamar and other neighbouring groups to graze inside the park, and also supplied fodder from far away areas – from Maze Park, near Gofa, and from the Kuraz Sugar Factory – during the 2017 drought in the region.

## Summary and conclusion

To fully understand what led to the 2015 conflict between the Hamar and the local government it has been necessary to study the relationship between both parties, taking their respective values, intentions and motivations into account. These included the wider social, cultural and economic base of the Hamar and the developmental priorities of the Ethiopian government.

From the Hamar side, three factors can be seen as the underlying causes of their conflict-laden relationship with the local administration: their strong attachment to hunting as a mechanism for proving manhood and elevating one's social status; their subsistence economy, which is partly based on cattle herding and demands the constant search for grazing land and watering points; and the value given to girls as agents for the continuation of the Hamar as a group and as a source of bride wealth.

From the local administration's side, centrally designed development projects – such as the conservation schemes to foster eco-tourism development, the strict enforcement of law, and the 'education for all' programme – along with the view that these programmes are inviolable prerequisites for the eradication of poverty and fostering of economic development are responsible for the contention with the local community.



The case presented here is that the escalation of the conflict when the Hamar Woreda administration decided to send armed police to Worro resulted in unwanted consequences for both sides and – in hindsight – could have been avoided. As the accounts from Hamar elders reveal, the contested issues – hunting and grazing in the Mago Park and female education – could have been addressed and at least partly resolved through an open dialogue between the elders and the *woreda* officials.

Given the high social value attached to hunting game among the Hamar, their suggestion that illegal hunters pay fines to the government instead of going to jail was in fact an offer to compromise with the park authorities. Yet, it was interpreted as resistance to government authority. As the president of the SNNPR and the new administration admitted during the post-conflict peace meetings, the order given to the police was a serious mistake that caused the loss of human life on both sides and the destruction of public property. The overgrazing and entry of herders into the Mago Park was, at least partly, the result of the allocation of grazing land to investors, which restricted the herders' access to grass and watering points. As the Hamar economy is to a large extent derived from animal husbandry, the development programmes implemented in the area should have considered this reality and ensured the availability of livestock routes and access to riverbanks. Hamar resistance to sending their girls to school was only partly based on the important role played by girls in the Hamar household economy and their central place in the continuation of Hamar as a group. These cultural aspects may not change fast, but Hamar concerns about their daughters' security in the boarding schools in towns could be more easily addressed. Instead of exerting pressure on parents to send their daughters to school, more attention should be given to awareness raising and ensuring the overall protection and wellbeing of girls in the towns.

To conclude, the Worro conflict and its resolution can teach us a lesson about how and why things can go wrong when two different values systems come together. While in such situations the more powerful partner – usually the government – often 'wins' and subjugates the weaker one, the Hamar case was different as their land is still rather inaccessible and they are heavily armed. Besides, nowadays many local government officials are native Hamar, which means that they have a good knowledge of the local culture and values, even if they no longer share it. The way the issue was finally resolved shows that not only mutual understanding, but also tolerance, flexibility and patience are needed to live peacefully together in a culturally and legally plural country.

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