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**Women's Worlds in Dassanetch,  
Southern Ethiopia**

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# **Women's Worlds in Dassanetch, Southern Ethiopia**

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Peggy Elfmann

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## Introduction

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“What is a woman?” Simone de Beauvoir asked in her book *The second sex* (de Beauvoir [1949] 1975: XV) more than half a century ago. She refers to women’s devaluation and discusses its reasons. Her starting point was a “male bias” within society and sciences, including social anthropology. Most researchers to this point had been male and had preferred male informants. Women were neglected and not given a voice. For example Paul Spencer in his ethnography about the Samburu wrote that women were “usually unhelpful as informants” and “less quick to grasp situations” (Spencer 1965: 231). Two of the first researchers who described societies from the perspective of women were Margaret Mead and Cora Du Bois (Rosaldo, Lamphere 1974: 1). Since then many researchers, most of them female, have studied women and men, sex and gender.

In the 1970s concepts of a universal category of “woman” and a universal dominance of men dominated research about women. But over the past years this uniform approach has been abandoned and “women research” developed into gender studies (Moore 1988: 7-10). The categories “woman” and “man” are not regarded static and universally applicable anymore but rather as cultural constructs. Gender identity is both constructed and lived (Moore 1988: 48; Moore 1994: 49). Already de Beauvoir stated that “woman, like much else, is a product elaborated by civilization” (de Beauvoir [1949] 1975: 725). But from today’s point of view her argumentation is wrong in that she assumes that there is a universal category of “women” which is inferior to the (universal) category of “men”. Today this idea of a uniform category of “women” is outdated. Rather there exist countless and manifold varieties. Being a woman does not have the same meaning everywhere but differs according to time and place.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a survey on the evolvement and development of women’s research and gender studies see Henrietta Moore 1988: *Feminism and Anthropology*; Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louis Lamphere 1974: *Woman, Culture and Society*; Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead 1981: *Sexual meanings. The cultural construction of gender and sexuality*.

The aim of this thesis is to show and explain what it means to be a woman in Dassanetch. I do not intend to draw a general picture of the “typical” Dassanetch woman. This thesis is neither exhaustive nor representative. It rather is a portrait of certain people at a certain time in a certain place. It portrays the girls and women of one homestead in the Dassanetch village Aoga, Southern Ethiopia, where I have lived in August/September 2002 and January/February 2004.

This thesis is based on shared everyday life, discussions and interviews with a few women, most of all with my host mothers Nakwa and Kidoa and my host sisters Nyendite and Orib. In presenting a “partial truth” about Dassanetch women and not intending to present *the* Dassanetch woman I follow Lila Abu-Lughod’s demand for “ethnographies of the particular” (Clifford 1986: 1, Abu-Lughod 1991: 49). Describing how particular women acted and what they told me, I try to avoid generalisations that are inherent to most early ethnographies.<sup>2</sup>

Because of my relatively short stays in the field I could observe and ask only few things. Another limitation of my work were my poor language skills for certain. I did not know Dassanetch language before and only began learning it in the field. But my skills were not advanced enough to allow clear communication. Thus I worked with a translator a few hours every day, especially when conducting interviews. Nevertheless I think that my findings give interesting insights about what life in Dassanetch may mean for girls and women.

The Dassanetch live along the eastern and western bank of the Omo River in Southern Ethiopia and on the shores of Lake Turkana (also known as Lake Rudolf) in Kenya. They are an agro-pastoral society that cultivates sorghum, maize, and beans and tend cattle and small stock. *Af Dassanetch* (the language of the Dassanetch) belongs to the East Cushitic languages of the Omo-Tana branch (Tosco 2001: 8). The first Europeans who encountered this area were the travellers Count Samuel Teleki and his companion Ludwig von Höhnel in 1888. Von Höhnel wrote that they were on “friendly relations

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in Evans-Pritchard’s *Man and woman among the Azande* or Spencer’s *The Samburu* it is never clear from where information comes from, whether from direct observation or interviews with informants. Besides, both authors write about *the* woman, *the* man, *the* Samburu and so on (Evans-Pritchard 1974; Spencer 1965).

with the Reshiat”<sup>3</sup> but they hardly got any information about the area (von Höhnel 1894: 163). Until the 1970s Dassanetchland and Southern Ethiopia in general remained an “unexplored” and “unknown” area.

During the past years many anthropologists have done research in Southern Ethiopia which is, according to Ivo Strecker, an area with the “highest density of ethnically different groups in the whole of Ethiopia and possibly even Africa” (Strecker 1976: 2). Scholars from different countries have studied, for example, Arbore, Ari, Bashada, Dassanetch, Hamar, Karo, Maale, Mursi and Tsamai.<sup>4</sup> One breakthrough concerning research among the Dassanetch was the work of social anthropologist Uri Almagor. He published the book *Pastoral Partners* and several articles about social organisation and bond partnerships in Dassanetch. Other research about Dassanetch was done by geographer Claudia Carr who concentrated on society and environment, Neal Sobania who wrote about the history of the people of the area and linguists Hans-Jürgen Sasse

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<sup>3</sup> Von Höhnel called the Dassanetch Reshiat. Since he first travelled to the area different names were given to the Dassanetch. This caused confusion among scholars and travellers in the subsequent time. To give an example of the variety of names and their modifications I indicate a few: Geleba, Galeb, Galop, Reshiat, Rissiat, Marille, Marle, Dasanetsch, Dathainac (Pauli 1950: 155; Cerulli 1956: 81). Neighbouring groups call them Geleba. Folk-etymology sees it as related to the Amharic *galaba* (hull of coffee beans). Tosco explains this by the fact that the Dassanetch are fond of drinking *bie kulla* (hot water made out of coffee hulls) (2001: 5). Dassanetch is their proper name – for which there are several spellings – because this is the term they use themselves. The term Dassanetch refers to a cultural group, the region where the Dassanetch people live, and to the language they speak. In the following I try to make clear what I refer to.

<sup>4</sup> For research about Arbore see: Christina Gabbert 1999: Zwischen Pragmatik und Zeichengebung. Zur materiellen Kultur der Arbore von Gondoroba; Ayalew Gebre 1993: The Arbore of Southern Ethiopia. A study of inter-ethnic relations, social organization and production practices; Yukio Miyawaki 1996: Cultivation Strategies and Historical Change of Sorghum Varieties in the Hoor of Southwestern Ethiopia; Tadesse Wolde Gossa 1999: Warfare and Fertility. A study of the Hor (Arbore) of Southern Ethiopia; about Ari: Yintiso Gebre 1995: The Ari of Southwestern Ethiopia. An exploratory study of production practices; Alexander Naty 1992: The culture of powerlessness and the spirit of rebellion among the Aari people of Southwest Ethiopia; about Bashada: Susanne Epple 1995: Life in Gunne. Social Relationships in a Village in Bashada, South Ethiopia; Nicole Mohaupt 1995: The dances of the youth as a reflection of gender relations and a gerontocratic society in a village in Bashada; about Hamar: Jean Lydall and Ivo Strecker 1979: The Hamar of Southern Ethiopia. Vol.I Work Journal and Vol.II Baldambe Explains; Ivo Strecker 1979: The Hamar of Southern Ethiopia. Vol.III Conversations in Dambaiti; about Karo: Gezahegn Petros 2000: The Karo of the Lower Omo Valley. Subsistence, Social Organisation and relations with neighbouring groups; about Maale: Donald L. Donham 1979: Work and power in Maale, Ethiopia; about Mursi: David Turton 1973: The social organization of the Mursi. A pastoral tribe of the Lower Omo Valley, South West Ethiopia. Tsamai: Melesse Getu 1995: Tsamako women’s roles and status in agro-pastoral production. This list is not complete and gives first insights only. For further information about South Omo and a list of researchers see the SORC homepage ([www.uni-mainz.de/Organisationen/SORC/content/view/51/36](http://www.uni-mainz.de/Organisationen/SORC/content/view/51/36) retrieved September 14, 2004).

and Mauro Tosco who studied Dassanetch language.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless there are topics which have not yet been taken into account. One is the world of women and girls. The worlds of girls and women are hardly mentioned in the works about Dassanetch, just as in the majority of ethnographic works about the peoples of Southern Ethiopia. German anthropologist Ivo Strecker who has been studying Hamar from the 1970s on has dealt with women's worlds in Hamar, too, and presented those in his films and books. Especially British anthropologist Jean Lydall studied Hamar women intensively and gave them a voice in her papers and films.<sup>6</sup> Just recently Ethiopian anthropologist Melesse Getu gave insights into women's worlds in Tsamai.

### **Organisation of this thesis**

This thesis is organised in four main chapters. First I give an overview of some features specific to the Dassanetch such as the importance of the Omo River for cultivation. Annual inundations of the surrounding flats and rain result in seasonal cultivation and seasonal grazing areas. Thus Dassanetch move seasonally, too. Another feature inherent to Dassanetch culture is its social organisation according to generation sets and bond partnerships. This chapter is based mainly on literature by Almagor, Carr, and Sobania and entails only little information from my fieldwork.

In chapter two I give a “detailed account of all the arrangements of the experiment”, to use Malinowski's words (Malinowski [1922] 1984: 2).<sup>7</sup> Unlike early ethnographers who

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<sup>5</sup> Claudia Carr 1977: *Pastoralism in Crisis. The Dasanetch and their Ethiopian Lands*; Neal W. Sobania 1980: *The Historical Tradition of the Peoples of the Eastern Lake Turkana Basin c.1840-1925*; Hans-Jürgen Sasse 1974: *Notes on the structure of Galab*; Mauro Tosco 2001: *The Dhaasanac language*.

<sup>6</sup> In Strecker's film *Tanz in der Savanne* one gets to know how girls and women prepare for the dances. The book *Baldambe Explains* by Strecker and Lydall has one chapter about “women's talk”, but this is from a man's view point. In her films about women in Hamar Lydall lets the women talk and present their points of view.

<sup>7</sup> But Malinowski himself did not truly inform the reader about his fieldworks' circumstances like *A Diary in the strict sense of the term* unveils. It was not until the 1970s that ethnographers gave more account to the fieldworks' circumstances such as their feelings and emotions in the field and the making of the text (Malinowski 1967; Clifford 1986: 14-17). Two of the early works where ethnographers included their own “voices” in the field are *Return to Laughter* by Elenore Smith Bowen and *Reflections of a woman anthropologist* by Manda Cesara (both pseudonyms) (Bowen 1954; Cesara 1982).

took settings into account, but often did not mention relationships between ethnographer and informants, I describe the circumstances of my fieldworks. I present Aoga, the village where I lived and did research and Nyabba's family, my host family. I explain the methods I have used in order to learn about girlhood and womanhood and describe the problems I encountered during my stays in the field.

Chapter three deals with the girls and women of Nyabba's homestead. Introducing the girls Nyendite and Nautcho, the bride Orib and the wives and mothers Nakwa and Kidoa, I explain the stages a girl undergoes in order to become a woman. Roughly three stages – girlhood, bridehood, womanhood – can be identified. To be a good girl, for example, one must work a great deal and work hard, but this is one aspect only. The way one dresses, uses jewellery and behaves, as well as being circumcised, are features of girlhood that I describe further. In Dassanetch there are certain ideals and ideas of how things should be carried out. Yet ideals and reality sometimes differ. For example, co-wives are expected to help and support each other. This is what I was told but quite often Nakwa and Kidoa argued with each other.

Girls and women are not bound to the house and homestead. In chapter four I speak about different spaces where females spend their time. First I describe Nakwa's and Kidoa's houses. A woman is associated with her house and the domestic sphere in general. In that way space becomes gendered. Nakwa and Kidoa spent most of their time with domestic chores. But unlike early feminists who regarded women's association with the domestic sphere as a sign of subordination, I show that this also may empower women.

Girls and women move around, too – to the river, to the cattle and goat enclosures, to the fields and to town.<sup>8</sup> One may not regard these places as women's exclusive spheres. While the field and harvesting is closely linked to women, the cattle enclosures are related to men. Nevertheless females have to fulfill certain tasks there that I describe in this chapter.

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<sup>8</sup> Women and girls also move to the *foritch* (stock camp) or other villages. These are not taken into account because I describe the everyday movements I witnessed during my stay.

The conclusion serves to give a short summary. In it I discuss my approach to fieldwork and the mosaic-style of this thesis. I also deal with early women's research that concentrated on universal devaluation of women.

Between descriptions of how girls and women in Dassanetch live, I put excerpts from my diaries and letters (written in italics). By quoting myself I pursue a certain goal: I want to show how I felt and thought during fieldwork. I consider this important because unlike technical sciences, fieldwork is closely related with the personality of the ethnographer. Anthropologists can never remove their personality completely from their work and be "machinelike recorders of human events" (Powdermaker 1966: 19). Fieldwork, especially with the ethnographer being a "total participant" (Gans 1982: 54), is highly subjective. In the beginning one enters into a strange culture and only slowly one can get to know it. Depending on one's personality each person deals with this in a different way. Just as Elizabeth Tunstall wrote: "My physical, mental, and emotional limitations had a significant impact on the method, form, and content of this project and thus this [thesis]" (1999: 33).

Fieldwork is also a situation where many voices, those of the others and that of the researcher, interact (Denzin 1997: 33). In this thesis I try to reproduce this polyphonus process by including quotes and words in Dassanetch (written in italics), excerpts from my diaries and letters, descriptions, interpretations, pictures and sketches. The written text resembles a collage – a meeting place of many voices, as in fieldwork, too.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout this thesis, I draw on examples from other ethnic groups in South Omo and compare them with Dassanetch. The sources of these information are manifold: they stem from my own observations in Hamar and Bashada, from personal discussions with ethnographers or from discussions during the workshop "Pride and Social Worthiness of Women in South Omo" in Jinka which was held from October 5 to 9 in 2002. Together with my host father Nyabba, my host mother Nakwa, their daughter Nyendite, and

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<sup>9</sup> It is only one first try. In order to fully work polyphonously the ethnographer's informants should be given a "louder" voice (Strecker 1995). Unfortunately I cannot use more direct quotes of what Kidoa and Nakwa told me but have to use my own words. This lack stems from my poor language skills.

Elle, an old woman from Aoga, I took part in this workshop after I had been in the field for the first time.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This workshop was organised by Susanne Epple, Christina Gabbert, Tina Brüderle and students from the Johannes Gutenberg-University in Mainz. The workshop was one of the first in its kind in that way that women from different ethnic groups were invited (Arbore, Ari, Banna, Bashada, Dassanetch, Hamar, Kara, Maale). In small groups together with anthropologists and students they discussed culture and gender specific role and labour divisions and rituals in the life of a woman.

## **I. The Dassanetch – an overview of habitat, origin, social organisation, economy and relations with neighbours**

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### **1 Habitat – geographical location and environment**

*Les Dassanetch*, the land of the Dassanetch, lies in the Lower Omo Basin, a depression formed by down-warping more than four million years ago (Carr 1977: 21). When one comes from Jinka and drives through the green, lush land of the Hamar, Dassanetchland seems like a big, wide desert. The region is semi-arid to arid with mainly desert to the west and southeast. The vegetation can be described as dry savanna and grassland (Carr 1977: 22; Almagor 1978: 36).

Dassanetchland comprises about 2,300 square kilometres and stretches along the northern shores of Lake Turkana in Kenya and is on the west and east banks of the Omo River, the largest river in southwestern Ethiopia (see map 1). The Dassanetch number between 35,000 and 40,000 and most live on the west bank in Ethiopia. The east bank is occupied temporarily during cultivation season but otherwise deserted (Tosco 2001: 1; Almagor 1978: 1, 37).<sup>11</sup>

Lake Turkana, which has no outlet, receives most of its water from the Omo. The Omo River rises seasonally and irregularly. The extent and timing of the rising and inundation in the Dassanetch area depends on the quantity, timing and rainfall in the catchment area, the central plateau of Ethiopia. In general the river reaches its peak in August but it can be as early as February or as late as November when the Omo overflows its banks and inundates the surrounding flats. The inundations can be rather slight (“low river”) or extensive (“big river”). The actual duration of the flood waters

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<sup>11</sup> All population estimates of the Dassanetch are highly conjectural. Von Höhnel reported them to number about 2,000 to 3,000 (von Höhnel 1894: 167). Almagor estimated them to be about 15,000 and Carr counted 9,440 Dassanetch living on the west bank (Almagor 1978: 14; Carr 1977: 9). The latest reliable figures stem from the 1994 Ethiopian Census which numbers the Dassanetch to be 32,029 living in the Southern Omo Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in Tosco: 1). To this, a number of Dassanetch living in Kenya must be added. Since no comparable figures are available, the 1980 SIL of 2,500 is merely an estimation (Grimes in Tosco:1).

also varies from year to year, usually lasting between three and four months (Almagor 1978: 38).

Rainfall varies according to season: *ir gudoha* (large rainy period) is between March and late May and *ir ninika* (short rainy period) ranges between late August through October. Small erratic rains may occur (Carr 1977: 22). Rainfall also varies over successive years. “Its distribution is unreliable and its incidence irregular” (Sobania 1980: 26). During the major rainy periods, temperatures may drop markedly. Otherwise they are constantly high (about 35 degrees centigrade)<sup>12</sup> (Carr 1977: 22).

Not only precipitations but also wind occurs with great fluctuations and seasonal extremes. The southeasterly winds blow almost constantly across the region and may range “from periods of relative quiet to storms of gale force” (Carr 1977: 4). Already in 1888 von Höhnel accounted to “the east winds, which blow unintermittently with more or less force here ...” (von Höhnel 1894: 101).



Map 1: The location of the South-Omo area within Ethiopia  
([www.maf-germany.de/aethiop/land.html](http://www.maf-germany.de/aethiop/land.html) retrieved July 21, 2004)

<sup>12</sup> Carr notes that during rainy season temperatures below 20 degrees centigrade have been recorded. Their chilling effects may be accentuated by the northerly winds (Carr 1977: 22).

## 2 Origin – a multi-ethnic group

The Dassanetch are recognised as one ethnic unit but have several distinct origins. In the past they were a dynamic community which absorbed and assimilated outsiders and groups from various surrounding tribes (Carr 1977: 9; Sobania 1980: 54). When looking at the origin of the Dassanetch, one needs to understand the origin of the different segments.

The Dassanetch consists of eight tribal sections; each tribal section is seen as coterminous with a territorial section (see map 2).<sup>13</sup> Almagor divides these eight tribal sections in two bigger sections: Sheer and Yenmeto. The Sheer comprise only three sections: Inkabelo, Inkoria and Nyaaritch – but are the majority of the Dassanetch. The Yenmeto comprises the Elelle, Orru, Randal and Kuoru (Almagor 1978: 14-15). Tosco, on the other hand, leaves the Nyaaritch aside (Tosco 2001: 2). In the following description of the “becoming of the Dassanetch” it becomes clear that the Nyaaritch have a separate origin and should not be regarded as belonging to the Sheer group.<sup>14</sup>

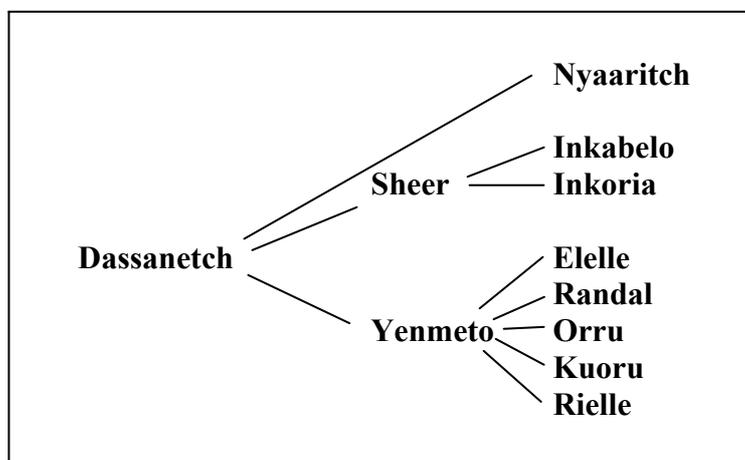


Figure 1: The tribal sections of the Dassanetch according to Tosco (Tosco 2001:2)

The Sheer, who are regarded “proper” Dassanetch, originally lived in a place called “the place of Nyupe” west of Lake Turkana. War and environmental factors are cited as the

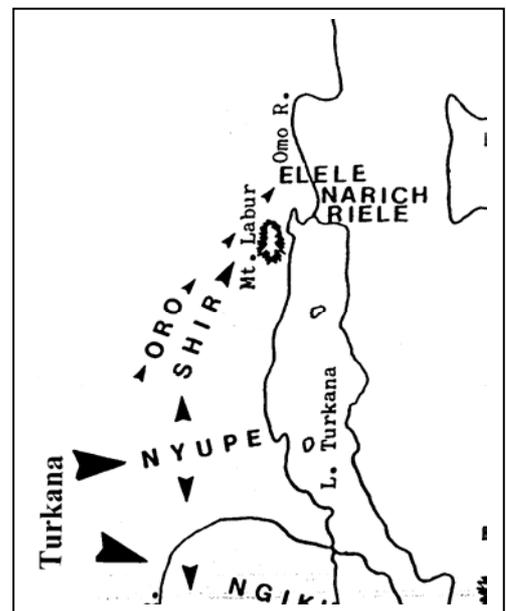
<sup>13</sup> Five of the sections, the Inkabelo, Elelle, Randal, Nyaaritch, and Inkoria are territorial in structure. The Orru and Kuoru live dispersed through the Inkabelo territory and the Rielle live in a single settlement which is also within Inkabelo territory (Almagor in Sobania 1980: 46).

<sup>14</sup> Tosco claims that the Nyaaritch group are of recent Nyangatom origin “as witnessed by the initial /ŋ/ of their name (which violates Dhaasanac positional constraints)” (Tosco 2001: 2).

reasons for the separation of the Dassanetch from the Nyupe and them moving northwards (see map three) (Sobania 1980: 63). Tradition suggests that the Orru migrated to the land of the Dassanetch at about the same time as the Sheer. Together, or within a short time of each other, the Sheer and the Orru journeyed northwards. Their interaction supposedly started south on the western lake shore (Sobania 1980: 69). The Nyaaritch were an independent segment that already resided on the north end of Lake Turkana when the Sheer and the Orru migrated there. The incorporation of the Nyaaritch was a “result of peaceful processes” (Sobania 1980: 71). The Elelle, who lived on the Omo River and employed various modes of economic subsistence, were absorbed by force. “We fought and killed each other. We fought, but when we came together (we realized) they were Dasenech”, the Dassanetch said, recorded by Sobania (1980: 73). Like the Elelle the Rielle inhabited the Lower Omo region prior to the arrival of the Sheer-Orru group. But unlike the Elelle the Rielle were regarded as “water people” whose economy was based on fishing (Sobania 1980: 74).



Map 2: The tribal sections of the Dassanetch (Almagor 1978: 16)



Map 3: Migration into the Omo delta (Sobania 1980: 79)

Nowadays the Sheer are the dominating section in Dassanetch society – most Dassanetch belong to the Inkabelo section – but “it is impossible to say with any confidence whether the stronger links of “Dasenechness” lie to the southwest of Lake Turkana or in the lower Omo valley” (Sobania 1980: 75). Today “all sections share a common culture and language” but they are not a “homogenous unity” (Almagor 1978: 17, Pauli 1950: 160). The most pronounced differences occur to the Randal and Kuoru who are the most recent immigrants.<sup>15</sup>

Around the turn of the century, a time of disasters, many peoples living in the Lake Turkana Basin were starving.<sup>16</sup> They, in turn, moved away in search of food. Among those who found sanctuary among the Dassanetch, who had not suffered that much, were the Samburu and Rendille. Assimilations of one group into another were not uncommon but this one assumed another dimension. “Gradually these Samburu and Rendille enclaves were absorbed, acculturated and ultimately assimilated into Dasenech society and are today recognized as Kuro and Randal section respectively” (Sobania 1980: 202).<sup>17</sup>

### **3 Social organisation – clans, moieties, generation-sets, and bond-friendships**

Dassanetch society is grouped into eight tribal sections (explained above) each of which is made of exogamous patrilineal clans. Descriptions of the *tur* (clans) are in some way contrary. Almagor describes clans to have no genealogical structure, common territory, shared rituals or political organisation (Almagor 1978b: 70). Patrilineality is not used to delineate corporate groups and clan solidarity is weak (Almagor 1978: 9, 18). Clan affiliation, on the other hand, is stable (Tosco 2001: 3). There are *bil* (sub-group; literally house) within a clan which Almagor names sub-clans. Some clan or sub-clan

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<sup>15</sup> For example the Randal and Kuoru sections do not perform the *dimi* ceremony and also do not have the moiety system (Almagor 1978: 17). Both features are described below.

<sup>16</sup> From 1880 on the region around Lake Turkana suffered severe drought and famine because the rains had failed to appear. Outbreaks of contagious bovine pleuro-pneumonia and rinderpest followed. During the 1890s smallpox spread among the different ethnic groups (Sobania 1980: 133, 162, 190).

<sup>17</sup> Randal is the name the Dassanetch give to the Rendille and Kuoru the name which the Dassanetch give to the Samburu. Even though they were assimilated and are regarded as Dassanetch the Kuoru and Randal section have kept their names (Tosco 2001: 2).

names recur in different tribal sections that derive either from the way in which a group of immigrants spread over several sections or how the segments of a group have changed their affiliation (Almagor 1978: 22).

Carr's data contrasts with Almagor's in that way that she describes most clans as having certain duties and/or rights. My host father confirmed this description. These duties and rites are of importance in Dassanetch life and may include everyday, ritual, or special activities. Some clans have similar duties for different tribal sections while others of the same name strongly contrast in duties among sections (see Appendix B) (Carr 1977: 109). Carr does not mention what persons – clan heads<sup>18</sup> or specialists – exercise these duties.

The Dassanetch are divided into endogamous moieties – *baadiyet* (outside) and *geergi* (womb) – whereas every Dassanetch belongs to the *dolo* (moiety) alternate to that of her/ his father and identical with that of her/ his grandfather (Almagor 1989: 147). “The division into moieties cuts across territory, tribal sections, clan and the age-system groupings” (Almagor 1978: 23). An exception are the two tribal sections Randal and Kuoru: all Randal belong to the *geergi* moiety while all Kuoru belong to the *baadiyet* moiety (Almagor 1978: 35).

Besides regulating marriage the moieties have ceremonial functions. For instance they form the primary organising principle for *dimi* ceremony<sup>19</sup> that is held separately for each moiety of an individual tribal section. The moieties' connotation with fertility – *baadiyet* is connoted with male and *geergi* with female – are stressed on these occasions (Almagor 1978: 23; Carr 1977: 105).

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<sup>18</sup> It is not at all clear yet whether there are clan-based leaders in Dassanetch. Almagor and Carr do not report of any persons like that but Tadesse states that one of his Arbore informants told him “they seek the blessing of a D'assanetch man who has the same powers as Qawot Lochilil [senior ritual leader] and controls the other end of the desert” when returning from Dassanetch to Arbore (Tadesse 1999: 109).

<sup>19</sup> *Dimi* ceremony is undergone by those men who have fathered a daughter eight to ten years before. It is a time of feasting and dancing. At the ceremony about ten cattle and thirty small stock are slaughtered, others are traded for coffee. The *ara* (leaders of the most senior generation set) bless the girl for fertility and future marriage. The father of the girl acquires the status of an elder, independently of his membership of a generation set. In that way *dimi* is the most important ceremony in a man's life (Almagor 1978: 33, 68).

The central defining principle of Dassanetch social organisation is age. Every man belongs to a *hari* (generation set<sup>20</sup>) and to one of the peer cliques of which “annuals” are constructed (Almagor 1978b: 79). It is through this membership in a peer clique and participation in its activities that a man’s formal social position is determined. Power in the age system is vested in a clique of about thirty *ara* (elders, literally: bulls). This title is conferred upon “certain elders elected by and from the surviving elders of the senior generation-set” (Almagor 1978: 24-25).

The Dassanetch have six named generation sets which are serially arranged and grouped into two triads. Each generation set in one triad has its counterpart in the other. Each of the pairs – *Nyemur* and *Nyemolomoyen*, *Nilimeto* and *Nikoria*, *Nigabite* and *Nilimkorio* – forms one line that a man and his male descendants pass (Almagor 1978: 24; Almagor 1978b: 72-73).<sup>21</sup> “A man’s generation set is determined at birth and he always joins the alternate set to that of his father” (Almagor 1979: 129). The age differences within one generation set may be forty years or more since entry into one set depends on when its alternate one starts to beget children. Thus a “generation set is not a set of coevals” (Almagor 1979: 129). Each alternation is endogamous and has its own meeting place (Almagor 1978: 29; 1979: 136).<sup>22</sup> The stratification by age groups can be compared to a ladder with slanting rungs. “The older the age-group, the fewer the strata represented in it” (Almagor 1978: 24).

Age peers are, in theory, a group of equals and should not use *fargoginte* against each other. No member of the clique should show off (Almagor 1979: 122). But “the image of equality and the process of differentiation among peers do not correspond” (Almagor 1978b: 80). Such differences between peers are created by bond partnerships and affinal

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<sup>20</sup> Carr translates *hari* with age set which is not correct since in a *hari* persons who are of the same generation and not of a close age are grouped (Baxter, Almagor 1978: 2). The term “generation” does not necessarily mean that it is an aggregation of fathers or of sons, it rather “emphasizes the structural distance by which the position of a son within the age class system is defined by the position of his father in the same system” (Bernardi 1985: 73). In the following I use the expression peer clique and age group to refer to cliques within a generation set. A generation set itself is a relatively loose linkage while the members in peer cliques are knitted together tightly.

<sup>21</sup> When I talked with my friends and informants in Dassanetch they used the terms *Nabus* and *Kubir*. According to Nakwa, my host mother, the term *Nabus* is equivalent to *Nyemur* as *Kubir* is to *Nyemolomoyen*.

<sup>22</sup> Nakwa told me that each generation set also has its own *naab* (dancing place).

ties. The older the members of a peer clique get, the more they move geographically and socially apart (Almagor 1978b: 84).

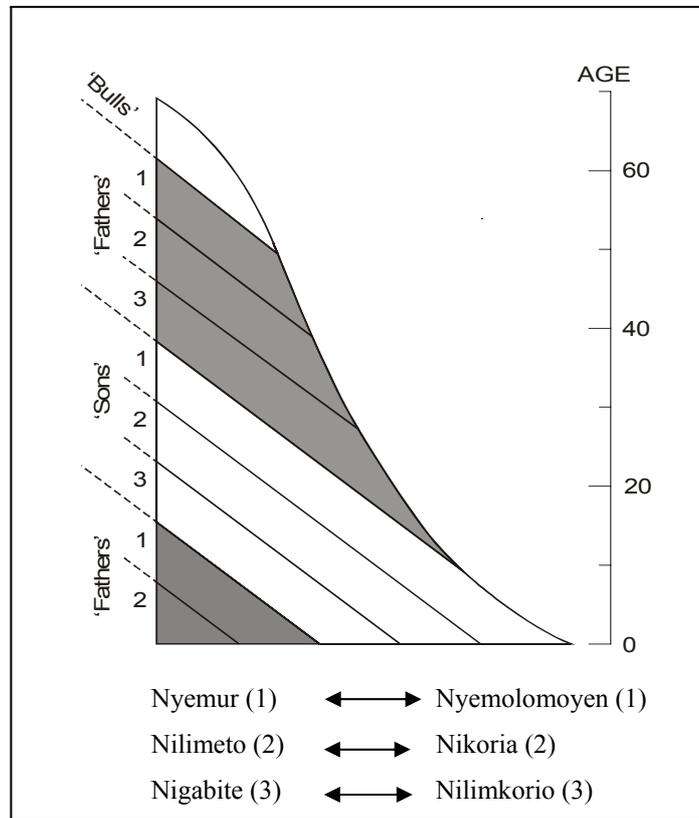


Figure 2: The Dassanetch generation sets  
(Almagor 1978: 25)

#### EXCURSUS: FEMALES AND GENERATION SETS

Age sets and generation sets are organising structures in many ethnic groups in Eastern Africa, but mostly women are affiliated to their husbands' set. Even where female classes and grades occur it "is no more than a bland form of parallelism to the male form" (Bernardi 1985: 137). For example, in Bashada and Tsamai women become members in an age set through their husbands. This indirect involvement in the age sets regulates Tsamai women's lives in that way that those being members of the senior age set may not use ox-drawn ploughs, milk cows or enter the cattle kraal (Melesse 1994: 38). In Kara there are said to be "ten named latent age-groups" among women while in contrast there are only eight age groups of men. But women's age groups "do not function as actively as the age-groups of men" (Gezahegn 2000: 68).

In the literature, information about Dassanetch girls' and women's affiliation are not clear. While Carr describes females being affiliated to their husband's generation set and to their father's generation set (before marriage); Almagor reports that Dassanetch females belong, like males, to one of the six generation sets. "The principle of affiliation with age-categories applies to women who, like men, enter a predetermined generation-set at birth according to patrilineal lines of descent" (Almagor 1989: 150). Similar to Kara, "women's affiliation ...[sic] are purely nominal and are not expressed in the actual grouping of women into age group units within generation-sets". The main importance of a woman's affiliation in the generation sets lies in the rule of exogamy (Almagor 1989: 150). According to Almagor, unmarried teenage girls who live in the same settlement and belong to the same generation set are organised in groups in which the girls "help each other in the many domestic and economic chores they perform." It may also be regarded as a means to "protect themselves from the boys' 'misbehaviour'" (Almagor 1983: 100-101).

Though information is contradictory, both authors agree that women's generation sets are of much less importance than men's. Baxter and Almagor explain this as follows: "it is because women are entangled in domestic cares much earlier and from the start much more tightly than are men". The transitions from girl to wife to mother and to old woman occur on an individual basis; group affiliation plays a minor role (Baxter, Almagor 1979: 11).

Dassanetch girls and women, when asked, speak of themselves belonging to a certain age group. For example my host mother Nakwa told me that the women of her *hari* meet from time to time and slaughter an ox, without men being present.<sup>23</sup>

Further studies are necessary to make clear statements about girls' and women's affiliation and about the effect this affiliation has on their lives.

Besides peer cliques, bond partnerships play an important role in Dassanetch social organisation. They are mainly of importance for men, "especially from the standpoint of increasing [their] array of social and economic relations" (Carr 1977: 118) since most bond partnerships are established between men only. Thus I present only an overview.

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<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately I did not ask whether Nakwa meant the whole generation set. I suppose she rather spoke of smaller groups into which girls of one generation set living in one village are organised. See above.

Among men there are five different bond partnerships with each bond characteristic of a particular stage in a man's life (Almagor 1978: 122). The bond partnerships are created and reinforced by reciprocal exchange of gifts. "We meet and greet each other. ... If we... agree to be friends, he will not go back empty-handed from my settlement. Or I will not come back empty-handed from his settlement" (Sobania 1980: 122). The *lil-metch afu* (bond partnership of lips) is established between teenage boys. It is considered a weak bond and is dissolved when the boys undergo the hairdressing ceremony<sup>24</sup> (Almagor 1978: 107). The *lil-metch shisho* (bond partnership of gift) is established between men from of twenty to forty years of age. It derives from economic interests that are approximately equivalent and eventually lose force (Almagor 1978: 108). When a boy reaches physical maturity he undergoes a ceremony in which he establishes the *lil-metch uru* (bond partnership of smearing) with a man from his *hari* (generation set). This creates an unbreakable bond (Almagor 1978: 110). On circumcision the *lil-metch kerno* (bond partnership of holding) is created. The man who is circumcised is held by the "holder" who afterwards gives him a headrest, beads and necklaces, calabashes and a skirt (Almagor 1978: 112). The strongest bond of all according to Almagor is the *lil-metch meto* (the bond partnership of name-giving). It is created when a newborn child is named after someone at the name-giving ceremony (Almagor 1978: 119-120).

According to Almagor there is only one bond between females, the *beele kerno* (friendship of holding). When a girl gets circumcised she is held by another female who has already undergone the procedure. Almagor writes that this bond is rather weak and usually elapses after a while. Thus it is not referred to as a real partnership but as a friendship. Often it is entered because of affection between the girls or out of friendship between the girl's mother and another woman. In many cases men are involved in that that they suggest the woman who shall hold the girl and try to strengthen their own affinal ties through this (Almagor 1978: 118). There is not much known about this kind of friendship. Among Turkana women for example exist institutionalised friendships

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<sup>24</sup> The *me tagniya* (hairdressing ceremony) is a ceremony boys undergo at about the age of 17 to 20. The ceremony is undergone by every peer clique separately and independently. By changing their hairstyle the boys mark their transition to manhood. The *nigen* (boys) become *kabana* (men). It is at this time that the peer cliques are formally and fully incorporated into the generation sets (Almagor 1978: 120; Almagor 1979: 129; Almagor 1978b: 73-75).

between women. These are made in youth and last until after the female has married (Schultz, Scholz 1994:78). Further research in Dassanetch is necessary about this topic.

#### **4 Modes of subsistence – pastoralism, agriculture, and fishing**

According to Almagor the Dassanetch see themselves as pastoralists although their economy is only partially based on pastoralism. Agriculture plays an equivalent role in subsistence.<sup>25</sup> Most Dassanetch dislike fishing but eat fish during the dry season as a supplement (Almagor 1978: 1).

I have laid out the conditions for Dassanetch economy above, the Omo River being the determining variable. Once a year the Omo rises and inundates the riverbanks and surrounding flats.<sup>26</sup> After the water retreats (September/October) and plots have ceased to be muddy, clearing and sowing can be started. Sowing on the riverbanks can be started earlier than on the flats because they dry earlier. This variation permits an early and late harvest. The main sorghum crop, as well as maize and beans, are harvested in February/March. Depending on whether the rains come in time, there is a second or even third harvest (Almagor 1978: 40-43).

Floodwaters and rain have a big influence on pastoral economy, too. The “large number of cattle”<sup>27</sup> graze on the east and west bank. Grazing areas vary seasonally according to rain, from November until March on the east bank and from March until November on the west bank. In each season the herds move in order to make the best use of the

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<sup>25</sup> The same holds true for other ethnic groups in Southern Ethiopia, such as the Arbore and Nyangatom (Tadesse 1999: 168; Alvarsson 1987: 17). Spooner states that “most pastoralists rely on non-pastoral products for their subsistence” but pastoralism is more valued (Spooner in Melesse 1994: 12). In Dassanetch cattle occupy a central position in economy as well as in society overall. They contribute to the diet by supplying milk, butter, blood and meat. Skins are used for building houses. Cattle are a medium of exchange, especially as bridewealth. (Carr 1977: 99) Men are identified with cattle. For instance, every man has a name-oxen for which he sings and dances. All members of one age set take part in such name-ox ceremonies which strengthen the affiliation of the age mates (Almagor 1972: 90).

<sup>26</sup> While flats may be cultivated by anyone (a person acquires rights over a plot simply by clearing and preparing it) the rights to cultivate on the riverbank are derived from a person (Almagor 1978: 44). Flats are also called *les Waagiet* (land of God) and river banks *les baba* (lands of the fathers) (Sobania 1980: 104).

<sup>27</sup> The facts about how many cattle the Dassanetch own differ. Almagor speaks of three to four cattle and nine to ten small stock per person while Carr reports that many stock owners have 40 to 50 head of cattle (Almagor 1978: 45; Carr 1977: 177).

different kinds of grass (Almagor 1978: 50). Herding involves both daily treks from the village, including watering the cattle and small stock, and extended periods away from the village with temporary *foritch* (stock camps) (Carr 1977: 181). A man's stock is not grazed together: cattle graze before small stock in order to protect the pasture and in the dry season sheep are often separated from goats. There is no pattern the herders follow in successive years. They move rather freely. Within a tribal territory no member has specific pasture rights in any place. Whoever reaches a plot first grazes it. Seasonal movements have the effect that the land is saved from overgrazing and deterioration (Carr 1977: 181; Almagor 1978: 50).<sup>28</sup>

Over the year the economy is based on a balance between cultivation and animal husbandry. Individual households follow a transhumant pattern of herding and cultivating. During the "time of plenty" which begins in December with the first harvest of the early sowing and when the milk yields start to rise, agricultural activities dominate and diets are based on agricultural products. During the "time of want" (milk yields drop and grain stores are exhausted) which begins in June, the Dassanetch rely more on their stock and eat more meat since "food shortage is too severe for the old and the sick to bear so it is justifiable to slaughter animals in order to sustain them" (Almagor 1978: 52-54).

Though Lake Turkana and the Omo are abundant in fish, only few Dassanetch subsist on fish.<sup>29</sup> Those who live mainly by fishing are considered poor people and "there are many restrictions on social relations with fishermen" (Almagor 1978: 52). Already von Höhnel stated: "Only the poorest of the people eat fish" (von Höhnel 1894: 166).

Besides climatic and environmental conditions which influence economy Dassanetch tribal segmentation has an impact, too. "It is through his membership in one of the eight sections that he [every Dassanetch] acquires the rights for grazing and cultivation" (Sobania 1980: 46). Due to the unique environmental features of each section's territory, the dominance and emphasis of one particular economic mode varies. While

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<sup>28</sup> Carr describes changes in economic production modes (on the west banks) since land is more and more restricted (by the police or due to tsetse flies). This limits the territory and accelerates overgrazing. "The overstocking ratio ... derived, however, indicates that it is not possible for stock raising to serve as the sole source of their subsistence. Therefore, it is imperative that the vast majority of Dasanetch production units undertake to diversify their productive activities" (Carr 1977: 280).

<sup>29</sup> Almagor reports of two villages on the northeastern shores of Lake Turkana and a few small villages along the Omo River in the tsetse meander belt which subsist mainly on fish (Almagor 1978: 52).

the Inkabelo mainly cultivate and practise animal husbandry, fishing plays a bigger role among the Rielle, who live in a small territory directly at the Omo (Sobania 1980: 46).<sup>30</sup>

## **5 Relations with neighbouring groups – trading and raiding**

As can be seen from map four, the Dassanetch are surrounded by several ethnic groups. Relations with their neighbours ranged and range between hospitality and hostility, trading and raiding.

The unique environmental conditions of Dassanetchland, first and foremost the Omo River, allow the Dassanetch to harvest a “surplus grain”.<sup>31</sup> The Dassanetch trade sorghum and other agricultural products such as tobacco with the Hamar, Bashada, Kara, Arbore, Turkana, Samburu and Rendille (Sobania 1980: 105).<sup>32</sup>

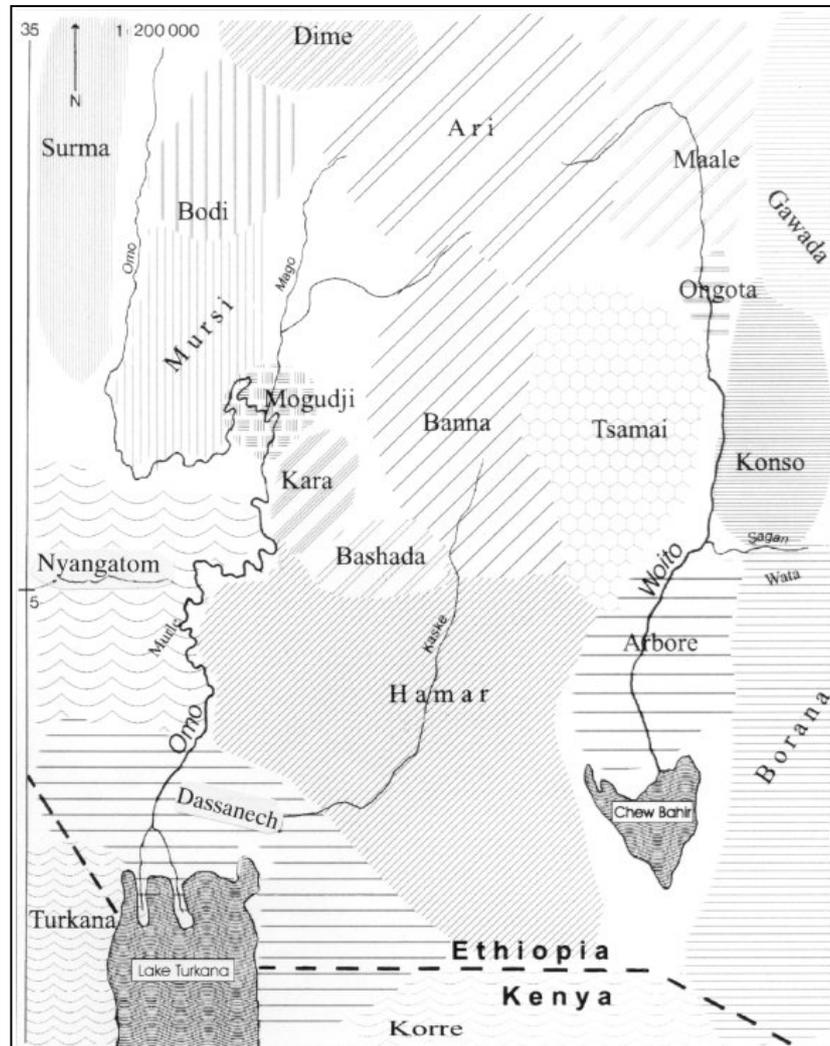
It is possible to roughly identify two exchange networks. Both networks are comprised of different ethnic groups and different “brokers”. The first network involves the Konso who produce clothes, spears, knives, irons, bracelets and grow coffee and the Arbore who bring these products to the Dassanetch. The other network includes the Hamar, Bashada and Kara. The Kara and Hamar serve as “brokers between the Dasenech and the Bachada, as well as providing articles of their own manufacture”. These articles are iron ware, clay pots, coffee, and honey. The production and trade of grain is also a means to acquire new stock (Sobania 1980: 106-109, 220). Nowadays the trade of firearms, bullets and *arakit* (local alcohol) plays a big role. The Dassanetch get firearms through the network Arbore, Hamar and Tsamai. *Arakit* is traded for goods from Kenya, such as contraband textiles, laundry and toilet soaps. (Tadesse 1999: 163, 268)

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<sup>30</sup> See Appendix D and map two.

<sup>31</sup> Unlike in Hamar, in Dassanetch agricultural activities did not solely depend upon rain that occurred irregularly. Because of the Omo environmental conditions in Dassanetch are much better than in Hamar and more suitable for cultivation (Sobania 1980: 104).

<sup>32</sup> The Dassanetch did this in the past and still do it the same way.



Map 4: The neighbouring groups of the Dassanetch  
 ([www.uni-mainz.de/Organisationen/SORC/content/view/63/43](http://www.uni-mainz.de/Organisationen/SORC/content/view/63/43)  
 retrieved September 14, 2004)

The actual mode of exchange was between individuals. Men and women travelled with small sacks to seek trading partners. The Dassanetch also went to their neighbours but seldom with grain; they usually carried tobacco or stock (Sobania 1980: 110).

Trade relations between the Dassanetch and neighbouring groups were influenced by the system of bond friendships which is inherent to other ethnic groups in the Lower Omo Basin, too. Since there are no restrictions which precluded the formation of bond

partnerships with individuals of other ethnic groups, the Dassanetch used this kind of tie to strengthen economic activities (Sobania 1980: 126).<sup>33</sup>

As I already indicated, Dassanetch were not always peaceful with their neighbours. The Dassanetch, whose warriors have “a fearsome reputation as fanatic and bloodthirsty killers,” raid and are raided by neighbouring groups (Almagor 1979: 121).<sup>34</sup> Quarrels at water holes, forays by warriors, or outright attacks to secure additional grazing led to temporary trade stoppages (Sobania 1980: 110). While “relations with the Borana are continuously hostile,” fights and clashes with Hamar, Turkana, and Nyangatom alternate with economic and social interchange (Carr 1977: 9).

The rewards of raiding are cattle, girls, and prestige. A man who has killed an enemy wears scars on his chest to distinguish him. But the prestige gained from raiding cannot be converted into strengthened individual status or into a group position in the peer clique because social position is not dependent on success in raiding (Almagor 1979: 135).

Almagor argues that hostilities usually take the form of reciprocal raiding which is governed by certain conventions and that escalations where rules are violated are less frequent (Almagor 1979: 123-126). Cattle and small stock have just moved back and forth from one to the other but none has gained a substantial amount. Raiding is typically small-scale and evolves spontaneously from a clique of ten to fifteen age peers in their twenties (Almagor 1979: 122).

Ivo Strecker took a closer look at warfare between Hamar and Dassanetch. He states that around the turn of the century when drought had ruined the crops in the Hamar mountains, the Hamar went down to the Omo delta and made fields alongside those of the Dassanetch (Strecker 1976: 11). Warfare between Hamar and Dassanetch started in the 1920s when “the Hamar flourished so well among the Galeba, that rivalry and antagonism developed among them“ (Strecker 1976: 34). Strecker estimates that between 1944 and 1974, at least one hundred people were killed on each side. A certain

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<sup>33</sup> The most common type of bond partnership that existed between Hamar, Kara, Dassanetch and Turkana was the bond of “gift-giving” (Sobania 1980: 127-129). Strecker also reports that his Hamar friend Choke Baje established bond friendships with Dassanetch men when they travelled to that area (Lydall, Strecker 1979: 131).

<sup>34</sup> Dassanetch warriors do not see themselves in the way described but according to Almagor they do not object to this image because of its psychological and strategic advantage (Almagor 1979: 143).

pattern is distinguishable: raiding occurred especially during drought times. When the harvest was rich the relations relaxed (Strecker 1976: 43).<sup>35</sup>

Like Strecker Almagor sees the hostilities in South Omo to have escalated in number and intensity during the last fifty years. This may be due to the introduction and spread of firearms in the area (Almagor 1979: 128).

Warfare between Dassanetch, Arbore and Kara has been a taboo ever since, because they regard each other of “one kin” and belonging to one family. Quarrels that lead to a loss of life between these groups is avoided. (Tadesse 1999: 65; Gezahegn 2000: 104) At times Arbore collaborated with Dassanetch in attacks on the Hamar by providing them with access to Arbore territory to launch attacks on the Hamar. (Tadesse 1999: 65)

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<sup>35</sup> The years 1972 and 1974 seem to have been exceptions when raiding took the form of serious escalation “bordering on all-out war” (Almagor 1979: 126). Warfare between Dassanetch and Nyangatom led to over 200 casualties and starvation among both groups since the fields were abandoned (Lussier 1993: 64).

## II. Circumstances of my research in the field

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### 1 How I came to study the Dassanetch

I had been to Ethiopia once before I decided to study the Dassanetch girls and women. In spring 2002, I did an internship in Addis Abeba with a German land use and gender project from the Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ). During that time, I also went to Southern Ethiopia to visit the Hamar about whom I had heard much in seminars from professor Ivo Strecker at Johannes Gutenberg-University in Mainz. A few days in Turmi, one of the Hamar towns, were enough to make me wish to come back and do research in this region.

Then in April 2002, Ivo Strecker and his doctoral student Susanne Epple organised a student field trip to Southern Ethiopia.<sup>36</sup> The plan was to send a couple of students to do research among different ethnic groups. After that the workshop *Pride and Social Worthiness of Women in South Omo* was to be held in the South Omo Research Center (SORC)<sup>37</sup> in Jinka to which each of the students and researchers invited girls and women from different ethnic groups.

During one of our preparatory meetings, Professor Strecker proposed that my fellow student Konrad Licht and I to go to the Dassanetch. At that time, I did not know anything about the Dassanetch and was a little sceptical about doing research there. I read Almagor's "Pastoral People" and Carr's "Pastoralism in Crisis" and was

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<sup>36</sup> This field trip to Southern Ethiopia was not the first being organised by Ivo Strecker. Already in 1995, 1996, and in 2000 social anthropology students from Mainz University went to Hamar, Banna, and Bashada to do fieldwork. Several M.A. Theses came into being out of these field trips. See: Susanne Epple 1995: Life in Gunne. Social relationships in a Village in Bashada, Southern Ethiopia; Nicole Mohaupt 1995: The dances of the youth as a reflection of gender relations and a gerontocratic society in a village in Bashada; Alke Dohrmann 1996: Kürbisgefäße im Leben der Banna; Sandra Becker 1996: Choke, Dikaranda und ihre Kinder. Portrait einer Familie in Hamar, Südäthiopien; Tatjana Kranjc 1997: Krieg und Frieden in Süd-Omo (Äthiopien) – Eine Darstellung aus der Sicht der Hamar.

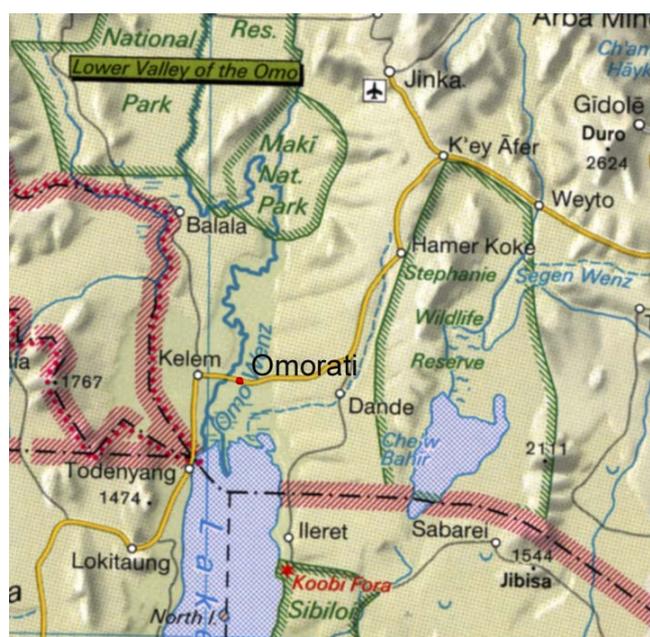
<sup>37</sup> The SORC is a unique place in Southern Omo. It is here where the ethnic groups have space to present themselves and to get together for workshops and discussions. It is an inter-ethnic meeting place. For more information about the SORC see: Ivo Strecker 1992: Some steps in the planning of a research centre at Jinka, South Omo; Ivo Strecker 1994: Museum of South Omo Natural and Cultural Heritage. Principles of Construction and SORC homepage ([www.uni-mainz.de/Organisationen/SORC](http://www.uni-mainz.de/Organisationen/SORC) retrieved September 14, 2004).

disappointed. The question I had asked myself most often during reading was “What about the women?”. The two authors had dealt extensively with pastoralism and bond partnerships, but women had been almost excluded from their research. Almagor does not forget women; he describes bridewealth questions and marriage, but he never lets the women speak. Women are merely objects, never actors or informants. They are “muted” (Ardener 1975: 21-22).

This also motivated me. Because I have been interested in research about and by women for a long time and have studied this in Mainz as well as in Lund, Sweden, I wanted to go to Aoga to get insights into the lives of the Dassanetch women, one important part in Dassanetch culture which has been more or less neglected in the past literature.

## 2 My research site – the village Aoga

In August 2002, Konrad and I flew to Addis Abeba. From there we drove to Jinka, the provincial capital of the Southern Omo Zone and home to the South Omo Research Center. We stayed one night at the centre and continued our journey with the SORC-Toyota to Omorati, a small Dassanetch town in Southern Ethiopia. Due to the bad condition of the road we needed almost one full day of driving for the approximately 220 kilometres.



Map 5: The location of Omorati within South Omo Valley  
(Planet Erde 1998:240)

We had been to Hamar only a few months before but now we felt like freshmen. We had never been to Dassanetch, and we neither knew the language nor a Dassanetch who could have introduced us to the people. When we arrived in Omorati<sup>38</sup> we were in search of a village not too far away from the town but we did not know in which direction to head or what to expect from these people whom the Hamar call thieves and liars.<sup>39</sup> Our second day we met Mamuie, a young English teacher, who wanted to help us with finding a village. The plan was to drive around a little, have a look at several villages and then choose one. The reality: we only made it into the first village – Aoga. When we arrived in Aoga, about four kilometres southwards from Omorati, on the east banks of the Omo River, we slowly got off the Toyota. A tall, slim man – Nyabba – came towards us and invited us into his house. His children gathered around us and looked curiously into the car, grabbed my hand and led me to Nyabba’s house. His wife<sup>40</sup> – Nakwa – gave us coffee and milk while we told them about our plans to study the Dassanetch. I told Nyabba that I wanted to learn about the life of Dassanetch women. He seemed excited and invited us to put up our tent next to his houses. From this moment on, we were integrated in Nyabba’s family.<sup>41</sup>

*From my diary (Aug. 18, 2002): We just came back from “our” village. Damn, I don’t remember the name of the village. But it is very nice. It seems perfect. I am really looking forward to get to know the people.*

At that time, about thirty houses comprised Aoga. Not all of them were inhabited because many women and men were in the field. Aoga was not fenced and did not have any natural shade. It was surrounded by wide, sparse land with very few bushes and almost no trees. The view and the unbearable heat at first made it seem like a desert. We decided not to put up our tent next to Nyabba’s houses, instead about thirty metres

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<sup>38</sup> For more information on Omorati see chapter four.

<sup>39</sup> Before I went to Aoga in January 2004 I spent one week with Susanne Epple in Bashada. Here I met her host family and friends. When Susanne told them that I research among the Dassanetch, they answered that the Dassanetch are bad people who lie and steal.

<sup>40</sup> Nakwa is his first wife but I did not know that at the time of arriving.

<sup>41</sup> We could not stay immediately in the village because we did not have a research permit and the administration head in Omorati did not want us to live in a village without this permit. We had to stay in Omorati and after four days Awoke Aike, President of South Omo and close friend of Ivo Strecker, explained to him that we are anthropology students and convinced him that we could do research in Aoga.

away. This was due to a practical reason: we hoped to find some shade under one of the rare acacias in the area. Because there was so little vegetation around Aoga, it was very vulnerable to wind. From late morning till late afternoon, when the sun was standing high, there were permanent winds blowing. These winds carried much sand and dirt into the village, the houses and my tent.



*Picture 1: A glimpse of Aoga when coming from Omorati*

Between my first and second stay many people had moved to different places. When the Dassanetch move, they take their whole houses with them. Thus, in January 2004 the village was smaller: only 20 houses were in Aoga. But the village itself had also changed meanwhile. When I came back, it had moved about fifty metres southwards.<sup>42</sup> Also, the arrangement of the houses within the village had changed (see maps six and seven).

Nakwa and Kidoa, too, had moved away in the meantime, but they had returned to Aoga several months before I returned. After I had left in September 2002, I knew they were about to move because of the *berisho* ceremony.<sup>43</sup> When Konrad returned in December 2002 from Aoga he told me that Nyabba had said they would move to the other side of the river and come back in the near future.

When I returned to the Dassanetch in January 2004, I was again supported by the SORC and drove to Omorati with the Toyota. I was not sure whether Nyabba's family was in

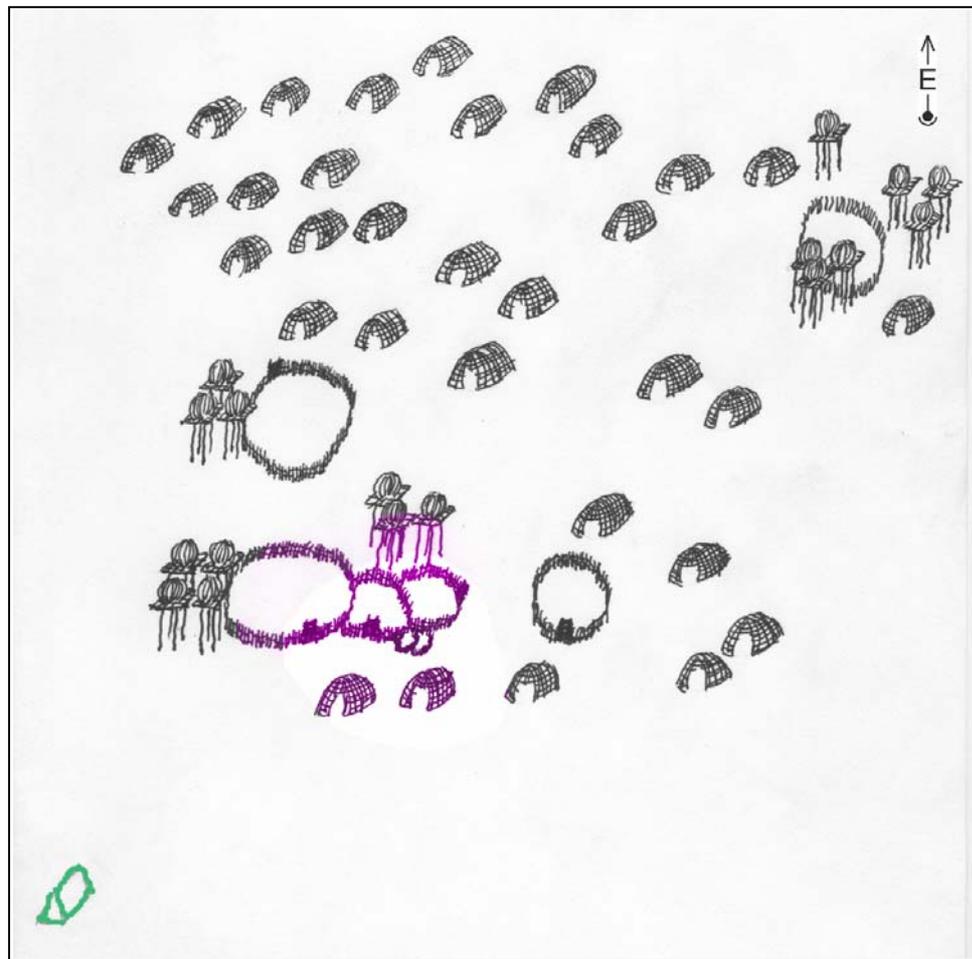
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<sup>42</sup> Nyabba explained to me that the village had moved because many goats had died at the other place.

<sup>43</sup> In the field I unfortunately did not find out what kind of ceremony *berisho* is. According to Carr it is the "exogamy breakage ritual" (Carr 1977: 116).

Aoga and what I would do if they were not. I immediately headed to Aoga and found the village almost as I had left it.

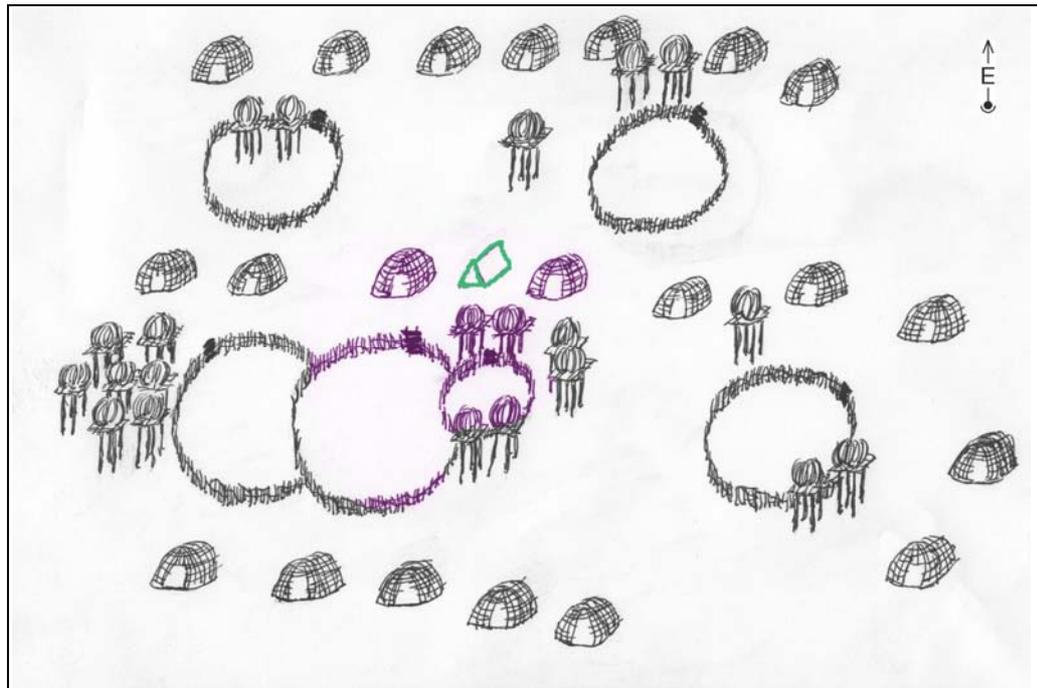
*From my letters (Jan. 26, 2004): I put up my tiny tent in between Kidoa's and Nakwa's houses and I must admit that I feel extremely safe in Aoga. But my tent is so unbelievably small. I think, they laughed at me yesterday because even Dassanetch houses are bigger than my tent. I managed to put all my bags inside but the jerry cans didn't fit. I had to put the rest in Kidoa's and Nakwa's houses. Maybe you can imagine how cramped it is when I try to fall asleep at night.*



Map 6: The village of Aoga in 2002 (those areas highlighted mark Nyabba's homestead: the cattle kraal, the goat kraal, Nakwa's and Kidoa's houses and the sorghum stores)

Legend:





*Map 7: The village of Aoga in 2004 (those areas highlighted mark Nyabba's homestead: the cattle kraal, the goat kraal, Nakwa's and Kidoa's houses and the sorghum stores)*

### **3 Time of the fieldworks – two seasons**

My fieldwork in Aoga comprised of two visits. My first stay was from August 16 until September 16 in 2002. The Omo had not risen yet. Some villagers, among them my host mother Nakwa, had a field far away. Only a few cattle were in Aoga since there were few grazing areas. Food was limited. There was not much milk, either. To speak with Almagor's words it was the "time of want".<sup>44</sup> Towards the end of my stay it started raining from time to time and the Omo rose. It was now that the crops could be sown. During my second stay which was from January 25 until February 15 in 2004, it was harvesting time, "the time of plenty". There was ample milk and enough food. The fields of my host family were close by on the banks of the Omo River. Like most women from Aoga Nakwa and Kidoa spent much of their time in the field harvesting sorghum, maize, beans, and tobacco.

<sup>44</sup> According to Almagor the "time of want" lasts from June until December and the "time of plenty" from December until June (Almagor 1978: 51).

Although I did not intend to do field research during two different seasons it clearly turned out to be an advantage. Though not being in the field for a very long time I was able to see how village life differed between harvesting and not harvesting time. During my second stay there was much more food and milk which was due to the season, while during my first stay, food and milk were not as plentiful.

## **4 Methodology**

### **4.1 Participant observation – life in a host family**

#### **4.1.1 My host family – Nyabba, his wives Nakwa and Kidoa, and their children**

From my very first day in Aoga I belonged in Nyabba's family – I was his daughter. Nyabba's wives Nakwa and Kidoa were my mothers and their children were my sisters and brothers. Nyabba belonged to the Fargaaru clan of the Inkabelo section and like all his children, I belonged to Fargaaru, too, he told me.

*From my diary (10.9.02): Today, two tourists came. This was the first time that we saw people coming to the Dassanetch and paying for taking photos. But I did not approach them because Okhul came and we went to the shade and just watched. In that moment, I felt like I belonged to this village. Earlier in the morning, Kidoa said that we are her children and Nyabba's children are our brothers and sisters. This was a slight feeling of home within all these curious feelings and "strange customs".*

Nevertheless, during my first stay my integration into Nyabba's family was not as strong and obvious to me (and probably neither to them) as it was during my second stay. This was mainly due to the fact that during my second stay, I spent almost all my time with them, which I had not done during my first stay.

When I returned to Aoga in January 2004, I was welcomed even more warmly than the first time.

*From my diary (26.1.04): They were very happy to see me. Just as I was. Nyabba immediately started to take care of me and showed me where I should put up my tent. Before going to bed, he told me to put everything inside of my tent so nothing would be stolen. Nakwa gave me tons of milk to drink. I really feel like I am in good hands.*

*From my diary (4.2.04): Before I came, I was very afraid that somebody could do any harm to me. These thoughts have totally disappeared. In between these two houses I feel so safe and secure. Sometimes I am annoyed but I am never afraid. I think having a “family” in the bush, one doesn’t need to be afraid, no matter if it is in Hamar, Bashada or Dassanetch.*

Because I was integrated into Nyabba’s family and liked them very much, I spent most of my time with them, mostly with Kidoa (Nyabba’s second wife), Nakwa (Nyabba’s first wife), and Nyendite (Nakwa’s oldest daughter).<sup>45</sup>

*From my letters (7.2.04): I notice that field research (at least mine) is a very subjective thing. It maybe shouldn’t be like that but a lot depends on the fact whether I like the people or not. If there is someone whom I don’t like, I go there only seldom. On the other hand, I spend almost all my time with Kidoa. But maybe it is the same the other way around. If someone doesn’t like me, s/he doesn’t come to see me either.*

In the following pages, I introduce my host family.<sup>46</sup> The order in which I present the members of Nyabba’s family is not arbitrary: I start with Kidoa who was my closest friend and main informant. Nakwa, Nyabba and the children follow.

## KIDOA

Many ethnographers have one key informant. In many cases such a relationship between ethnographer and informant had been growing into deep friendships, as, for example, in the case of Ivo Strecker and Aike Berinas, called Baldambe (Strecker 1998, Lydall 1998). When I went to the field for the first time, I hoped to find my “Baldambe”.

Kidoa, my host father’s second wife, fascinated me from the first time we had met. She was the one I spent most of my time with and taught me all the things a Dassanetch woman has to do every day. She taught me how to grind sorghum, cook *nyaadu* (sorghum porridge), prepare *bie kulla* (coffee) and milk the goats.

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<sup>45</sup> See also genealogy of Nyabba’s family in Appendix D.

<sup>46</sup> Konrad made a film about our host family that shows them in their everyday life (Licht F 2003).

*From my letters (3.9.02): The person I talk with most is Kidoa, my host father's second wife. Probably because she is my age and her daughters are so charming.*



*Picture 2: Kidoa – my best friend and host mother*

Kidoa is in her early twenties<sup>47</sup> and has two daughters – Nautcho (four years) and Nakwa (two years) – both of whom are named after Nyabba's other wives.<sup>48</sup> Kidoa is called A-Nautcho (Mother of Nautcho), after her oldest daughter Nautcho.<sup>49</sup>

But during my first stay we did not become as close as I had hoped. Nevertheless, I returned to Germany with the feeling of having a friend in Aoga.

*From my diary (16.9.02): I wanted to spend more time with Kidoa when Nakwa-Tini<sup>50</sup> has recovered. Not only for my research, but because Kidoa has become a friend to me.*

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<sup>47</sup> All age information is estimated since the Dassanetch do not know their date of birth. The age information given here refers to my second stay in Aoga in January/ February 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Nautcho, originally Nyabba's first wife, had died a long time ago. She left three children: Kabele, the first son, had died, Chimarre, the second son, went to school in Omorati and the daughter Orib. Orib (about seventeen years old) had been raised by Nakwa who always spoke about Orib as her daughter. It took me almost the whole time in the field until I finally knew that Orib is not the biological daughter of Nakwa. Since Nakwa and Kidoa told that they do not like to talk about dead people and death, I did not inquire further about Nautcho.

<sup>49</sup> Unlike in Hamar where women are named after their firstborn son, the teknonym of Dassanetch women refers to the first born, no matter if it is a girl or boy. Kidoa is called A-Nautcho after her first born daughter Nautcho.

<sup>50</sup> The small Nakwa is called Nakwa-Tini (small Nakwa) by everyone.

Coming back to Aoga, Kidoa's and my relationship developed more deeply. She did not only help in terms of understanding the everyday life of a Dassanetch woman but also gave me strength when I thought I could not manage life in Dassanetch dirt any longer. When I needed a few moments for myself – whether it was for resting or writing down some notes – I went into her house, which to me felt like my home, too.

*From my diary (27.1.04): Kidoa has a certain talent – she can explain things to me in Dassanetch and I understand it even though my language skills are not that advanced.*

Kidoa did not only have this special talent of explaining and teaching things. She was just as interested in German culture as I was in Dassanetch culture. When we talked to each other, it resembled a real dialogue. While I asked her how it is to be a second wife, she asked me how it is not to have a second wife. Our personal lifestyles fascinated each other.

We spent every evening together. After having milked the goats, we would prepare coffee and drink it mixed with fresh milk. Afterwards Kidoa cooked *nyaadu* (sorghum porridge) while I stayed outside with Nakwa-Tini and Nautcho. Then Nyendite and her friends came and sang a little with me. Afterwards Kidoa, her children, and I would huddle on a small cow hide or plastic sack, watch the stars, count from one to twenty in Dassanetch and English or talk about the moon.

*From my letters (28.1.04): In the evenings I sit with Kidoa in front of her house. While looking at the stars, I dream a little and try to forget all the scorpions and insects darting around me and the dirt on my body. Last night, the little Nakwa fell asleep while sitting on my lap. I had sung German lullabies to her.*

To me Kidoa was my best friend. I would have called her *beel* (friend) but genealogically she was considered to be my mother. When we went to the Omo and met curiously-asking Dassanetch women who did not know me, Kidoa told them that she was my mother. “*Heella initchu*”(This is my daughter) she used to say, which made us not only laugh but also made us feel proud.

*From my diary (4.2.04): I am afraid I don't notice any more that Kidoa and Nakwa are both Nyabba's wives. I regard Nakwa as his wife and my “mother”. But Kidoa is like my best friend. That's why she cannot be my “mother”.*

## NAKWA

While I had problems with accepting Kidoa as my “mother”, I never had any when it came to Nakwa, Nyabba’s first wife. Nakwa is a woman in her late thirties and mother of eight children (Loichama, Nyendite, Kolokhon, Karre, Ulli, Ankoï, Arba Nech, and Becky<sup>51</sup>). Nakwa told me that she is named after the village where she was born which was then Dassanetch territory but now belongs to the Bume (Nyangatom).<sup>52</sup> She is called A-Loichama (mother of Loichama) after her firstborn, who is her son, Loichama. To me our relationship was more like a mother-daughter relationship than that of friends. Our age difference could be the reason for that. For Nakwa I was a girl who still had much to learn and not a grown-up woman.



*Picture 3: My host mother Nakwa and her daughter Becky*

*From my diary (9.2.04): Aifack came into Nakwa’s house today and asked whether my mother was not at home. At first, I was slightly confused but then I understood that she had meant Nakwa. It seems as if I am Nakwa’s daughter in the eyes of the others, too.*

In many ways, Nakwa is a very strong woman. I was amazed how she could carry sorghum sacks on her head weighing not less than 40 kilograms after having worked all day long on the field.

*From my diary (8.2.04): Sometimes it is so annoying to have five small kids running around. I don’t understand how Nakwa can manage to take care of her eight children, or actually nine since she has raised Orib, too. Having two children like*

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<sup>51</sup> Her last-born daughter is named Becky after me. The Dassanetch in my village called me Becky.

<sup>52</sup> The village Nakwa talked about was near Mount Nakwa which is now in Nyangatom territory.

*Kidoa is nice but Nakwa's children are always teasing each other and one of them is always crying.*

Even though we were mother and daughter, I was a guest and she did not make me do the jobs daughters have to do. She gave me preferential treatment. I noticed this on many occasions, such as the times when I got an extra portion of milk.

*From my letters (28.1.04): I just came back from Nakwa. Nakwa called me and I thought we would drink coffee, nothing special. But it was only her and me and after she had put coffee in the calabashes, she put very quickly lots of sugar into them and whispered to me that we will drink this alone not telling anyone. If we would do that we have to share it with all the children.*

#### NYABBA

Nyabba, my host father, is a man of about 45 years of age. He is one of four elders in Aoga and a well-respected person.<sup>53</sup> Nyabba told me that one of their tasks is to mediate between people having an argument, for example, between husband and wife for example.

Nakwa and Kidoa, his wives, do not call him Nyabba but use the name I-Kabelle (father of Kabelle).<sup>54</sup>

Nyabba is tall and very skinny. Compared to Nakwa, he looks almost fragile and, in European terms, much more feminine than she does.

*From my diary (10.2.04): To me, the women are the stronger ones. They harvest the sorghum, maize and tobacco and carry the heavy sacks home on their heads. The men, Nyabba too, are skinny and when it comes to strength, they are inferior to the women. I cannot imagine that Nyabba possesses the physical strength to carry even half as much sorghum on his head as Nakwa does.*

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<sup>53</sup> The other three elders are Aiebet, Yerikoi (Nyabba's brother) and Atoll who lives in Omorati. These men own a *gintot* (special stone with a depression) that is used at boys' circumcision. Each boy sits on this *gintot* while his foreskin is cut and afterwards oil is applied onto his penis. Nyabba told me that one recognises the elders the day after the new moon. When the new moon comes and all his children are in Aoga, he and the children cover their faces and bodies with white clay.

<sup>54</sup> Kabelle, who died, was Nyabba's and his deceased wife's Nautcho's firstborn son. Nyabba nevertheless carried his name.

But nevertheless, it seemed to me that his children respected him much more than their mothers.

*From my diary (2.2.04): Arba Nech didn't take care of the house and the kids went inside. Nyabba got angry. Arba Nech still didn't listen. So, Nyabba took an alang branch, threatened, and Arba Nech ran away screaming.*

When neither of the women was around, Nyabba took care of Becky. He would go with her in Kidoa's house where it was cooler than in Nakwa's or in the shade. There he put her on his lap and rocked her gently.

I met him each morning when I had my first coffee in Kidoa's house. Although sitting inside, he was closely taking care of what was going on outside. While drinking coffee, he supervised what his sons Loichama, Karre and Ulli were doing with the cattle and small stock.

*From my diary (2.2.04): Nyabba seems to me like the conductor of a big orchestra. He is sitting in Kidoa's house but at the same time conducting everything his sons, daughters, and wives are doing outside.*



*Picture 4: Nyabba – my host father*

I did not have much to do with him, though, since I spent most time with the women and girls. I even felt uneasy when he was around. He also seemed not quite sure of what to do with me and say to me, this young white girl who wanted to learn how the Dassanetch girls and women live.

During my second stay, an incident happened that caused me to realise I had undermined his authority.

*From my diary (4.2.04): I am so fed up with everything. Right now I am sitting in my tent and crying like crazy. No one understands me. This stupid, drunk Nyabba is moaning to me because Samson is not coming any more and I didn't tell him in advance. As if I had known how everything would develop! Isn't it his fault when he spends the whole day in Omorati? Probably drinking beer and not doing anything else. I didn't understand him and he was snapping at me like this. Who does he think he is?*

The day after, everything was fine again. He did not say anything about this and I tried to forget how bad I had felt that night. A few days later there was another, completely different incident. It knit us somehow together and made me proud of having a father like him.

*From my letters (12.2.04): Last night something funny (in retrospect) happened. Something had stung/bitten me. When I walked to the bush it felt like my leg would become numb. I went into Naukwa's house (there was still fire inside) to look at my leg and started crying because I thought I have to die. Nyabba thought a scorpion had stung me and wanted me to go to him. So, the scene was the following: me sitting on a cowhide, crying, everything around me was pitch dark, while Nyabba (still little drunk from the beer in Omorati) was trying to suck the "poison" out of my thigh. I started to think about what a funny photo this would make and had to start laughing. Today, Naukwa has looked at it and said it was a gunni. Don't know for sure what that is but I hope it is only an ant.*

*From my diary (12.2.04): That must have been such a funny picture last night. ...After all this has changed my attitude towards Nyabba again. I still don't feel comfortable when he is around but I am very thankful that he is taking such good care of me if one thinks that I am actually a stranger...*

## KIDOA'S AND NAKWA'S CHILDREN<sup>55</sup>

Nakwa's oldest daughter Nyendite (about thirteen years old) was the one who taught me most about being a girl. Jente, as her friends used to call her, taught me how to properly cook sorghum, prepare coffee and take care of a baby (one should always have plenty of milk nearby). Thus I also like calling her my big little sister.

When I was in Aoga in 2002, she was very shy. In the evenings, when she was finished with milking the goats, she brought Konrad and me a *kulu* (lid of the milk container, about the size of a glass) filled with milk and sometimes shyly asked whether we had some sugar. We gave her a little and she quickly disappeared. Konrad and I had taken her to the workshop in Jinka where she felt very uneasy. She did not say much among that crowd of Hamar and Bashada women.

When I returned to Aoga in 2004, I felt like Nyendite started to become a self-confident and proud girl. She had not grown much or changed physically but her way of behaviour had changed. She was fond of making necklaces and couldn't wait until the sun went down to go dancing and singing with her friends Okhul, Aifack and Nadyaut. I did not have much to do with Nakwa's sons Loichama (about fifteen years old), Karre (about ten years of age) and Ulli (about eight years of age) because they were herding the cattle and small stock and did not spend their days in the village. Sympathy also played a role that I did not spend much time with the boys.

*From my diary (29.1.04): I don't like Loichama. He is such a show-off. Always behaving selfishly and speaking in such an arrogant tone towards Nakwa. But maybe boys in his age have to behave like that...*

The younger children like Ankoi, Nautcho and Arba Nech spent most of their days in Aoga playing. They were a great (and sometimes annoying) help in learning the language when they made me repeat Dassanetch words. Finally, after having pronounced them correctly, Ankoi smiled at me and clicked approvingly with his tongue. Sometimes, however, they gave me a hard time, too.

*From my diary (4.2.04): Kidoa and Nakwa are in the field. But all their children are here which I considered quite nice for a few minutes. Not any more. They are running*

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<sup>55</sup> Kidoa and Nakwa told me that the children of each the other one are also their children. Thus I will present the children of both women in this sub-chapter.

*through the house doing things they should not do. I feel like an Au-Pair-girl – not knowing the language but trying to take care of cheeky, little minxes.*

One child who captured my heart was Nakwa-Tini, Kidoa's youngest daughter.

*From my diary (13.2.04): It seems like Nakwa-Tini remembers who I am even though I have not been here for over a year and she was only half a year when I was here the last time. When she cries or something is bothering her and Kidoa is not around, she comes to me as if I were her second mother, calms down, and falls asleep on my lap. It is as if she knows that I was here before and spent a great a deal of my time with her. As if she knows that I used to hold her when Kidoa was milking the goats in the evenings or fetching water.*

Nyabba's oldest daughter Orib was at the *foritch* (stock camp) with her husband Kwanakwarin and Nakwa's daughter Kolokhon when I arrived for the second time. While being in the camp, someone told them that I was in Aoga and one day, Orib came to see me. She only stayed for three days, but still we found time to talk about newlyweds, the stock camp, and girlhood.

#### **4.1.2 Sharing everyday life**

My main method in getting to know how the Dassanetch girls and women live was to share and observe their daily routine. My taking part in the lives of Dassanetch girls and women was mainly limited to Nyabba's family. I also got to know many other girls, young and old women, but I decided to concentrate on a few individuals. "Instead of studying large samples of people, the anthropologist enters as fully as possible into the everyday life of a small group of human beings" (Keesing 1976: 9).

Through being there and actively taking part in the people's everyday lives I learned many things, often by accident. When I sat in Nakwa's house and saw something new I asked her about it. Mistakes were also a way of getting to know how things are supposed to be done in Dassanetch. Quite often I did something wrong without knowing that it was wrong and Nakwa explained it to me afterwards. I was like a child who did not know anything. This helped me to learn about Dassanetch customs and rules.

Through participant observation I obtained 1)important insights into their lives and roles (although I did not speak the language well) and 2)information about topics that neither interviews nor questioning could clarify sufficiently. For example, I interviewed Nakwa and Kidoa about their relations towards each other and they said that they assist each other. It seemed like they were best friends. But when observing their daily routines and living with them I noticed that they did not always get along well with each other and basically each of them took care of her own household.

I took part in such daily tasks as cleaning beans, fetching water, and milking the goats. I also wanted to accompany Kidoa to Omorati where she went quite often to sell her *dambu* (chewing tobacco).

*From my diary (5.2.04): Just went to Omorati with Kidoa. She wanted to sell tobacco and it had started quite well. On the way, we met the missionaries who took us to town in their car. But then we sat at the market and more and more people gathered around us. People I had met once in town were standing in front of us and watching or trying to make conversation. Poor Kidoa. No one looked at her tobacco any more because they wanted money, "karamella" or a t-shirt from me. Or they were simply standing there and staring. Kidoa chased a few kids away but with little success. She decided that it did not make sense and gave her tobacco to Bunno, and we went back to Aoga.*

Later, I realised that the main reason for returning to Aoga was not the fact that she did not sell her *dambu*. We mainly returned because she was disgusted and annoyed by all the people begging and demanding things from me. She told everyone in Aoga how the *ushumba* (Amhara) and Dassanetch had behaved and everybody confirmed that this was bad. Whenever she went to Omorati on later occasions she asked me whether I needed anything from town and bought it for me.

This example describes very well that I could not take part in the lives of my host family and friends without any consequences. I was not invisible. It shows that I had some impact on them, too. What is usually described only as a one sided process (the researchers are influenced by those being researched) but actually is a reciprocal one (those being studied are also influenced by the researcher).

## **4.2 Interviews**

### **4.2.1 Learning the language and working with a translator**

During both my stays, I worked with a translator. Before coming to Aoga for the first time, I could not speak a word of Dassanetch. Bit by bit, I learned some words and phrases so I could get by. But it was not enough for having a fluent conversation.

Before I came to Dassanetch in August 2002, I already knew that I wanted to do research about girlhood and womanhood. Besides the daily tasks and responsibilities of girls and women, I also wanted to know about important events in their lives like circumcision and marriage. I was well aware of the fact that a translator would have an impact on the interviews but it would have taken months until my language skills would have been advanced enough to allow clear communication. Thus I decided to work with a translator.

During my first stay I worked with a young man named Oscar Ode. He was originally from Ethiopia, but attended school in Kenya and knew English very well. During this time Oscar came to Aoga in the morning, spent the day with us and translated for Konrad and me. He went back to Omorati in the late afternoon.<sup>56</sup>

During my second stay I also wanted to work with a translator because I planned to spend only a few weeks in the field. Oscar was at school in Kenya. But while I was in Jinka before going to Aoga, I met Steven Koriye, a Dassanetch schoolboy. He was also one of the students' assistants of the South Omo Research Center. He wanted to come with me to Aoga and translate for me. I felt lucky that the problem of finding someone who speaks Dassanetch and English was solved so quickly. But Steven could not come with me immediately, so I left on my own. Having arrived in Omorati, I headed for Aoga and my host family immediately, not yet knowing how I would deal with the "language problem". In Omorati I met another student – Samson Ekitala Akol Abong – who could speak English and Dassanetch. But Samson had examinations in school in Omorati and had to study for those. We agreed that he would come a few hours per day and translate for me. Two weeks later Steven arrived and came to Aoga to translate for me. I discuss my problems in working with them below.

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<sup>56</sup> It was school vacation time in Kenya and Oscar stayed with his brother in Omorati.

Besides working with Samson and Steven, I spent a great deal of my time on my own without a translator – in the mornings, in the evenings, when Samson had class, and on Sundays. During that time I learned the language through listening to the others, trying to understand what they said, and repeating it. After some days, I already understood a lot but could not say much yet.

*From my diary (29.1.04): In the evenings when Kidoa would have more time, Samson is not here anymore. But on the other hand, this time without him is very important because that way I get to learn the language.*

#### **4.2.2 Formal and informal interviews**

Besides participant observation, I drew information from interviews and conversations, mainly informal ones. While drinking coffee or fetching water, the girls and women told me about their tasks. In 2002 Oscar was with me most of the time and translated for me. In 2004 I tried to ask about things myself because I spent more time without a translator and I could speak more Dassanetch than I could during my first stay. Though still being limited in knowledge of the language, I was able to chat with the women and girls. The talks with Kidoa probably were the ones that were most informative because she grasped quickly what I meant and I could understand her well, too.

We held these informal conversations while doing household tasks such as preparing coffee, cooking sorghum, or making chewing tobacco. On these occasions I learned many things by accident. When I saw something that was new to me, I asked Kidoa or Nakwa about it.

*From my diary (29.1.04): Working with the women is just as difficult as it was last time. Either they are in the field, cooking nyaadu, making dambu or selling it in Omorati or they have to take care of their cheeky children. That is why I have talked with Nakwa a lot less than with Kidoa. Yesterday I wanted to have a formal interview with Kidoa but that didn't work out. After a few minutes she had to go to the goats, or someone came and wanted coffee and so on. I realised that a scheduled interview*

*would be impossible. Because Kidoa and Nakwa are so busy, I can ask my questions and find out new things during informal talks.*

The reason for these informal interviews is the fact that the girls and women were busy most of the day and I did not want to disturb them.

*From my diary (30.1.04): Everyone is busy with their tasks. And me? Sometimes it is so difficult to be a researcher. The women have to go to the field or work around the house. I don't want to disturb them, so I wait with many questions until they have some spare time.*

Another reason for these informal interviews was my lack of language knowledge. I did not know enough to lead an abstract conversation, for example, about marriage. Instead it was much easier to ask Kidoa about her day in Omorati or about the skirt she was making for Nautcho.

I did a few formal interviews with Kidoa during my first stay and my second stay. During these Oscar or Samson translated for me. I did not tape the interviews and conversations. Instead I made notes later on in my diary and research notebook. I also wrote letters to my parents and my boyfriend which helped me in describing and remembering what I had just learned and seen with my own eyes.

*From my diary (2.9.02): So far I have not recorded anything when talking with Kidoa although I have the necessary tools. It is not the fear of destroying the recorder which stops me from doing that, but more the fact that to me, these recordings would lack genuineness. Kidoa talks; Oscar translates. Everything I understand is Oscar's words. Although he says that he translates as exactly as possible, I have problems attributing the translated words to Kidoa. While talking I also don't take notes because I am afraid this would destroy the flow of conversation. Instead I restrict myself to listening. I listen to what she says and talk with her and look into her eyes, just as I would in a normal conversation. I am sometimes afraid I might forget something, but I remember all the important things. My fear is unjustified. It is only because we are used to writing everything down that we have lost confidence in our memories. I want to rely on myself, also in the field. My impressions are subjective; I am well aware of that. But I am capable of differing information and observations from feelings. This is the most important thing.*

Certainly one reason for not recording interviews was also that I was not comfortable with the technical equipment. I knew how to operate it but not very well. Thus I was not only afraid that my informants could get distracted but also that I could not be concentrating on the interview and what Kidoa or Nakwa said but would rather be paying attention to the recorder.

When I interviewed Nakwa and Kidoa I noticed that there were certain, mostly abstract, topics about which it was difficult to pose questions. For example, the relationship between co-wives interested me from the beginning on but it was quite difficult to directly get to know something about it.

*From my diary (27.8.02): My interview with Nakwa and Kidoa about being a woman in Dassanetch was terrible. I noticed how much we live in two different worlds. While both women talked proudly about how good it is when a man has more than one wife I am sceptical, even though I sometimes have the feeling that the two are friends. I feel like the women here are an asset or the means to wealth. They explained that when one gets many children one wants especially girls because that way one gets a lot of bridewealth. We live in two different worlds and every one considers her's better. Is it possible to cross that border?*

## **5 Experiences and problems during my stays in the field**

Each of my two stays in Aoga was very different for me, mainly because of the different circumstances of my fieldworks. During my first stay, I spent less time with the women and girls than I did during my second stay. The main reason was that Konrad and I had put up the tent not directly in the village. When sitting outside of the tent, I was not only not involved in village life but also optically “an outsider”. During my second stay I was living inside the village. I spent almost all my time with the girls and women. This made me much more associated with things going on than the first time. Another reason was that during the second time I was by myself and not accompanied by Konrad or another (white) ethnographer.

## 5.1 Struggling to find my role

During both stays in Aoga, I was incorporated in Nyabba's family. I was his daughter and Kidoa and Nakwa were my mothers. My role changed insofar as during my first stay, I was considered a *minni* (woman)<sup>57</sup> while during my second stay I was a *maarti* (girl). This change occurred because in 2002, I had stayed in the field with Konrad. We lived together in one tent so we obviously seemed to be husband and wife. In 2004, I stayed in Aoga by myself and explicitly said that I was a girl.

*From my diary (28.1.04): All the women and girls keep on asking me whether I am a girl or a woman. As soon as I tell them that I am a girl, they look surprised. There are no such old and big girls in Dassanetch as I am. That is one reason why I feel strange going to the dances with the girls. The girls are only half as old as I am. Frustrating. The other problem is that most of them think I am a woman and Konrad's wife. They don't seem to understand that we are not husband and wife.*

Before going to Dassanetch for the first stay, I had read the *Work Journal* by Jean Lydall and Ivo Strecker. In it, Jean Lydall often wrote about of the "injustice" that for example she had to take care of the children and household while her husband could devote himself to research. She wrote in her diary: „I would like to be a Hamar man but I have no desire to be a Hamar woman. This constitutes a problem for me. I like Hamar a lot and want to identify with Hamar as closely as possible but I don't want to accept a woman's lot, yet I cannot adopt all that is a man's lot because I am not a real man" (Lydall, Strecker 1979: 173).<sup>58</sup>

I was very preoccupied with this possible problem and was, I thought, prepared for facing a similar role division among the Dassanetch. I was quite aware that I could not avoid slipping into the role of a woman, also because I was planning to stay in the field with a man.

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<sup>57</sup> The term *minni* refers to a married woman who has already given birth. Everyone knew that I did not have a child yet but they saw Konrad and me as a couple and referred to me as his wife.

<sup>58</sup> In her papers *Discovering womanhood through fieldwork* and *Versöhnte Kontraste* Lydall describes how she and Ivo Strecker were forced into and how they dealt with role divisions in Hamar (Lydall 1994, Lydall 1993).

In Aoga I tried to learn all the tasks women do: to grind sorghum, to cook *nyaadu* (sorghum porridge), to smoke the *kurrums* (milk containers), or to milk goats, because I wanted to learn about the women's lives and this was a perfect opportunity to learn about these things first-hand. But when I sat near the smoking fire and stirred the sorghum porridge or held the kids in the pouring rain, I longed for being a man and not having to perform these tasks. Another point was that I was dissatisfied with my role as a woman because I had the feeling of spending too much time with practical things.

*From my diary (8.9.02): I start to question my job as an anthropologist. I sit in front of the tent, filter water, fetch water again, wash my t-shirt, but what about the Dassanetch women?*

I was in a dilemma: on the one hand, I wanted to be a Dassanetch woman. I wanted to prepare coffee as they do, grind sorghum as well as they do, milk the goats as quickly as they do – but I could not fulfill these tasks like they do because I was a child, just as Kidoa sometimes said. All these jobs were new to me. And also I felt dissatisfied when doing these jobs and trying to live like a Dassanetch woman. I felt subordinated and had the feeling of lacking something because of these practical tasks.

*From my letters (24.8.02): Next to our tent some men always play a game. Yesterday, one of them came up to me and told me to fetch water. He was thirsty. I would have loved to pour the dirty water on his head. Of course, I didn't do it. It would not have helped.*

*From my diary (22.8.02): We have just been with Nyabba's second wife drinking coffee. Maybe I should not go with them anymore. I only sit there and wait for my coffee which I usually get last. It is a strange feeling. One sits while everyone else is shaking their calabashes. If I were here on my own, would I be the main guest and not only an appendage? I think so.*

I did the tasks women do but nevertheless I was not regarded as a “real” woman because I still had to learn all these tasks and because I was a *ferenji* (white person). Dassanetch women are only allowed to eat with their hands while men may use a spoon. The women break this taboo but only when no man is around. I, on the other hand, received a spoon for eating in presence of men.

*From my letters (3.9.02): All the time, I do something wrong and that really gets on my nerves. I stir the porridge but it is wrong because I have to stir it another way. Or I remove the grains from the sorghum stem but only with one hand and not with two hands. Or I sit like a man and not like a woman (legs stretched out). Theoretically I am not allowed to eat with a spoon, but sometimes I get one because they know that we have different rules.*

Nakwa especially did not regard me as a woman but rather as a girl. She and also Oscar, our translator, told me several times that I should go and play and do not have to sit in the house.

During my second stay, I was the “main guest” and not an “appendage” any more. I was not regarded and did not see myself anymore as a wife who has to fulfill such tasks like fetching water, preparing coffee and food. I was a girl because there was no man around, no household I could have been responsible for and no cooking place either.

*From my diary (5.2.04): This time, I have no problems with my role as a woman. Probably, because I am not as much a Dassanetch woman as I had been last time... Unlike last time, I don't want to be a woman anymore because I could never make it as a Dassanetch woman anyway. My rules are different and I have adapted a great deal but I cannot completely live like them.*

*From my diary (28.1.04): Last time, I felt disadvantaged, but now it is just the other way around. I go fetching water with the girls but mainly because I want to wash myself. I don't need to cook and have lots of clean drinking water, so I don't have to spend my whole day with cleaning the dirty and muddy Omo water. The girls and women do all the work and I can sit and watch just as the men do.*

Even though I did not push myself into this woman role anymore, I still did women's tasks like fetching water or preparing coffee.

*From my diary (3.2.04): Kidoa and Nakwa went to the field yesterday, so I prepared coffee for Nyabba. I felt very insecure because I wasn't sure how much coffee to put in the calabash or whether there was anything else I was not doing correctly. But that was a situation where I realised that it makes a difference to be a woman. Nyabba would not have given his empty calabash to a male researcher and expected him to*

*refill it. Even though I don't have to do the "normal" work of the women, I am a woman and in situations like this it is I who is supposed to do certain things.*

## **5.2 Problems with my translators**

During my first stay, I had the opinion that it did not matter much whether a translator was around or not. During my second stay I noticed that this was not the case. I spent most of my time on my own – not intentionally but accidentally – which showed me that there is a big difference having an intermediate around. I divide this difference into two problems. Problem one was what I call “gender gap”. When Oscar, Samson, or Steven was with me, the young girls did not come to me. But when they were absent, the girls came and tried to teach me songs, chatted cheerfully with me or just sat next to me while braiding each others’ hair.

In the beginning I had some doubts because Oscar was a man (even if only sixteen years of age) and I did not know whether the women would be shy in his presence or withhold certain information. This feeling disappeared soon and I felt that the women behaved as they did when he was not there.<sup>59</sup> But the problem was Oscar. He behaved differently when he was translating in a conversation between women than he did when he translated a men’s conversation. He did not translate women’s conversations very carefully, often paying no apparent attention to what they said.

*From my diary (26.8.02): I am very sceptical whether this will work out. Also because of Oscar. Today we were with the girls while Kidoa made susur (metal beads). They kept talking to me the whole time but I did not understand a word. And when I asked Oscar, he said he hadn't paid attention. It seems to me as if he thinks this is only girl's gossip and not important to me.*

I explained to Oscar that I am doing research on girls and women and it is their talk what I am interested in even if he may think it is only gossip. He seemed to understand this and in the following weeks, translated more carefully.

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<sup>59</sup> The girls were more shy than the women. For example, I never conducted an interview with Nyendite because she never said much and was very shy in the presence of the boys.

This gender problem (which was not only present when it came to girls) was also there when I worked with Samson and Steven in 2004. Additionally, whenever one of the boys was around I felt like I had to divide myself: on the one hand I wanted to use the time and ask important questions, but on the other hand I wanted to live and share everyday life with Kidoa and Nakwa. This annoyed my translators, because they thought that research is only about asking very important things all the time.

*From my diary (1.2.04): Today is Sunday, which means that this is a day without a translator. This is actually quite nice, too. I don't understand as much but instead I can spend my time helping Nakwa when she makes the beans and don't have to feel guilty when there is a break. My questions have to wait until tomorrow, but I want to have more contact with the women and especially with the girls. They always come in the evenings and tell me things that I don't understand.*

*From my diary (27.1.04): I wanted to talk with Kidoa about circumcision but she had to go to the field and bring some tobacco leaves. By the time she came back, Samson had to go to school for his exams. But even though these things happen, I am glad that he only comes for a few hours per day. That way I really learn the language and he is not hanging around all the time, although he is nice. Yesterday, he helped Nyendite putting the sorghum up into the buti (store) and he eats and drinks the Dassanetch food without complaining.*

The second problem concerned the role of the boys. I call it “education gap”. The boys were “no longer one of them. They have become an *ushumba [Amhara]*”, like Mauro Tosco commented (personal information, February 29, 2004). Those who could speak Amharic or English and went to school also showed that they went to school by looking down on those Dassanetch who lived traditionally and could neither read nor write.

*From my diary (4.2.04): Samson annoys me so much. This morning he came with a book. And of course, he had to start reading immediately so that he can demonstrate that he can read. Translators should be invisible. But unfortunately they are not.*

This problem did not only become noticeable in connection with reading and writing, but also with food.

*From my diary (3.2.04): There are many disadvantages in working with a translator. Just one moment ago, he asked how his work will be now that he is finished with his exams. He wanted to know if he has to stay here for the whole day because he needs a “real” lunch. I answered that Kidoa and Nakwa always give him something (he even receives extra milk). He said that nyaadu (porridge) is good but he doesn't like only cooked sorghum. Stupid guys! Does he think I love to eat sorghum? That is so arrogant.*

In the end, I asked Steven to only come for a few hours each day. He was more an obstacle than a help but I did not want to stay completely without him.

*From my diary (10.2.04): I said to Steven that he only needs to come in the mornings and maybe from time to time in the afternoon. One reason for that is that Nakwa and Kidoa are not here during the day but in Omorati or in the field. The second reason is that it is much more pleasant when he is not here. It doesn't seem as if someone intrudes.*

### III. The girls and women of Nyabba's homestead – three stages of becoming a woman

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While I was in Aoga the question I had to answer most often was “*Kuuni maarti ba minni?*” (Are you a girl or a woman?) A Dassanetch would never ask this a Dassanetch female because it is obvious at first sight whether a female is a girl, bride or woman. The way she dresses, her hairstyle, and the jewellery give information about her status, whether she is a *maarti* (girl), *nyakhataran* (bride<sup>60</sup>) or *minni* (woman).

In the following I describe these outward appearances as well as tasks and responsibilities girls and women have to fulfill. On their way towards becoming a woman, girls undergo certain rituals and stages in their life. The ideal order as Nakwa told me is as follows: circumcision, marriage, birth of the first child. According to van Gennep several of the ceremonies are *rites de passage*, ceremonies in which the female moves from one stage to another by going through an intermediate stage ([1909] 1960: 1).

I do not describe a female's life cycle. For instance, I do not take old women or widows into account. This is due to the fact that for most of the time I had close contact with girls and young women and learned most about their lives and everyday chores.

#### 1 Girlhood – being a *maarti*

##### 1.1 Growing into a girl's tasks and responsibilities

When girls grow and get older, they get to know the tasks and responsibilities of a woman. These are manifold and vary from season to season. Girls and daughters are a

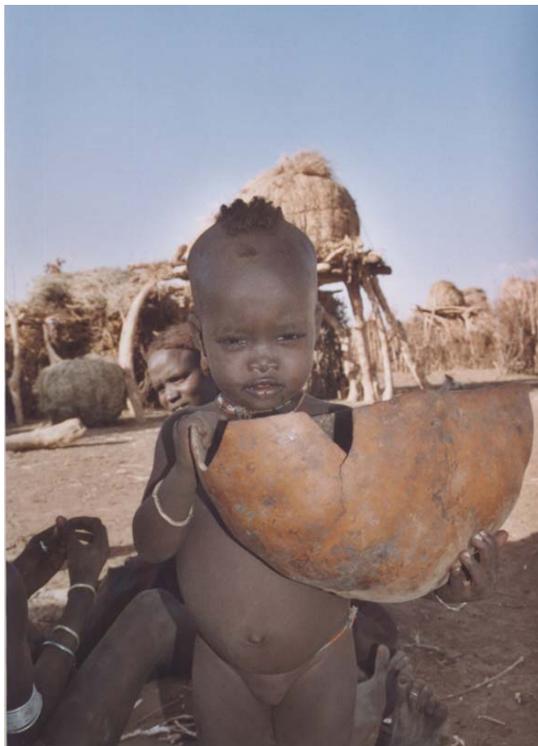
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<sup>60</sup> In the following I use the term “bride” to translate *nyakhataran*, similar to Lydall's and Strecker's translation of *uta* as bride (Lydall, Strecker 1979b: 207). In Dassanetch a female is called *nyakhataran* from her wedding day until she has a child. *Nyakhataran* is both a term of address and term of reference for a bride.

big help for their mothers because they assist them with the everyday household tasks and take over some jobs almost completely.

As soon as girls are able to walk, they are urged to help their mothers. Quite often, this resembles a play but through this they get to know the girls' responsibilities.

When Nakwa sat in her house and wanted a calabash from Kidoa, she did not go herself but sent someone or simply yelled to Kidoa. Kidoa took the calabash from its place and gave it to Nakwa-Tini while telling her "*Kisso, kisso*". (Run, run.) Compared with her sisters and brothers Nakwa-Tini was too young to fulfill regular tasks and thus did not have to help much.



*Picture 5: Nakwa-Tini carries a calabash*

Kidoa introduced her four year old daughter Nautcho slowly into the world of what a girl has to do. When fetching water or firewood, Kidoa made Nautcho accompany her.

*From my diary (30.1.04): Nautcho had to come with us to the Omo. On the way to the river, she was carrying a small jerry can. I carried it on the way back because Nautcho could not carry it on her head yet. But Kidoa also encouraged Nautcho to carry it for some short distances.*

Kidoa said that mothers do not explain to their daughters how to fetch water or grind sorghum, but they rather learn it through observing. When Nautcho has seen how to

grind sorghum many times she will know how to do it and eventually grind sorghum herself.

*From my diary (31.1.04): Kidoa went outside to the goats. Nyabba has finished his coffee and puts his calabash next to the pot. He says to Nautcho that she shall take the plastic cup and pour some coffee into his calabash. Nautcho hesitates but finally takes the cup and gives some coffee to her father.*



*Picture 6: Small children help to milk the goats in the evening*

By the time Nautcho gets older she will also be able to do the women's chores because she has practised them a lot. Small girls and boys have to assist their parents but they can still spend a lot of their time playing. One of their favourite plays was "grinding sorghum". Once Nautcho, Arba Nech, and Ulli carried a skeleton of a goat, several stones and big leaves under a shade tree. There they imitated grinding sorghum: they moved a small stone back and forth on the skeleton. In between stone and skeleton they had put some soil which they now slowly ground onto the leaf of a *doshite* tree. This was their hide where they kept the "flour".<sup>61</sup>

Nakwa's teenage daughter Nyendite was not as ignorant as her younger sisters anymore. She not only knew the tasks of a woman but also carried them out.

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<sup>61</sup> Learning by playing is widely spread among South Omo and occurs among other ethnic groups like the Bashada, Hamar, and Tsamai, too (Epple 1995: 29; Lydall, Strecker 1979: 70f; Melesse 1994: 48).

*From my diary (1.9.02): Yesterday, it seemed as if Nakwa was calling “Nyendite! Nyendite!” the whole day. To be the oldest daughter is not that great, I guess. But on the other hand, she is a big help for her mother. I have never seen Nakwa fetching water. I either met her daughters or Kidoa.*

*From my diary (8.2.04): I am sure Nyendite could already run her own household. When Nakwa is not around, she takes care of Becky, cooks sorghum or nyaadu (porridge) and prepares coffee, makes dambu (chewing tobacco) and milks the goats. She does not know how to milk cows yet but all the other chores she deals with like a married woman.*



Nyendite's everyday tasks



*Pictures 7-12: Nyendite's everyday tasks*

Nyendite's day started in the early mornings with fetching water. After she had drunk coffee (usually the left-overs) and Nakwa went to the field, Nyendite took care of the household. She ground sorghum and smoked the containers for cow's milk. One of Nyendite's main and all day long tasks was to take care of her younger sister Becky and

her brothers Ankoï and Arba Nech. Around eleven o'clock she cooked sorghum porridge for them and for her older brothers who tended the cattle and small stock. Afterwards she prepared coffee for Nyabba if he was in Aoga and went to join Nakwa in the field. After coming back from the field Nyendite prepared coffee for Nakwa. When the sun slowly went down, Nyendite cleaned the goat and cattle enclosures. First, using her hands she swept the cow dung together. Then she piled it all up and took it to the cow kraal where it was all burned when it got dark.<sup>62</sup> After cleaning the enclosures Nyendite used to smoke and clean the *kurrum-aye* (containers for goat's milk). She milked the goats and helped drive them into the kraal. Afterwards she usually went fetching water another time. Often, she brought firewood with her and helped Nakwa to cook food.

The girls had to do much work and help. Small girls sometimes refused to carry out a job. For example, Nautcho often ran away when Kidoa told her to bring a calabash or spoon to Nakwa's house. Nyendite on the other hand sometimes also did not want to help but she never refused to do what Nakwa or Nyabba told her to do. Nyendite and her friend Okhul (about sixteen years old) told me several times that they like to work. Okhul sometimes made fun of me who was always writing something and carrying my notebook with me. She said that writing is not good. Both Okhul and Nyendite said that girls have to fetch water, grind sorghum, collect firewood and milk the goats. They told me good girls are girls who do much work.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> The Dassanetch burn the cow dung as a means against mosquitoes. The smoke is supposed to chase these away.

<sup>63</sup> In the film *The women who smile* the girl Duka talks about her daily work. She says that she works much, which is good. Her father rewards her for her work with bracelets and beads (Lydall, Head F1990). During the workshop in Jinka, Arti, a Bashada girl, explained that it is good to work hard because then one marries quickly. "If you do not work hard, no one will marry you", she said (Arti, workshop session Kara-Bashada-Arbore-Ari-Maale, October 8, 2002).

## 1.2 How a girl should behave

There are certain ways a girl should behave. Neither Nyendite, Kidoa nor Nakwa ever explained these rules to me. I found out about them by behaving or misbehaving myself.

*From my diary (5.2.04): Kidoa and I were lying in front of her house watching the sky. Yeruboi came and said something. Kidoa explained that he said that I was lying like a boy. Karre, as a boy, may lie like this but Nautcho has to lie on her side because she is a girl.*

Girls should not lie on their backs but on their sides. When Nakwa-Tini slept and turned around in her sleep, Kidoa took care that her legs were side by side with private parts not exposed. Kidoa often told Nautcho to sit like a girl. Girls and women should sit in a certain position with their legs stretched out straight. Nautcho did not like that but Kidoa often got angry with her, so that she finally listened to what her mother said.

*From my diary (5.9.02): An old woman passed by our tent. I was busy writing when she asked me whether I am a woman or a man. She told me not to sit like a man. Sit like a woman, she said, not at all in a friendly tone.*

Girls should respond in a certain way when they are addressed. Nakwa told me that the girls/women have to respond with “*eeh*” when someone calls them and boys with “*woi*”. I observed that Nyendite and Kidoa sometimes used “*woi*” and I also used it. But whenever A-Eeneb (Nakwa’s neighbour) called me and I responded with “*woi*” she explained to me that I have to answer with “*eeh*” and made me repeat this several times.

## 1.3 Expressing pride and self-confidence

As already mentioned above, the girls are proud of fulfilling their tasks and working hard. They express pride and self-confidence not only in statements about how good it is to work hard but also through their clothes, jewellery, and hairstyle. All these features indicate the marital status but above all make the girls pretty and self-confident.

## CLOTHING

Unlike boys Dassanetch girls start wearing clothes from childhood on. From the age of about two years they start wearing an apron made of cloth or leather. From the age of four they start wearing a *gele*. This is an ankle-length leather skirt which consists of two separate tanned skins, the *silla* (front skirt) and *abbuni* (rear skirt). The skins may be from either goat or sheep and are tied around the waist in such a way – the rear one above the front one – that the girl’s private parts are always covered.<sup>64</sup>

Nakwa-Tini did not have a skirt yet. Kidoa said she is too small. Shortly before I left, Kidoa sewed a ribbon onto a piece of cloth. She tied this ribbon around Nakwa-Tini’s waist, so that she had a tiny front skirt. Kidoa’s four year-old daughter Nautcho already had a leather skirt. She only wore a front skirt but did not treat it carefully. Kidoa had sewn plastic beads on the edges of Nautcho’s *silla*, but they were loose and fell off. During my first stay Kidoa had tried hard to make Nautcho comfortable with her rear skirt. But Nautcho had not liked it then and did not want to wear it this time. Laughingly Kidoa explained to me that Nautcho had thrown the first *abbuni* in the Omo River and the second one she had thrown away so that the dogs had finally eaten it.<sup>65</sup>

Nyendite on the other hand liked her *gele* very much. The edges of her *silla* were nicely decorated with *susur* (metal beads). Nakwa had sewn *morieng* (small glass beads) on the *abbuni*. These *morieng* were sewn onto after a certain pattern: three rows of each about ten beads were sewn on the skirt: yellow-red/black-yellow. Sometimes Nyendite smeared her skirt with oil and charcoal which made it soft. She told me she wants to make it pretty. On the ribbon of her front skirt she had tied metal objects like springs, bells and can leftovers.

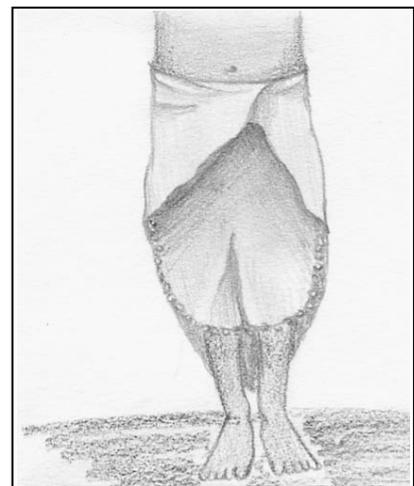


Figure 3: The *gele* – a girl’s skirt

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<sup>64</sup> The wearing of leather skirts seems to have spread from Dassanetch to Hamar (Lydall, Strecker 1979b: 130).

<sup>65</sup> In his film *Open Wide Doors* Konrad shows a scene where Kidoa gets angry with Nautcho because she has thrown her skirt away (Licht F2003).

*From my diary (3.2.04): Each time Nyendite moves it jingles. It is a wonderful, very special melody. To me it sounds so different from the other girls. When she returns from the river I always hear that it is she approaching.*

In theory, girls are only allowed to wear the *gele*. They must not wear a *dafarre* (women's cotton skirt). If a girl does that, Kidoa said, the girl's parents will beat her. Although girls are not allowed to wear a *dafarre*, I have seen many girls, including Nyendite and her friends Lalotte and Nachugul, wearing them. There are exceptions, Kidoa told me. If the *gele* needs to be repaired, the girls may wear a cloth skirt. This was the case with Nyendite. For two days, she had been wearing an old towel which she had put around her waist because the ribbon of her skirt had fallen off and a new ribbon had to be sewn onto it.



*Picture 13: Nyendite wearing her leather skirt*

It was the mothers who repaired, made and decorated the leather skirts for their daughters. One day, Kidoa came back from Omorati with a skin. She told me that this was a sheep skin which she had bought for three *birr* from the tobacco she had sold that day. She wanted to make a new front skirt for Nautcho. A few days later, Nakwa bought a goat skin to make a new skirt for Kolokhon.

The women also made the *susur* (metal beads) themselves. During my first stay, Kidoa made some for one of her younger sisters. She had bought a metal rod in Omorati. She put this metal on a stone where she bent it straight and flattened it through hitting it with a big piece of iron. Now she chopped off short pieces of about two centimetres in length from the metal rod. She put such a piece around a small, round rod and worked it step by step to a small ring, the *susur*.



Picture 14: Kidoa makes *susur* (metal beads)



Picture 15: Kidoa processes the iron pieces



Picture 16: *Susur* on Nyendite's skirt

The small metal beads were later sewn onto the skirts with the help of a thorn and leather thread. Kidoa told me that everyone can make the *susur*. Nyendite's *susur* were made by Nakwa who had gotten the metal from Konrad.<sup>66</sup>

## JEWELLERY

Besides clothes, jewellery played a big role for girls. The girls wore necklaces made of small glass beads or bigger plastic beads around their necks. Their arms were decorated with bracelets which may be metal, aluminium or copper. These necklaces and bracelets were worn by women, too. Nakwa had bought some of Nyendite's necklaces in Omorati

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<sup>66</sup> During the workshop in Jinka, Konrad and I went to the local market with Nakwa, Nyendite, Nyabba and Ellele. There we bought metal for Nyendite's *susur*, among other things.

(one cost 15 *birr*<sup>67</sup>) and some she had made herself. Kidoa had given beads to her daughters. Even babies and small girls like Becky and Nakwa-Tini already wore jewellery. Nyendite had made a necklace out of seeds from a tree called *galte* for Becky. Nakwa-Tini wore two very colourful necklaces which Kidoa had made for her from leftover beads. She had tied a thin string of *morieng* (beads) around Nakwa-Tini's waist. Nakwa-Tini also wore bracelets: on each of her ankles she had one thin aluminium bracelet. Nyendite wore several *boolong* (aluminium bracelets), *marra* (golden brass bracelets) and *kibo* (grey metal bracelets) on her arms and fingers. These she had gotten from different persons, she told me. The *marra* were from Merama, a girl she sometimes met when fetching water. The *boolong* were from Nakwa and the *kibo* from Kidoa. These same kinds of bracelets and necklaces were also worn by Nakwa and Kidoa.

What differentiated girls in the marriageable age from small girls and married women were *morieng-me'imor* (headband made of beads), *muul* (iron rings around the legs), and *angatch* (ribbon around the upper body). This special jewellery showed their status. During my second stay, Nyendite made a *morieng-me'imor* for herself. Nakwa explained to me that a girl is not free in choosing the beads' colours for her headband. She has to use the colours of her *hari* (generation set). The colours for *Nabus*, the generation set Nyendite belongs to, are green and red, Nakwa said. But Nyendite used blue and red beads which puzzled me the first moment. Nakwa said that if there is no green, it is no problem to take blue. A girl from *Kubir* would have to use red and yellow *morieng*, Nakwa said.<sup>68</sup> In the afternoons when Nyendite had some time off, she sat with her friends Okhul and Nachugul in the *gaatch* (shade). Together they threaded Nyendite's headband. The beads were from Konrad and me. Having finished it, Nyendite proudly wore it the following days. When Orib came, she took a look at her little sister's headband and put it on for a while. I asked where she has hers. Orib said

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<sup>67</sup> One *birr* (Ethiopian currency) is equivalent to about 10 Euro cents. ([www.oanda.com/convert/classic](http://www.oanda.com/convert/classic) retrieved July 8, 2004)

<sup>68</sup> Ginno Ballo, an Arbore, confirmed that he had heard of the Dassanetch practice to wear different jewellery according to one's generation set. Similar to Dassanetch, Maasai women wear certain beadwork as distinctive markers of successive male age sets. "Wearing the appropriate ornaments is one way to claim and demonstrate age-set membership for men and elective affinity for women" (Klumpp, Kratz 1993: 202). Ginno also said that there are different kinds of jewellery according to the sections. (Ballo and Gabbert, personal information, July 3, 2004) I have not personally heard this information.

that she is married. Only girls wear it in everyday life. Married women may wear it on special occasions like *dimi*, Orib explained.



*Picture 17: Portrait of Nyendite with her headband*

Nyendite did not wear *muul* and *angatch* yet. I asked her if a girl has to have *muul* and *angatch* before she can get married. She answered no and said that a girl can marry whenever she wants to. She does not need *muul* and *angatch*. They are a sign of beauty.



*Picture 18: Okhul's muul (iron anklets)*

I also asked Nyendite if she wants to wear *muul* like Okhul. She said no because they hurt. She explained that *muul* are big and heavy and not for a small girl like her. When she is older and bigger, she might wear them. She said that Okhul likes them but also says they are painful to wear. I had seen that Okhul had some cloth around her ankles as a protection.

*From my diary (8.2.04): I have taken a close look at Okhul's muul. No wonder she always walks so slowly and sedately. These rings are unbelievably heavy. It seems like a miracle that she can walk at all.*

Kidoa told me that before she got married she had worn iron rings around her ankles. They were very heavy and thick, she said. While talking about her *muul* she showed me the scars she still had. It was her father who had given them to her when she was young. Unlike Nyendite Okhul also wore an *angatch* which are ribbons made of *doshite* (a kind of tree) and a layer of clay around it. Okhul wore these ribbons diagonally around the upper body. I asked Nyendite about the *angatch* and she said that she does not want to have one. An *angatch* is only for girls whose breasts have grown like Okhul, she told me. During my first stay, Kidoa wore an *angatch* as necklace. She explained to me that *angatch* is made from a tree called *doshite*. First, single threads are separated from the tree trunk. They are braided and a layer of clay is put around the braid. Kidoa was the only woman I had seen with such jewellery. When I was in Aoga for the second time, she did not wear it any more.

#### HAIRSTYLE

Small girls like Nakwa-Tini and Nautcho had a similar hairstyle to that of the boys.<sup>69</sup> From the age of about six, the girls get a special hairstyle called *me suing*. The *me suing* is not identical among all the girls and young women but it follows a similar pattern. On their forehead, some hair is plaited into two or three small braids. Nyendite's front plaits were connected. These plaits stand for the father, Kidoa explained. The other hair stands for the mother. It is plaited backwards but in another technique: two strands are twisted around each other and the ends are knotted together. This looks very delicate.

Nyendite also had a *kerretch* (bead-ribbon) tied into her hair. Her *kerretch* consisted of blue and red beads and two *vieru* (cowrie shells) on the bottom of the ribbon. Nyendite said she wears it to be pretty.

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<sup>69</sup> On the front of the head they had a small tuft which is called *shurte*. On the back of the head, they had a *shuro*. This is bigger tuft which might be shaved into different patterns: for example, like a circle or oval, but always unplaited. One day, Ulli found an old razor blade and played with it – he tried to shave his hair, succeeded and shaved his *shurte* off. When Kidoa saw this, she was shocked and said that Nyabba will beat him. Through this incident, I found out the different meanings of the hairstyles. Kidoa said that the *shuro* stands for the mother and the *shurte* for the father. If a child does not have a *shurte*, it means that its father died. What Ulli did is an affront against his father.

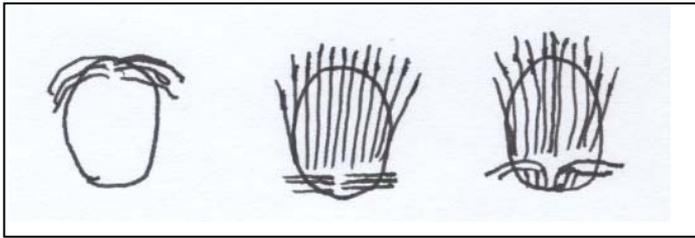


Figure 4: *Me suing* – the hairstyle of girls

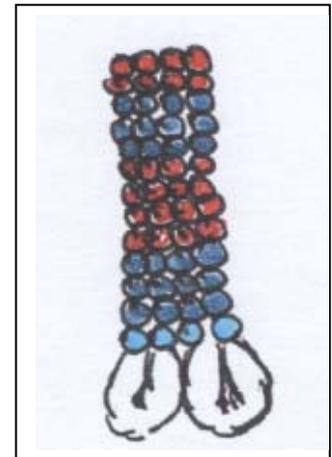


Figure 5: Nyendite's *kerretch*



Picture 19: Kidoa braids Nyendite's hair



Picture 20: Nyendite's hair is braided

The girls spent a lot of the time braiding each other's hair. When Nyendite got her braids renewed this took several days and quite a few girls and women were involved in this. First Okhul opened Nyendite's old braids and braided the hair anew. She took two small strands and twisted them around each other. The next day in the afternoon when Kidoa, Nakwa and I sat in the shade of Kidoa's house, Nakwa plaited a string in Nyendite's freshly braided hair. A little later Kidoa continued. She tied the ends of the plaits together while Nakwa and I peeled and cleaned the beans. In the evening Kidoa continued plaiting Nyendite's hair.

From time to time, the girls and women put *hod* (red ochre) on their hair to make it pretty. They bought the ochre from someone passing by or in the market in Omorati. Two pieces of the size of an ostrich egg cost one *birr*.

*From my diary (7.2.04): I was sitting in Nakwa's house and drinking coffee when she and Nyendite suddenly ran out of the house. Nyendite came back and took Becky. I asked her what was going on outside and she said "hod" and pointed to her hair. We went out and really, the women, especially the young ones, came running and bought the hod.*

The woman selling hod was a Dassanetch woman. During my first stay Nakwa had told me that they sometimes get ochre from the Bume (Nyangatom) who live north of the Dassanetch on the west bank of the Omo River and come for trading to Omorati.



*Picture 21: Ground red ochre on a hide*

Before Orib went back to the *foritch* (stock camp) she put red ochre onto her hair. First, she took about one third of the hod piece and crumbled it with a stone. She ground it so that it looked almost like red ground sorghum. She took some *salab* (oil)<sup>70</sup> in her palm and put it on her hair. Afterwards she put the ochre flour on her hair very carefully and gently tapped it on. She repeated this procedure several times so that the braids finally were of a brown reddish colour.

#### SINGING AND DANCING

After having finished their work, Nyendite and her friends Okhul, Aifack, and Nadyaut often met in the evenings. Together they went to the *naab* (dancing place) where they sang and danced. When they went to go dancing, they passed by Kidoa's house and stopped for a while to sing. They tried to teach me their favourite songs.

*From my diary (13.2.04): The girls came back and now dance in front of Kidoa's house. When they dance, they move proudly, almost majestically, up and down while*

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<sup>70</sup> Once Nakwa heated *salab*. She used that *derda* (cooked clotted butter) to mix it with ground *hod* and put onto the hair.

*singing. Beautiful but at the same time disconcerting because they sing so loudly and Okhul's muul are very loud when they clap against each other.*

Once I joined the girls but because it was not one of the “real” dances only small children were dancing. I felt like stepping on everyone’s toes since everyone around me was at least ten years younger. The following time I stayed at Kidoa’s house where Kidoa and I talked, sang and laughed. The girls later joined us.

*From my diary (5.2.04): I am not the only one who is taught songs in the evenings. The girls sing songs to each other or learn new songs from the young women. Afterwards, they often go and dance.*

The dances I witnessed were dances of young girls and small boys. They were just playing, like Nakwa said. In “real” dances when also the men and women get together the dancers have to dance according to their generation set.<sup>71</sup> Nakwa told me that she is *Kubir*, so she may only dance with people from *Kubir*. Nyendite on the other hand is *Nabus*, so she may only dance with people from *Nabus*.<sup>72</sup>

Also, for “real” dances, the older girls have a special jewellery – a *nyakhote*. This is a ribbon made out of cow leather and decorated with cowrie shells or beads. Nyendite showed me how to wear the *nyakhote*. She said that Nakwa had made it for her. Now, she wears it occasionally for the dances. But after she has married she must not wear it any more.

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<sup>71</sup> Unlike in Hamar where brides and married women must not dance any more, Dassanetch women may dance even after they have married. Lydall interviewed the Hamar girls Duka and Gardi about being married women and both were very sad that they cannot dance any more after their wedding (Lydall, Head F1990).

<sup>72</sup> One may also only marry within the same *hari* (generation set). Maybe the girls in the marriageable age wear a headband in their *hari*'s colour, so that men (possible future husbands also) can see which *hari* the girl belongs to. But this has not been confirmed yet and is only a speculation from my point of view.



Picture 22: Nyendite wears her nyakhote

#### 1.4 Circumcision

On their way to womanhood girls not only learn about their duties and responsibilities but also undergo certain rituals and physical changes. One of these is *herr* (circumcision).

*From my diary (5.9.02): I was with Kidoa and learned many new things. It was very interesting but I was afraid of getting further into the circumcision topic. I do not know how she will react to direct questions and I really don't want to put our (just developing) friendship at risk.*

Rapport is the central element in fieldwork and as Laura Nader notes "...anthropologists often hold back for fear of ruining rapport..." (1970: 113). When I came to Aoga in 2002, I did not know Nyabba's family at all and we just got to know each other. I was afraid to ask certain things and get too intimate, even though I was very interested in these topics. I did not want to offend Kidoa and Nakwa with my questions. During my second stay, this feeling had not vanished completely. I talked

with Kidoa and Nakwa about circumcision but did not go into certain details. Certainly one drawback was working with a (male) translator.

### NAKWA TALKED: HOW SHE GOT CIRCUMCISED<sup>73</sup>

Nakwa was circumcised in her mother's house in Djele. First Nakwa entered the house followed by Naberitee. Some leather was taken off the wall to get more light into the house so that the woman who was going to circumcise Nakwa could see better. Nakwa sat down with her legs spread out and Naberitee held her. While she was getting cut<sup>74</sup>, many people gathered in front of the house and killed a sheep. Naberitee held Nakwa all the time and gave her beads afterwards. From then on, they addressed each other as *beel*.<sup>75</sup> The stomach fat of a sheep and the sheep skin were hung around Nakwa. When the sun went down, Nakwa and Naberitee went outside. Naberitee was like a mother to Nakwa. She went to her mother's house and brought milk which was only for Nakwa. Nakwa's *beel* now lived in Lobongyot which is far away. Nakwa said that they visit each other sometimes. She has been to Lobongjot and her *beel* has been to Aoga. When they see each other, they call each other *beel*.<sup>76</sup>

The girls do not get cut in a very young age. During my first stay, Kidoa joked with her daughter Nautcho and asked laughingly if she wants to get cut. I was surprised because Nautcho was then only two and a half years old but Kidoa explained to me that the girls getting cut are as old as Nyendite, about ten to twelve years old.<sup>77</sup> Nautcho is much too small. She does not know anything yet, when she hears the screams of a girl getting cut, she does not know what it is but thinks someone will kill her, Kidoa said. But compared to the Arbore girls who get circumcised when they marry – they are then about 18 to 25

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<sup>73</sup> This is a summary of an interview I conducted with Nakwa in Aoga about how she got circumcised.

<sup>74</sup> When the girls get circumcised, their labia and clitoris are cut out, according to Almagor (1978: 152). Nakwa told me that the clitoris is cut but did not specify the act of cutting further (Nakwa, workshop session: Hamar-Dassanetch, October 6, 2002).

<sup>75</sup> A girl's *beel* ("holder" on circumcision) may be of any age and be from any *hari*, Nakwa said.

<sup>76</sup> The term *beel* is also used as greeting between women and girls. But when Nakwa or one of the other women told me about their *beel* they meant the girl/woman who had held them during circumcision.

<sup>77</sup> Before the girls get circumcised their lower middle teeth are pulled out. Kidoa told me when a girl gets older, one will take a sharp metal stick or *kibo* (piece of iron) and go in between the teeth. Forcefully they are broken apart. This is also done with boys of the same age.

years old – Dassanetch girls get cut early.<sup>78</sup> In Arbore girls get circumcised when they marry. Then they are about eighteen to 25 years old (Ballo and Gabbert, personal information, July 3, 2004; Peller 2002: 53).<sup>79</sup>

One prerequisite that a girl can get circumcised is that the girl's father has gone through *dimi* ceremony. Nakwa said that the father will hurry and do the *dimi* ritual because he wants that his daughter marries so that he gets cows. If a girl does not get circumcised, no one will marry her, Nakwa said. Girls who are not cut are teased that they are like a wild animal. Especially when the girl behaves like a man, one will say that she is a man and her clitoris needs to get cut, so that she becomes a woman. Other people will tease her and say that she is like a wild animal. They actually mean the male part, the clitoris, which has to be removed. Finally all the girls tease her that much that she wants to get cut. Circumcision is an old tradition among the Dassanetch, Nakwa explained. When a girl would not get circumcised, her father could die because he gets cursed by his age mates (Nakwa, workshop session: Hamar-Dassanetch, October 6, 2002).

The cutting itself is done by experts. Nakwa told me that these female experts are from the Randal section.

In the workshop in Jinka, Nakwa also talked about circumcision but the procedure she explained in some ways differed from what she later on told me in Aoga. Nakwa said that the girls who are going to get cut go to a special village. They go together with their mothers and age mates.<sup>80</sup> The mothers put a necklace around the girl's neck and hold the girl. Then the girl gets cut by an expert. When the expert is finished, it is the next girl's turn. She is also held by her mother and gets beads. This is how the girls get cut, one after the other. Afterwards they drink *gamana* (sour milk) (Nakwa, workshop session: Hamar-Dassanetch, October 6, 2002).

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<sup>78</sup> There is one exception. According to Almagor, the girls of the Randal section are circumcised shortly before marriage, much later than girls of the other tribal sections (Almagor 1978: 18).

<sup>79</sup> There are no detailed accounts about circumcision in Arbore but *Warfare and Fertility* by Tadesse Wolde Gossa and *Chiffrierte Körper – Disziplinierte Körper* by Annette Peller give further information (Tadesse 1999; Peller 2002).

<sup>80</sup> Though Nakwa said “mother” I am not sure how exactly she meant the girl's biological mother because she told me later on that the girl's *beel* will be like a mother and take care of the girl getting circumcised. Kidoa also told me about her *beel* Yetam and said explicitly that Yetam is like a mother to her. When she comes to Aoga, she brings sorghum, butter, or sugar for Kidoa. Thus I suppose that Nakwa did not mean her biological mother when talking about circumcision but her *beel*.

Regardless whether the girls get circumcised in their mother's house or in another village, a girl is never only by herself. She is circumcised with her age mates of whom each is held by a female.<sup>81</sup> This is similar to Borana where girls of about eight to ten years of age are cut collectively, but in a different way from Arbore. In Arbore only the girl who is getting married is circumcised. Many women, among them the father's mother, hold the girl. There is no special term by which the girl and the holders call each other (Ballo and Gabbert, personal information, July 3, 2004).

Because of this collective character of the ritual in Dassanetch, it might happen that a girl gets "forgotten". It might be that she is in the field or in the *foritch* (stock camp) when her age mates get cut, Nakwa said. If that happens, the people say that she shall not get cut now but shall wait until she gets her first child. When she gives birth and has pain anyhow, she gets cut (Nakwa, workshop session: Hamar-Dassanetch, October 6, 2002).

Kidoa told me that when young men get circumcised, they wear special shoes. But there are no special shoes for girls. They only have a leather ribbon in between their legs. When the pain is over, they throw it away, Kidoa explained.

Circumcision is one of the transition periods a female undergoes in her life. This period is a time when restrictions are abolished. In everyday life girls are not allowed to wear the women's dresses. But after their circumcision girls put on their mother's *morritch*<sup>82</sup> (women's leather dress), Nakwa told me. When Kidoa was circumcised, she wore her mother's *morritch*. When Orib was circumcised, she wore Nakwa's, when Nyendite was circumcised, she also used Nakwa's. When Nautcho gets circumcised she will wear Kidoa's or Nakwa's. Nautcho may also put on Nakwa's *morritch* because Nakwa is also Nautcho's mother, Kidoa said.

When the first daughter is circumcised, the father of the girl kills a female sheep for all the people who gather.<sup>83</sup> These people are members from the girl's *hari* (generation set). Kidoa explained that they will slaughter a sheep for Nautcho, just as they had slaughtered one for Nyendite and one for Orib. When it is not the first daughter who is

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<sup>81</sup> Almagor ascribes to this "bond of holding" only little significance because it "...carries no rights to bridewealth..." (Almagor 1978: 118).

<sup>82</sup> It is also used when the boys are circumcised and hung around them.

<sup>83</sup> Being the first daughter refers to being the first daughter of one woman, not of one man.

getting circumcised, no animal will be slaughtered. But not everyone is allowed to eat from that meat. Kidoa told me that married men and women are not allowed to eat from it; only unmarried girls and boys may eat this meat. If a married person would eat it, he/she would go crazy.

## **2 Becoming a woman**

### **2.1 Marriage**

Marriage, Lydall and Tadesse state, is a turning point in the life of a girl in Hamar and Arbore. The girls move off to live with strangers and leave their family and friends behind them (Lydall, Head F1991; Tadesse 1999: 149). The phases of marriage can be compared with the pattern of van Gennep's *rites de passage*: first the girl separates from her family, then undergoes a phase of transition, and finally she is incorporated into her husband's family (van Gennep 1960: VII). Van Gennep describes marriage as "the most important of the transitions from one social category to another, because for at least one of the spouses it involves a change of family, clan, village or tribe..." (1960: 116). The same holds true for Dassanetch girls. They move out of their father's homestead, their family's circle; then they have to remove all their clothing and jewellery and are in transition – they are physically and socially naked – and in the end get incorporated into their husband's family.

The ideal marriage involves several ceremonies such as the "departed oxen" ceremony (carried out after the completion of the small bride stock) or the "household" ceremony (final incorporation of the wife in her husband's group) (Almagor 1978: 119-125). I do not give a complete account of marriage and its ceremonies but describe what Nakwa and Kidoa told me about it.

Marriage is but one step only towards becoming a woman. It is the birth of the first child and not the wedding when a married woman gets the status of a *minni* (adult woman). Until that she is called *nyakhataran* (bride). The marriage may be dissolved. It is only after the birth of the first child that husband and wife are inseparably united.

### 2.1.1 Marriage rules

The Dassanetch live polygamously, which means that men may have more than one wife. During my first stay I made a census of Aoga and found out that about half of the men had more than one wife (see Appendix E).<sup>84</sup> Women, on the other hand, are only allowed to have one husband. Kidoa told me that she may only be married to Nyabba. If another man would come into her house and drink coffee every day Nyabba would beat her.

Dassanetch girls marry at a very young age, boys comparatively late (Almagor 1983: 98). I already noticed this age difference in the beginning of my first stay. When I went to the Omo River with Kidoa and some girls, Kidoa told me that one of the girls who was not older than fifteen years would marry soon. Kidoa herself also married when she was very young.<sup>85</sup>

During my first stay, Kidoa told me that among the Dassanetch one cannot get divorced. Wife and husband always stay together, she said. Even if the husband dies and his wife bears children afterwards the children are regarded his children although he is not the biological father.<sup>86</sup> But only a few days later she told me about a girl who had married a man in a neighbouring village. The man had beaten the girl and they got divorced. I was surprised. Did Kidoa not herself tell me that it is impossible to get divorced? She explained that a divorce is possible when the girl does not have children yet. In the case of a divorce, the bridewealth has to be paid back. The girl may marry again already

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<sup>84</sup> Compared with the Dassanetch, on the average Turkana men have more wives. They even say that a man with one wife is not considered married. Five wives are the custom among them (MacDougall F1981, F1977).

<sup>85</sup> Almagor deals with this age difference between spouses and relates it to the generation set organisation. See Almagor 1983.

<sup>86</sup> Kidoa told me that if a husband dies his wife/wives may live together with another man. Usually this is a husband's brother. The wife does not call him *bel* (husband) but *byieso*. But there will be no wedding. If the *byieso* does already have a wife, she stays in her house and the *byieso* commutes from wife to wife. If he does not have a wife yet he lives together with her, Kidoa said. Kidoa said she does not want to talk about it further because it is not good if the husband dies. If the *byieso* is nice he takes care of the new wife, the children and the livestock but anyway it is not good if the husband dies.

shortly after getting divorced. If the girl is already pregnant or has children, she cannot get divorced.<sup>87</sup>

Nakwa explained to me that a girl may not marry any man but only one from her own *hari* (generation set). When someone wants to marry Nyendite, he has to be *Nyemur* just like Nyendite, she said.<sup>88</sup>

Dassanetch who want to marry also have to consider clan exogamy. Nyabba told me that just like it is forbidden to dance with members of the same clan, one must not marry within the same clan. Nyabba told me that he belongs to Fargaaru. Before he married Nakwa and Kidoa they were both Tuurnyerim. After their marriage the two women became Fargaaru. Nyendite is now Fargaaru but when she marries, she becomes a member of another clan. When I talked with Kidoa the day after, she explained the same principle but said that women stay in their clan. I asked her again, but Kidoa just repeated that she is Tuurnyerim like Nakwa and their children are Fargaaru like Nyabba.<sup>89</sup>

Kidoa told me that when her daughter Nautcho marries, Nakwa will get bridewealth. Kidoa will get cattle, goats, and sheep when Nyendite marries. The small stock she and Nakwa will share and slaughter but the cows each of the women keeps for herself. The cows are used for milking but not for slaughtering. Once I was with Kidoa and Naberu; the about fifteen year-old Naberu suddenly looked at me and asked why there is no bridewealth in Germany. The parents take care of the girl, give her food, buy her beads, bracelets and skirts. That is why they demand bridewealth when the girl marries, she said.

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<sup>87</sup> This is contrary to what the Arbore say about the Dassanetch. The Arbore say that in Dassanetch husband and wife can get divorced and marry someone else also after the birth of their children. According to Ginno Ballo, a girl and boy do not even have to marry in order to live together and get children (Ballo and Gabbert, personal information, July 3, 2004). I have never heard of that but compared to Hamar young men and women “are fairly free to choose their spouses” (Almagor 1983: 95). Gardi, a Hamar girl, said that the Galeba girls marry who they like (Lydall, Head F1991).

<sup>88</sup> See chapter one for a discussion about females and their affiliation to a generation set.

<sup>89</sup> In Nyangatom it is like Kidoa explained for Dassanetch. When women move to marry they keep their clan membership (Alvarsson 1987: 33).

### 2.1.2 Marrying the “coffee-way” – the ideal

Kidoa told me that her parents lived in Nelele which was close by Aoga. She married when she was in Nyendite’s age (about twelve years old). Nyabba went to her parents and brought them coffee. When he came the fourth time, they had decided that she should marry him. I asked her if she wanted to marry Nyabba. She said that she refused in the beginning. She hated Nyabba and did not want to go with him. But her parents talked with her and finally she accepted and went with Nyabba to Aoga. Then a big celebration took place. Lots of men and women came and ate meat.

She had to stay in the house for four days. During night, she was allowed to go outside but only for a short time. After four days she milked a cow with one of Nyabba’s aunts. Under normal circumstances, she explained, the mother of the bridegroom accompanies the bride but Nyabba’s mother had already died. It is important that an elder woman goes with her. Nakwa could also have gone with her. Kidoa milked the cow four times and afterwards could move freely in the homestead and village.

I asked her if she had known Nyabba before. She answered that Nyabba married her because he wanted a second wife who would help Nakwa with the children. Kidoa said that now she likes to be a wife but when she was younger she did not like it.

The way of marrying described above is called “coffee-way”. It is the preferred but not the only way how a marriage can be carried out. During the workshop in Jinka, Nakwa explained this ideal way of marriage:

The father of the boy or the boy himself knows who he wants to take as wife. The boy’s parents bring a sack of coffee to the parents of the girl. The parents take the coffee and wonder, “What is this coffee for?”. The father of the boy says, “It is obvious. You know why we bring the coffee.” And it is obvious. It means, I want your daughter to marry my son. They drink the coffee and the boy’s parents go home. After four days, they bring five goats and some more coffee. The goats will be given to the girl’s relatives, to the mother’s brother and other relatives and the animals get slaughtered and eaten in their homesteads. The parents go back home and after four days, they bring again five cows as dowry. These cows are not slaughtered, but goats are killed again. At the house entrance, a female sheep is slaughtered. The stomach fat is put around the girl and her husband like a necklace. They are blessed, so that they may get many children.

After the fat is put around the neck of the girl, the women of the village come and tell the girl to take her belongings off. The girl cries and says, “No, no, no.” But she has to. Her heavy metal anklets are removed.<sup>90</sup> She takes her leather skirt off and puts a cloth skirt around her waist. When the guests have left, her husband comes and sleeps with her.

If the man takes her as his second wife, she stays in the house of the first wife for some time. It may happen that a husband really wants to sleep with his newlywed wife although she does not want to. Then he will take her by force, Nakwa explained during the workshop (Nakwa, workshop session: Hamar-Dassanetch, October 6, 2002).<sup>91</sup>

### **2.1.3 Other ways of marrying**

There are other ways of marrying, too, which are not regarded as ideal but nevertheless occur. Nakwa talked about them in Jinka. When a boy and a girl fall in love with each other they elope and marry without consent of their parents because they are afraid that they would not be allowed to marry each other otherwise. The family of the girl does not like that and they go to the family of the boy. They give goats and cows to the girl’s family to solve the conflict. But if the father does not like that and does not want the girl to marry he can take her back home. Kidoa said that the father can take the girl home even when her iron rings are already removed.

When the girl who marries is still very small, the marriage ceremony takes place as described above but she does not move to her husband’s homestead the day of the marriage. Instead her parents give five cows and the girl stays in her mother’s house. It is only when she gets older that she moves to her husband, Nakwa explained (Nakwa, workshop session: Hamar-Dassanetch, October 6, 2002).

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<sup>90</sup> Almagor describes the opening of the bride’s anklets being the “climax of the ceremony”. The anklets are removed as follows: the bride sits inside her mother’s house with her legs stretched through the entrance. Leather thongs are tied to the anklets and leading to either side, the moiety groups pull to open the rings (see also sketch in Appendix F). When all rings are opened, the marriage is contracted (Almagor 1989: 160).

<sup>91</sup> Nakwa did not explain in detail about this but I suppose that she meant girls who are still very young when married since the act of sleeping together is part of the marriage ceremony.

The initiative for marrying does not always have to come from the boy, Nakwa said. It may also be that the girl absolutely wants to marry this one boy. She will tell him again and again: "Marry me." If at some time he agrees they go to his parents, bring coffee and negotiate (Nakwa, workshop session: Hamar-Dassanetch, October 6, 2002).

In the preferred way of marrying, regardless of when the girl moves to her husband, the marriage of the man and girl is arranged. Kidoa told me that a girl always agrees with the marriage. If she does not she runs away. It happens, too, that a man wants to marry a girl who refuses. The parents talk to her but if the girl does not want to go, she will not go, Kidoa said.<sup>92</sup>

Another way of taking a girl as one's wife is the stealing of the bride. One or several men steal a girl, against her will. Brideprice is often arranged afterwards. One day during my first stay while drinking coffee with Kidoa, a man came into her house and told Nyabba what had happened in the neighbouring village the day before. A man came with his gun and stole a girl in Nyendite's age which had not been circumcised yet. Nyabba said that this man is bad and will get beaten because of that.

The stealing of a bride is not as rare as I had thought at first. A couple of days later, we were on our way back from the sorghum field when we heard screams. Aiebet, with whom we were walking to Aoga, ran towards the noises and also Oscar, Konrad and I went closer. Aiebet told us that a man had just tried to steal a girl which was on her way to the river. But the girl's friends had screamed so much that the men ran away. Aiebet said that the men would not come back because they are way too afraid of the girl's family now. Shortly afterwards, he told me that this is the life of a girl in Dassanetch and he seemed to defend the incident. When a girl gets stolen, the father of the boy will refuse to pay the bridewealth. When the girl gets pregnant, he has to pay twenty goats. But the girl stays with her husband.

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<sup>92</sup> I do not know how much truth this comprises but it fits to what the Hamar say of the Dassanetch. The Hamar girl Gardi said that the Dassanetch girls may marry who they like (Lydall, Head F1991).

#### 2.1.4 Marriage as a *rite de passage*

When a girl marries she has to give all her beads and necklaces away, Kidoa told me. In the marriage night the bride has to take off her skirt, beads and bracelets. At first she refuses but eventually takes it all off. For a moment the girl is naked – physically and socially. She loses not only her old jewellery but also her status as girl. She is not allowed to keep anything but has to give her belongings to her husband's female relatives.<sup>93</sup> This is what Kidoa and Nakwa told me but as I found out each of the married women had kept at least one of her “girlhood-necklaces”. It is also now that the girl gets new jewellery and a new status. From now on she is a *nyakhataran* (bride): In that way marriage is a *rite de passage*. The girl leaves “one world behind”, the father's homestead, and “enters a new one”, her husband's homestead (van Gennep [1909] 1960: 19). The girl's belongings are a symbol of this transition since upon her wedding she has to give away her old jewellery and clothes and receives new ones.

Kidoa said she had to give all her necklaces to Nyabba's sisters, except for one necklace with white glass beads which her father had given to her when she was a little girl. Her *muul* (iron rings worn around the ankles) were removed and she had to take her *angatch* (ribbons worn around the upper body) off.

Jewellery indicates whether a female is married or not but there are no jewellery or body decorations that tell whether a married woman is a first or second wife. This is different from Hamar and Bashada where the first wife wears a *binyere* (necklace made of leather and metal rings) which symbolises that she is the first wife (Epple 1995: 81).<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> This is similar to Hamar and Arbore. In Hamar, when the *uta* (bride) comes to her father-in-law's homestead, her “mother-in-law shaves the girl's head, and takes away the girl's skirts, her rear skirt and her front skirt.” All the *uta*'s belongings are shared out among the girls of the homestead and the bride puts on her bride things, the Hamar man Baldambe explained (Lydall, Strecker 1979b: 140). In Arbore, the girl's circumcision constitutes the first marriage ceremony. When getting cut, the bride is naked. Her skirt and all her jewellery except for two iron anklets are removed. Afterwards she gets a cloth and beads from her family or her childhood boyfriend. Her own family takes the old belongings. On the second marriage ceremony which can be months or even years later (when husband and wife move in together into their house) the other two iron anklets are removed (Ballo and Gabbert, personal information, July 3, 2004).

<sup>94</sup> The only way to see whether a woman is a first or second wife is through the arrangement of the houses. I explain this in chapter four.

During my second stay, Kidoa made necklaces for her daughters. She told me that she does not want Nautcho to get many beads. If she has many she gets used to them and could become very sad on her wedding day when they are taken away from her.

After their marriage the young wives get new jewellery from relatives. Often they also buy it themselves in Omorati. Kidoa and Nakwa wore necklaces made of beads just like the girls did, but there were different kinds of beads. Some necklaces were made of small glass beads from Kenya. Another kind was made out of plastic. Nakwa, Kidoa and their daughters preferably wore white, blue, green and red beads.<sup>95</sup> Nakwa told me that she bought her beads in Omorati but that she had made some for her daughters herself. She had collected leftover pieces of plastic, melted them and made them into beads. The glass beads can be bought in Omorati. All these beads, no matter whether the very small ones, the plastic or glass ones, were called *morieng*.

Kidoa wore several necklaces made from plastic and glass *morieng*. The plastic beads had a green-red and blue-red colour. The glass ones were dominantly white and blue or red. She had also made herself earrings with *morieng*. Nakwa wore a necklace made out of big green and blue plastic beads. She said that Nyabba had brought it for her from the *Marle* (Arbore).

During my second stay, it was in fashion for the married women to wear a *dogo*. Such a necklace consisted of very big orange plastic beads and small red beads. These were arranged in a certain pattern, for example two orange ones – four red ones – two orange ones – four red ones and so on. Kidoa's sister Angutee had such a necklace. One day, when going to the Omo with Kidoa and Angutee, Kidoa jokingly said to me “*Berika kuuni dogo ka'eb*” (Tomorrow you bring a *dogo*) and laughed. I thought these big plastic beads ugly but nevertheless promised to buy them for her because I understood she considered these beads beautiful. A few days later we went to Omorati. On the way back, Kidoa and I stopped at a shop and bought the orange beads. When having arrived in Kidoa's house, she told me that she cannot wear it like that because the *dogo* is only pretty when the big beads alternate with small red ones. I gave her two *birr* for buying these and the next day, she made her necklace the proper way: two big orange beads

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<sup>95</sup> During my first stay, Nakwa had a special necklace called *unitee*. This necklace consisted of big wooden beads. Nakwa had made it herself: she had covered the wood with clay and threaded the beads onto a thin piece of bark from the *doshite* tree and smeared the beads with butter so that they shine. Nakwa told me that only circumcised women may wear this necklace. But not every circumcised woman wore such a *unitee* because I have only seen it on Nakwa.

alternated with four small red ones (see picture two). When she was finished, she did not put it on but allowed Nautcho to wear it for a short time. Nautcho, being proud of such a necklace, walked through the village and showed it to everyone. At that moment, I was drinking coffee in Khalle's house, from where one can see Kidoa's house. Khalle's husband and Aiebet were there and talked immediately about Kidoa's new necklace and calculated how much it had cost. Later, Kidoa told me that everyone asked her about the new necklace. She had told them that she had bought it from the money she had earned through selling chewing tobacco.

Nakwa said that she bought all her jewellery in Omorati herself. On her upper arm Nakwa had three *muul* (metal bracelets) which she had gotten when she married. The two *marra* (brass bracelets) she wore around her wrists Konrad had given her. Nakwa told me that she preferred brass and copper bracelets. These were also more expensive (six *birr* each) to the metal ones (five *birr* each). The aluminium ones are bad, she said. But in everyday life the girls and women mainly wore aluminium and metal bracelets that they got from Omorati.

On the day of her marriage the girl has to take her *gele* (leather skirt) off, Kidoa said. From now on she may wear a *dafarre* (cloth skirt) or *morritch* (leather dress). Kidoa and Nakwa preferred wearing their *dafarre* – Nakwa had a purple-blue checkered one and Kidoa a white-green striped one. Most women in Aoga, especially the young ones, wore a *dafarre* in everyday life. The women wrap this cloth that is bought in Omorati around their waist. When Kidoa went to Omorati, she sometimes tied it above her breasts together, so that it resembled a dress. The cloth is relatively loosely wrapped. The women rewrap it several times a day but always take

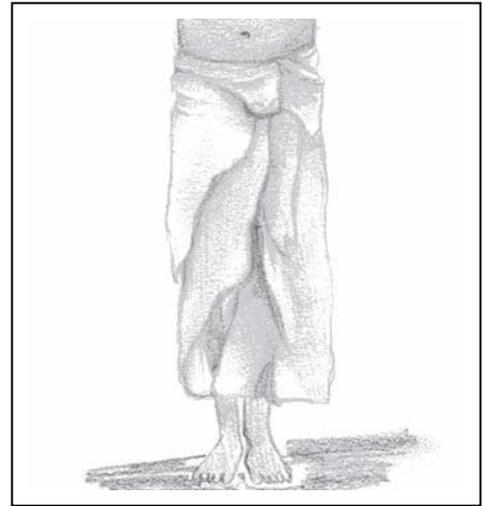


Figure 6: The *dafarre* – a woman's skirt

good care that their private parts do not show. When comparing Hamar and Dassanetch, Strecker was puzzled that the Dassanetch women “wear their skirts loosely and casually wrapped around their hips (you could easily and quickly pull them off!)” (Lydall, Strecker 1979: 132).

*From my diary (31.1.04): Ankoï was quite cheeky today. Khalle joked with Nakwa and took one of her dambu (chewing tobacco) pieces. Ankoï wanted to get it from her and pulled on her cloth. Suddenly all the women were angry with him. No one may pull on a woman's skirt, they said.*

Besides wearing a *dafarre* the women could also wear a *morritch*. This is a leather skirt which mostly old women like Elette and Yetam wore in everyday life. Like the girl's leather dress, the *morritch* is made of several goat skins. Kidoa told me that she needed four goat skins for sewing her *morritch*. Some women like Kidoa had their *morritch* decorated with *morieng* but others did not have any decorations on it. Compared to Nyendite's skirt, Kidoa's *morritch* had only



*Figure 7: The morritch – a woman's leather skirt*

very few beads and was not as colourful. It did not have *susur* (metal beads) nor plastic beads on the edges of the leather. Many women wore it as a skirt. Kidoa showed me that there is a leather ribbon on the top, so that the skirt can be tied up and worn like a dress. Kidoa did not wear her *morritch* in everyday life. But she promised me that when she had enough oil, she would put the oil and some charcoal on the *morritch* and wear it for me. A few days later, Kidoa smeared her *morritch* with oil and made a fashion show for me, just as her sister Angutee showed me her *ogo*. I could see that such a *morritch* is very long, even longer than the girls' skirts. After Kidoa had smeared her *morritch* with oil, she used it quite often as a blanket for Nautcho and Nakwa-Tini.

*From my diary (14.2.04): When I came to Kidoa this morning Nautcho and Nakwa-Tini were still sleeping. She had covered them with her morritch. Last night, she had already used it to cover them when they slept outside.*



Picture 23: Kidoa wears her *morritch*

For special occasions like *dimi* ceremony, the women wear an *ogo*, Kidoa told me. Like the *morritch*, this dress is made out of several goat skins which are sewn together. But it is made of more goat skins (about ten) than the *morritch*. Thus the lower rear is thicker and it resembles a tail. Kidoa also said that a woman wearing an *ogo* looks like a goat. The *ogo* is decorated with *morieng* (coloured beads).

Kidoa had lent her *ogo* to Nakwa's sister Awus who is doing *dimi*. After the *dimi* ceremony she will get her *ogo* back. Nakwa did not have an *ogo* anymore since hers had fallen apart.

## 2.2 Bridehood – being a *nyakhataran*

After a girl has married she is not a girl any more, but is still not yet a woman. She has now the status of a *nyakhataran* (bride). Quite often the young wives are not called by

their names, but instead simply *nyakhataran*. During my second stay there were several *nyakhatarans* in Aoga, Orib and Kidoa's neighbour's wife Nyakhan among them.

A *nyakhataran* is neither girl nor woman, as one can already tell from her appearance. Orib wore a *morritch*, the leather dress of the women, but her hairstyle was that of a girl. Orib and Nyakhan were richly decorated in beads, necklaces, and bracelets which they had been given at their weddings.

Nakwa said that *nyakhatarans* work hard. I realised this in many conversations.

*From my diary (8.2.04): Yeruboi came to Nakwa this afternoon and wanted Nyendite to prepare coffee for him. Nakwa laughed and said he forces her to do the work of a nyakhataran.*

Generally girls and women worked much and enjoyed it, as they told me. Nakwa told me that Dassanetch women always work. They are not like men, she said. She explained that women like to work and if they do not do that, they become ill. I got the impression that it was especially the brides who have to do most of the work. Nakwa and Kidoa sometimes rested a bit in the afternoon but Nyakhan never seemed to rest but was always working.

Orib was in the stock camp during my second stay. Kidoa told me that when she was just married she also stayed for some time with the cattle in the *foritch* (stock camp). It also seemed that newlyweds spent time there. This might be because the brides do not have either children or a house yet. They are more free in moving around than married women in that that they are not bound to the village.<sup>96</sup>

### **2.3 Life as a married woman**

In the previous pages I spoke about how a girl becomes a woman. I described various kinds of marriage and made clear that a woman does not acquire the status of an adult woman with the day of her marriage. It is only after a female has given birth that she is considered to be a *minni* (woman). But nevertheless a girl's life changes after she has

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<sup>96</sup> Orib was in the *foritch* with her husband. I do not know whether Kidoa had also been to the *foritch* with Nyabba or by herself. But unlike Kidoa, Orib was her husband's first wife and had married a man who was about her age.

married. In this chapter I deal with the everyday life of a married woman. I concentrate on the relationships and cooperation of co-wives and the relationships between husband and wife.

### **2.3.1 Cooperation of co-wives in everyday life**

Claudia Carr notes about Dassanetch that within the household there is a division of labour that depends upon the status of the women (1977: 168). I have not noticed such a division of labour within Nyabba's household but rather that each woman takes care of her own "sub-household".

During my first stay, I had an idealistic and romantic, almost naïve, view of Nakwa and Kidoa as being one unity. They had their houses next to each other and told me that they assist each other.

*From my diary (1.9.02): I have the feeling that Kidoa is like her (Nakwa's) daughter. The two support each other very often. Kidoa also said that Nakwa is like a mother to her.*

During my second stay, this feeling vanished almost completely. The two lived next to each other and got along very well but in everyday life there was not much cooperation between them, or at least not as much as they had told me there would be.

*From my diary (5.2.04): Last time I had the impression that Kidoa and Nakwa work together and are an "inseparable unity". I don't think that any more. Each one is taking care of her household and of her children. Kidoa rather brings Nakwa-Tini to her sister Angutee or to her mother when she goes to Omorati but not to Nakwa. And every woman cooks for herself. Often they give something to the children of the other woman but they themselves only eat their own food. To me it seems like Kidoa brings and gets more nyaadu (porridge) from Angutee than from Nakwa.*

In the evenings, each of the women prepared food for her children. Each ground sorghum for herself. During my first stay Nakwa-Tini was very sick. This was the only time when I saw my host mothers exchanging food: Nakwa gave Kidoa ground sorghum. In the evenings Kidoa usually cooked quite early, around seven o'clock. She

also cooked less than Nakwa because she did not have as many children to feed. Nakwa, on the other hand, was always very late with cooking, often not finishing until nine o'clock. When Kidoa was finished with cooking, Nakwa's sons Arba Nech, Ulli and Karre came to Kidoa with a plastic bowl and wanted some porridge. Kidoa always complained because she had only little porridge but was supposed to give something to Nakwa's children, too. When Nakwa had finished her cooking, Kidoa sent Nautcho to Nakwa who gave something in return.

During my stays, I bought coffee very often for Kidoa and Nakwa or gave them money for buying coffee. During my first stay, I had only bought coffee once or had just given it to one of the two, assuming they would share it. When I arrived for the second stay, I had only one plastic bag filled with coffee and said: "*Heella Kidoa ubaa Nakwa.*" (This is for Kidoa and Nakwa.) During the following days they shared, which was an exception as I found out.

*From my diary (15.2.04): The two women don't share their belongings. I had always taken it for granted. Kidoa just told me they usually don't do that. When Nakwa has bought coffee, she will use it herself, just as Kidoa will do when she has her own coffee.*

Already during my first stay, Kidoa told me that Nakwa's children are also her children and that Nakwa-Tini and Nautcho are also Nakwa's daughters. The women assisted each other also with the raising of the children but still I considered it a difference who the "real" mother was.

*From my diary (10.2.04): I think it makes a big difference who the real mother is, even if they assure again and again that all children are theirs. Kidoa just came back from Omorati. Nautcho and Nakwa-Tini happily run towards her. Nyendite and Anko also went into Kidoa's house but just too looked if she had brought candies with her and left immediately after.*

When Kidoa and Nakwa sat each in her house, they often talked and sometimes also argued with each other, mostly because of their children.

*From my diary (12.2.04): Every time the children fight with each other, their mothers are quarreling with each other, too. Each one of the children is running crying to*

*his/her mother who will support her own child. That is why frequently Angutee supports Kidoa's children but Nakwa does not.*

During the workshop Nakwa talked about how it is to be *min gudoha* (first wife; literally big wife). The first wife has a superior position towards the other wife/wives, she said. If she is old and cannot bear children any more the husband takes another wife. Then he sleeps with his second wife but he still goes first to his first wife and drinks coffee there. The first wife resembles a peacemaker, just by using words.<sup>97</sup> It is good to be the first wife, Elelle confirmed.<sup>98</sup> When the other wives argue or when the husband beats one of the wives, the first wife makes peace and tells them to stop (Elelle, workshop session: Hamar-Dassanetch, October 6, 2002).<sup>99</sup>

Once I asked Nakwa (in the presence of Kidoa) whether she liked Kidoa from the start. Nakwa said that she liked it when Nyabba married A-Nautcho.<sup>100</sup> It is not good when a man has only one wife because then she has to do all the chores in the household, she explained. Later on I found out that Nakwa accompanied Nyabba when he went to Kidoa's parents to bring coffee. Nakwa said she liked it when Nyabba took a second wife because Kidoa assisted her in her household. In Jinka, Nakwa said that she is sometimes jealous of Kidoa and would like Nyabba to sleep with her. But they do not quarrel, she explained, because they are afraid Nyabba might beat them (Nakwa, workshop session: Hamar-Dassanetch, October 6, 2002).<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> It is similar in Turkana. Schultz and Scholz write that the first wife has a special position among the wives; she is the "boss". In many cases the first wife wants her husband to take another wife to get support for her household tasks (1994:61-63).

<sup>98</sup> Elelle is the first wife of Aiebet, one of Aoga's elders. Konrad and I invited Elelle to come with us to Jinka and join the workshop at the South Omo Research Center.

<sup>99</sup> Almagor writes that there are different terms for first and second wives. The first wife is called *min a shurte* (literally: wife of the front part of a man's hairstyle). It refers to a man's hairstyle which is his pride. The second wife on the other hand is called *min kara* (literally wife of the stool) which refers to the husband's headrest. It is she who does the daily work of the household with which the first wife cannot cope alone (Almagor 1978: 167). During my stays in the field, however, I did not hear these terms.

<sup>100</sup> When Nakwa and Kidoa talked to or about each other they used their names of address. Nakwa addressed Kidoa as A-Nautcho and Kidoa Nakwa as A-Loichama. There was also a rule of how the children of each of the women should address the two women. Kidoa told me that her daughters address her with *eye* (mother). Nakwa's children use the term A-Nautcho. But Kidoa's daughters address Nakwa, just like Nakwa's real children, with *eye*, Kidoa said. This rule emphasises the dominant role of the *min gudoha* (first wife) since she is called mother also by the children of the other wife/wives.

<sup>101</sup> In Turkana, a wife who is jealous of the other wives is regarded a bad woman (Schultz, Scholz 1994:64).

### 2.3.2 The relationship between husband and wife

Girls and boys, women and men do different tasks in everyday life. What John Wood states about the Gabra that live in northern Kenya also applies to Dassanetch: “It is as if men and women occupy separate but parallel worlds that intersect at discrete moments but otherwise remain apart” (Wood 1999: 42). Kidoa and Nakwa spent much of their time in Aoga, where they prepared food and coffee, made chewing tobacco or were in the fields. When Nyabba was in Aoga it seemed to me as if they did not have much to do with one another.

*From my diary (13.9.02): I realised that men and women do not spend that much time with each other. All day long men and boys tend the goats or are in Omorati or take a nap while the women do their chores within the household, fetch water and look after the children.*



Picture 24: Nakwa shaves Nyabba's hair

Wives are supposed to always do what their husbands tell them to do, Arkriet, a young man, told me several times. If a wife does not listen to her husband he will beat her, he said. Arkriet often carried a *yie* (rod of hippopotamus) with him. He explained that men use this rod for beating their wives and children. I asked whether women might also use it. He just laughed and said that women must not beat their husbands. Women, on the other hand, have to be beaten, because otherwise they become arrogant.

*From my diary (2.9.02): Until now both women (Nakwa and Kidoa) seem very self-confident. No sign of the poor women who get beaten by their husbands like western feminists use to claim about Africa. (...) Though I have the feeling that women have to*

*work harder than males. The men take care of the livestock but very often lie in the shade and nap. The women carry these heavy jerry cans several times a day. Kidoa has a jerry can which seems to me unbelievably big and heavy. That must be at least 20 litres.*

Already on the first day of my first stay, Arkriet explained the use of the *yie* to me. From Jean Lydall's films and papers I knew that in Hamar beating is regarded differently than in Europe.<sup>102</sup> I was prepared that it might be similar in Dassanetch and that men might beat their wives in public. Still it was not until my second stay that I was confronted with such a situation.

*From my diary (6.2.04): The nyakhataran next to Kidoa's house was grinding sorghum. Suddenly she stood crying in front of Yeruboi (the one who always walks like he will die the day after and sometimes looks for his chicken in Kidoa's house) who got ready to hit again. Nyabba said: "Ash, Yeruboi". (Leave it, Yeruboi.) Yeruboi took his hand down and went away while cracking his whip. I was slightly shocked. Probably because he has beaten her while everybody was sitting in front of their houses and just watching. No one comforted her or yelled at him. What did she do wrong?*

I never found out why Yeruboi had beaten his young wife. All I knew was that they had married only a short time ago. They did not spend much time together: while Yeruboi always was with two of his age mates, Nyakhan seemed to work all day long. In her essay "Beating around the bush" Lydall analyses beating in Hamar and describes it as a way of how the newlyweds get to know each other. "The new couple has the problem of getting to know and like each other, and they do it in the way they have learned at the dances, through provocation and beating" (Lydall 1994: 214). The young women often provoke their husbands, for example, with cooking badly. The main purpose of this

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<sup>102</sup> In the films *The women who smile*, *Two girls go hunting*, *Our way of loving* and *Duka's dilemma* Lydall gives insights into Hamar culture, especially into the worlds of Hamar girls and women. In *Two girls go hunting* Lydall interviews Gardi who is going to marry. It becomes apparent that in Hamar for newlyweds beating is a means of getting to know each other (Lydall, Head F1990).

provocation is to test their husbands, Lydall states (Lydall 1994: 212).<sup>103</sup> Following Lydall's argumentation I propose that in Dassanetch beating might also be a means for getting to know each other, testing and consolidating one's position within this husband-wife relationship.

During my second stay, it came to an argument between Kidoa and Nyabba one night. I did not notice it but heard about it the day after from Nakwa and Yeruboi. The problem was that Nyabba still owed four cows to Kidoa's family. Nyabba said he will pay later but Kidoa's family wanted to have the cows, so they told Kidoa to come back to them. Kidoa was on the side of her family and wanted to go to her family, Nakwa explained. Beside this incident I never witnessed any situation when Nyabba and his wives quarreled with each other or when Nyabba was violent against them. This might be due to the fact that Nyabba had been married to Nakwa for more than sixteen years and to Kidoa for at least six years.<sup>104</sup> They knew each other and did not have to establish their positions within the household anymore. But there were several other examples where I realised that there were differences between reality and ideal. Kidoa and Nakwa, for example, told me that Nyabba never drinks alcohol.

*From my diary (7.2.04): Nyabba just came back from Omorati. He seems drunk although Kidoa assured that he does not drink alcohol. He sat down on his kara (stool) in front of Nakwa's house. Karre and Ulli looked at Nakwa questioning. But she just took a glimpse and continued making dambu (chewing tobacco).*

This situation gave me the impression that it is not completely unusual that Nyabba drinks alcohol when he is in Omorati. A few days later Kidoa told me that he always quarrels when he comes back from town. Nakwa and Kidoa seemed to ignore it when he was drunk. Maybe this was their way of dealing with the situation. When I was with Kidoa she was always respectful towards Nyabba. Once he was quite drunk and

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<sup>103</sup> In Hamar there are also rules about how a man should beat his wife – only on the back, with a *micere* (rod) and never with his hands. For more information about the *micere* see: Ivo Strecker 1990: *Micere. Zur Bedeutung der Rute bei den Hamar Südäthiopiens* and Annette Seifert 1993: *Die Rute als Kommunikationsmittel am Beispiel der Hamar in Südwestäthiopien*.

<sup>104</sup> These dates are my estimations made according to my estimations of the ages of the persons, the ages of their eldest children and what Kidoa and Nakwa had told me about when they married.

quarrelled with me.<sup>105</sup> Afterwards when he had fallen asleep, Kidoa made fun of him when the girls and young women came to her house. This, however, was an exception. From the beginning I thought the division of labour between men and women was imbalanced. To me the women worked much more than men. But I never heard Nakwa or Kidoa complaining about that.

*From my diary (14.2.04): Now I know why I consider it quite disconcerting when Nyabba is around. Most time I spend with Kidoa, Nakwa or Nyendite and help them in whatever they are doing. But Nyabba is sitting either in Kidoa's house or outside in the shade. He gets his food and coffee made for and brought to him. It is so different how men live here. Today when I was in Nakwa's house there was a young man who, I guess, wanted to be a bit funny when he told me where I shall sit and how I shall pour in coffee. This makes me sick. They pretend to know everything but they don't do anything but come home drunk from Omorati.*

*From my diary (29.8.02): When we were with Nakwa this morning she said something which made me do serious thinking. We sat in her house and drank coffee. Someone handed milk into the house. I rose for taking the milk but Nyabba said I shall stay and sit down. Nakwa replied that women always have to get everything themselves. Does this mean she feels treated unjustly?*

Comparing Dassanetch and Hamar I had the feeling that the relationship between husband and wife in Dassanetch is not as strict as among the Hamar.<sup>106</sup> In Hamar, when a woman serves coffee, she lowers “her head and body in a submissive pose”, her husband “does not look at her directly” and she herself “does not drink coffee but sits at the hearth” (Lydall 2004: 1). Kidoa served Nyabba coffee several times a day. In the mornings it was often only to Nyabba, Kidoa and me. Kidoa and Nyabba looked at and talked to each other. It seemed a casual and unconstrained atmosphere, often also a lively discussion.

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<sup>105</sup> I have explained this in chapter two where I outlined my relations with the members of my host family.

<sup>106</sup> Ivo Strecker observed a difference, too. “Watching Galeba [Dassanetch] men and women, I am once more struck by the fact that from tribe to tribe here in southwest Ethiopia the male-female relationship varies. While in Hamar it is antagonistic, here in Galeba it seems to be playful” (Lydall, Strecker 1979: 131).

But Nyabba was more or less dependent upon his wives. Once when Kidoa and Nakwa were in the fields and Nyabba had stayed in Aoga, he told me that there would be no food until in the evening since Kidoa and Nakwa were not around. He did not seem ill-humored or angry but rather accepted it as a matter of fact. This dependency gave Kidoa and Nakwa a position from which they exercised control and power.<sup>107</sup>

## 2.4 Motherhood

### 2.4.1 Becoming a mother means to become an adult woman (*minni*)

When a girl grows up she gets to know the tasks and responsibilities of a woman but it is only after she has given birth that she is acknowledged the status of a *minni* (adult woman). Her new status is visible to everyone. When a *nyakhataran* notices that she is pregnant she puts on her *ogo* (special leather dress of the women)<sup>108</sup>, takes *eshu* (coffee shells) and goes to her mother's house, Kidoa said. There the mother will shave the bride's hair. When the hair grows again, she gets the hairstyle of a *minni*. This hairstyle is called *me damaan*: all the hair is braided regularly and falls to the sides of the head, except for the *goite*. A *goite* always consists of three small braids on the upper backhead. Kidoa pointed on her head and showed me the *goite*. "Heella umtchu" (These are my children), she said. The three braids of the *goite* stand for a woman's children.

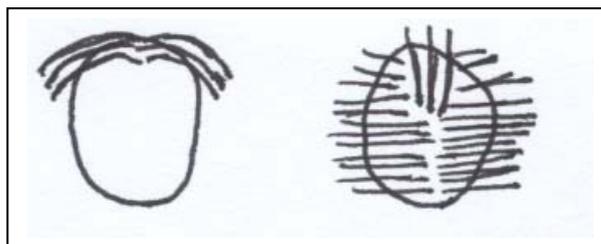


Figure 8: The women's hairstyle with *goite*

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<sup>107</sup> In the section about preparing food and coffee I go discuss more in detail how Kidoa and Nakwa exercised power.

<sup>108</sup> Kidoa told me that a woman gets her *ogo* after she has married. Relatives will make it for her.

All the other hair stands for Nyabba, she said. From now on the female is called *minni* and accepted as a woman.<sup>109</sup> The shaving of the hair has a deeper meaning than the simple act of shaving and braiding it anew. It serves to signify that the female has become an adult woman. It symbolises her new status.

Besides the hairstyle there is no other way to see whether a female is a mother or not, Kioda told me. In Hamar, for example, mothers wear a belt decorated with cowrie shells. At one end, these shells are arranged in rows of either two or three which indicates the sex of the first-born child: two indicate a girl and three a boy (Lydall, Strecker 1979b: 177).

When a woman is pregnant for the first time her parents will get a part of the bridewealth, namely five cows, Kioda told me. Bridewealth is not a fixed amount and may differ but it is the custom that a man does not need to give cattle until his wife has given birth, Kioda said. This confirms the fact that a marriage is not completely valid and solid until the birth of the first child. This may also explain why husband and wife can get divorced if there are no children although divorce is prohibited in Dassanetch.

The birth of the first child not only brings a change in status of husband and wife but also a change in names. Mother and father of the child are now called “mother (father) of so-and-so”; for example, Kioda is called A-Nautcho (mother of Nautcho) after her eldest daughter Nautcho and Nyabba I-Kabelle (father of Kabelle) after his eldest son Kabelle.

The birth of the first child leads to the establishment of a new household. It is now that a woman builds her first house where she and her husband will live. Until that a *nyakhataran* and her husband live with the husband’s first wife, the husband’s mother, or in the *foritch* because the young wife does not have her own house yet, Nakwa told me. That is also why Orib, who had been married for more than a year, did not live in an own house. She lived with her husband’s mother in Acheina, in the stock camp, or with Nakwa.

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<sup>109</sup> When a woman gives birth to twins, the mother and her twins wear a *kob* (leather ribbon which is decorated with cowrie shells) around their neck. When I was in Aoga the first time, Lotte, the wife of one of the elders in Aoga and friend of Nakwa and Kioda, had just become mother of twins. She wore that *kob* because it is a gift of God to give birth to twins, she said.

I asked Kidoa what happens if a woman never becomes pregnant.<sup>110</sup> Kidoa answered that this woman wears the hairstyle of the girls and is called *nyakhataran* for the rest of her life.

During the workshop Nakwa talked about what happens after a woman has given birth. During my second stay I could also observe this because Kidoa's neighbour Sokhon had given birth shortly before I arrived in Aoga. On the fifth day after the birth, Nyabba and the other elders went into Sokhon's house. She filled four calabashes with coffee. The elders stayed in the *bil gerre* (entrance area) and sprayed coffee on the ground. They spit *dambu* (chewing tobacco) and *makhate* (salt for chewing tobacco) on that place, too. Afterwards they again took coffee into the mouth, sprayed it and called the name of the child. Three days later Sokhon went through Aoga with a calabash in her hand and sprayed it everywhere and on everybody.

*From my diary (30.1.04): While we were sitting in front of Nakwa's house Sokhon came with a big coffee calabash and sprinkled everyone with water from that calabash. I was surprised and thought she had gone mad. But then I saw how she went from house to house and sprinkled the people sitting in front of their houses. On her way back, she stopped at every house and collected firewood. Nakwa gave her two big sticks.*

In Jinka, Nakwa had explained that after the elders have blessed the child, the mother collects leaves from the *miedi* tree. She grinds the leaves and mixes the powder with water. When the cows return to the village in the evening, she takes the calabash filled with the mixture and a branch of an acacia (without the bark) and takes her child in the cape of the leather dress and leaves the house. She drives the cows through the village and sprays the mixture everywhere. This is how she blesses the village (Nakwa, workshop session: Hamar-Arbore-Dassanetch, October 7, 2002).

If a girl gets pregnant before she has married, this is called "cowhide in the bush", in contrast to "cowhide in the house", Nakwa said. The girl's parents will be angry with the boy who made the girl pregnant. They will force him to marry the girl. The child may be born; there are no restrictions, Nakwa said (Nakwa, workshop session: Hamar-

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<sup>110</sup> During my first stay, a childless woman lived in Aoga. Thus when asking this question, I knew that it would not sound foolish to Kidoa.

Dassanetch, October 6, 2002). This is different from Bashada, Banna and Hamar where children born out of wedlock are killed or aborted beforehand (Epple 1996: 67; Lydall, Strecker 1979b: 153-154). Baldambe explained that in Hamar some men kill their wives when they are in a big rage about their wives being pregnant from another man (Lydall, Strecker 1979b: 153). Lydall doubts that, stating that “this story should be understood as a moral tale rather than as a statement of fact” (Lydall 1994: 225).

#### **2.4.2 The first shaving-ritual of a child**

The Hamar have a concept of impurity which influences childbirth and whether a child may live or not. If a child gets the top teeth first, it is considered *mingi* (impure) and is “thrown away in the bush.” Also, if the previous child’s naming ritual (*gali* ritual which is performed by the child’s grandmother) has not been performed, the previous and present child are impure and have to be killed (Lydall, Strecker 1979b: 147).<sup>111</sup> Among the Dassanetch there is no such concept of impurity. But there is the first shaving-ritual of a small child. This shall be performed before the mother gives birth again.<sup>112</sup> Unlike in Hamar and Bashada it is not the child’s grandmother who performs the ritual, but the child’s namesake.

Nakwa explained the procedure to me through telling how it had been when she shaved the hair of Kidoa’s daughter Nakwa who was named after her: Nyabba had bought a goat.<sup>113</sup> His brothers Arba Nech, Aiebet, and Lokwat stood in front of Nakwa’s house and held the goat up while it was stabbed to death with a spear. While the blood ran, Nakwa and her children and Kidoa and her children entered the house. Walking beneath

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<sup>111</sup> The *gali* ritual is very well described in the book “Baldambe Explains” (Lydall, Strecker 1979b: 48-50) and to be seen in the film “The women who smile” (Lydall, Head F1990).

<sup>112</sup> Unfortunately I do not know what happens when a woman gives birth without having performed this ritual first. But from what Nakwa said in the workshop (and the facts that there is no ritual to perform to get pregnant and that a child born out of wedlock is not considered impure) I suppose it has no severe consequences or none at all (Nakwa, workshop session: Hamar-Dassanetch, October 6, 2002; Nakwa, workshop session: Ari-Banna-Bashada-Dassanetch, October 8, 2002).

<sup>113</sup> In the workshop in Jinka Nakwa specified that this shall be a castrated goat which is slaughtered. The goat is distributed after a certain principle. One front leg and one back leg is for the family of the child getting shaved. The namesake gets the other front leg and back leg (Nakwa, workshop session: Ari-Banna-Bashada-Dassanetch, October 8, 2002).

the goat, they got sprinkled with blood. Kidoa had bought coffee shells and Nakwa prepared coffee. After Nyabba had blessed Nakwa-Tini Nakwa took a razorblade and shaved Nakwa-Tini's hair. This was the first time that her hair was shaved.

Nakwa said that this ritual has to take place in the house of the person who gives the name. Nakwa also said that Orib, Loichama, Nyendite and Kolokhon were all named after members of Orib's family (Nyabba's sister) and that the shaving rituals took place there. This is contrary to what Nakwa had told during the workshop when she said that the namesake comes to the homestead of the child to whom he/she has given his/her name (Nakwa, workshop session: Ari-Banna-Bashada-Dassanetch, October 8, 2002).

### **2.4.3 Being a mother**

“Being a mother and having many children is good.” Not only Kidoa and Nakwa, but also Orib and her friend Okhul openly expressed this attitude. They asked me why *ferenjis* (white people) only have one or two children. I asked them if it were better to have many children. They said it is good to have many children – boys and girls. When one gets many girls, one will get many cattle and goats later on. When one has many boys, they will take care of the cattle and small stock. It is not good to have only girls because they leave the homestead and no one will take care of the livestock. And when the mother dies, she will not be buried but thrown away like a dog if there are no sons, Orib said.

The greatest love and care of the mothers goes to the small children and babies. Nakwa spent most of her time with Becky and Arba Nech. Even while working, Nakwa and Kidoa had their youngest daughters near them. While making *dambu* (chewing tobacco) Kidoa kept telling Nakwa-Tini “*Lalo!*” (Dance)



*Picture 25: Nakwa-Tini is with her mother while she makes chewing tobacco*

*From my diary (6.2.04): Nakwa and I sat in her shade. She breastfed Becky and in between kissed her. She sang to her, made her dance and encouraged her to walk. Later we went into the house because it got too windy. Nakwa lay down and Becky-Nini snuggled up to her.*

*From my diary (14.2.04): Kidoa plays very often with her daughters. Last night, when we were in front of her house, she lay on the cowhide and lifted Nakwa-Tini and Nautcho in the air.*

Kidoa and Nakwa had special songs for their youngest daughters. It is not only the mothers but also other girls and women who sing these songs to the babies. Kidoa always sang “*Nakwa-Tini ini ye atan. Nakwa-Tini makina ye gili. Nakwa-Tini. Nakwa-Tini Turmi les sedhie. Nakwa-Tini Arba Minch nodhie...*”<sup>114</sup> Kidoa explained to me that she only sings it now. When Nakwa-Tini is older that song will not be sung any more. When Nautcho was small she had her own song but it is not sung any more.

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<sup>114</sup> Unfortunately I cannot translate this song word for word. The theme of it is that Nakwa-Tini has gone by car to Turmi and Arba Minch.

To me the small children and babies seemed very dependent upon their mothers and elder sisters. This close relationship between mother and child was reinforced by physical attachment. This resulted also because the small children were not weaned until they are two years old.

*From my diary (28.1.04): It seems like there is permanently one of the children crying here. One reason for this is, I think, because they are together with their mother or an elder sister all the time. And when these go away for ten minutes, the little ones are not used to that and start to cry.*

After a while I realised that this might only be a first impression. Especially during my second stay when it was harvesting time, Kidoa and Nakwa often left their smallest ones in Aoga when they went to the fields.

*From my diary (12.2.04): The children here are either with their mothers or they have to take care of each other themselves. In the beginning, I thought they are spoiled because they are with their mothers often and even two-year-olds get breastfed. But Becky is often alone and has to play by herself. If Nakwa is here, she makes dambu and puts Becky in the shade where she sits all by herself. In the evenings when everyone is busy milking the goats, Becky is all by herself, too.*

Nakwa was not as affectionate with her older children Nyendite, Loichama and Karre. These were busy with their everyday tasks. Loichama and Karre spent their days outside the village herding cattle and small stock. Nyendite assisted her mother in domestic chores.

In Nakwa's house it was often not peaceful at all because her children quarrelled with each other.

*From my diary (2.2.04): Ulli and Ankoi are quite cheeky. They want to hit Nakwa. But Nakwa also pretends to want to hit them.*

But often this was only a play. Ulli once was whining because he was hungry and wanted to force Nakwa to prepare some *nyaadu* for him. Nakwa just laughed and prepared coffee first. It often seemed like Nakwa's sons were testing their mother. But she never gave in and remained "in control".

*From my diary (12.2.04): There was a terrible fight between Nyendite and Loichama today. Loichama wanted to eat Nyendite's beans and put them in the boiling water while she fetched water. Nyendite came back and tried to take them out. They were beating each other quite severely. Nyendite did not have any chance because Loichama is taller and stronger than she is. Orib called Nakwa who chased Loichama away. He returned and beat with a stick on the roof. Nakwa went outside and told him not to come back because there will be no food for him today.*

## **Summary**

In this chapter I have described the three stages of becoming a woman. These are girlhood, bridehood and womanhood. A *maarti* (girl) like Nyendite slowly grows into her womanly tasks by assisting her mother and other female relatives. Step by step she assumes more and more responsibility through domestic chores. Working hard is only one aspect of being a good girl as Nyendite explained. Girls also define themselves through dress, jewellery and leisure activities such as dancing. Every evening Nyendite used to meet with her friends and they sang and danced together. At the age of about ten to twelve years, Dassanetch girls are circumcised. This ceremony takes place collectively and one expert is responsible for circumcising several girls. Each girl is held by a woman who in turn becomes the girl's *beel* (friend).

Once a girl has been circumcised, she may marry. From her wedding day until she gives birth to her first child, a female is considered a *nyakhataran* (bride). It is only once she has conceived her first child that she acquires the status of a *minni* (woman) and may dress like one.

In many cases, as in my host family, the husband has more than one wife. The *min gudoha* (first wife), like Nakwa in my host family, has a more superior position than the second wife, but my host mother told me both are supposed to cooperate. While during my first stay I considered Kidoa and Nakwa as an "inseparable unity" that always supports each other; during my second stay, I realised that each of them is responsible for her own household.

#### IV. Gendered spaces – where girls and women spend the day

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How are spaces structured and organised? Henrietta Moore describes the houses of the Marakwet in western Kenya and concludes that the organisation of space is “produced representation” (Moore 1986: 87). Moore takes Bourdieu’s description of the Kabyle house as a starting point. Bourdieu explains the organisation of the Kabyle houses according to other existing oppositions. He relates each of the sides, one dark and one light side, to female and male. To him the house is “...organized by the same oppositions and homologies that order the whole universe...” (Bourdieu 1990: 277).<sup>115</sup> Moore also regards the world as being divided into “gender specific domains and spaces, and into gender specific tasks, and both domains and tasks are associated with particular material items” (Moore 1994: 72). But these gender specific tasks, domains, and objects do not “simply reflect the division of the world into women and men” (Moore 1994: 72). The organisation of space is rather a context developed through practice – that is, through the interaction of individuals. Actors construct an understanding of the world and an understanding of themselves as gendered individuals (Moore 1986: 116; Moore 1994: 74). Spaces and patterns are reconstructed again and again in everyday life.

In the following pages I describe the existing spaces in Nyabba’s homestead in connection with the activities of the girls and women. It becomes apparent that the spaces described are gendered and follow a certain pattern. I also show that it is most of all the interaction of females and males in everyday life which consolidates this pattern.

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<sup>115</sup> See also: Pierre Bourdieu 1973: The Berber house. In: Mary Douglas (ed.): Rules and Meanings. The anthropology of everyday knowledge.

## 1 The house – a woman’s domain?

In the early feminists’ literature researchers held the opinion that “a woman’s place is in the home” (Ortner 1974: 77). This often went along with an assumed universal sexual asymmetry between women who occupied the “subordinate” domestic sphere and men who occupied the “superior” public sphere (Rosaldo 1974: 17). In her thesis about material culture in Arbore, Christina Gabbert asked “Is the house the woman’s domain?”. She asked it not only once but twice and concluded that the house is not the domain of one person but the place of many people living together and interacting (Gabbert 1999: 51). This question arose maybe out of protest against early feminists’ literature.

In Aoga women and girls spent much more time in and around the house than men and boys did as I could observe. While Nyendite helped her mother with domestic chores, her brothers tended the stock. While Nakwa and Kidoa cooked food, prepared coffee and made chewing tobacco, Nyabba took a nap in the shade or was in Omorati. Of course the house is also a place where males and females interact – Nyabba had coffee each morning in Nakwa’s and Kidoa’s house; he ate and slept inside. But the house is mainly a domain of the women. I propose that the house is a place where women exercise control and power; for example through cooking food and serving it they decide what to cook and who gets how much. This seems to have been neglected when women and the domestic sphere were treated as being subordinate.<sup>116</sup> In that way I speak of the house as a woman’s domain.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Rosaldo and Ortner ascribe the domestic sphere to women but are convinced that the domestic sphere is subordinate to the public just as women are to men. They regard this as a universal principle (Rosaldo 1974: 17-23; Ortner 1974: 67-77).

<sup>117</sup> In Bashada, people say that Dassanetch women chase their husbands away from the houses during the day and that the men must not enter (Epple, personal information, July 3, 2004). This is not true – I have never seen or heard that a man was chased away – but maybe holds some truth in it because men spend most of their time outside which is probably also due to the size of the houses and the heat within.

## 1.1 *Bil* – a Dassanetch house

Approaching Aoga one could see from some distance the igloo-like houses with their tiny entrances. The *bil* (houses) were either made of bush (*bil iisha*), of leather skins, straw mats and iron sheets (*bil baaroo*), or entirely of iron sheets (*bil khaalia*).<sup>118</sup> These types of houses differed in the material with which they were built, but the internal arrangements of the houses were similar. It was impossible for grownups to stand upright inside the houses since these were less than 1,50 metres high. The entrances were very low so that one almost needed to crawl inside. The diameter of a house was about four metres, so that it became very cramped at night.

*From my letters (1.2.04): Do you remember the photos of the houses I showed to you? It doesn't matter much to me that they are so small but what sometimes really annoys me is that the entrances are tiny. I barely fit through them and each time I crawl inside in the house, my knees look as if I have been playing in the dirt.*

During day, the entrances were kept open. They were only closed when those living in the house had left for a longer period of time – for example, to go to far-away fields. Then the houses were closed, so that no person or no animal could enter.<sup>119</sup> During the night, Kidoa sometimes hung a plastic bag on the entrance so that it was temporarily closed. She told me that she had done this because of the wind that blew very strongly at night.

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<sup>118</sup> It seems as if in former times when there were no iron sheets in the area, only hides and plaited grass mats were used for covering the house. Von Höhnel described the houses as follows: “They looked as if they were only intended as temporary habitations but the dirt about them proved the contrary” (von Höhnel 1894: 164). Carr also speaks of beehive-shaped houses that are covered with skins and woven grass mats (Carr 1977: 183). I do not know what kinds of houses are most widely spread but I suppose that the houses made of iron sheets are rather rare because I have seen such a house only once.

<sup>119</sup> There is no taboo concerning animals entering the house. The small but scrappy dogs that were held by many families in Aoga and also by Nakwa and Kidoa were not allowed to get inside because otherwise they would eat the food. We always chased them away except for the few times when they were called for eating Becky's faeces. When I told Kidoa that when in Hamar a goat enters a house, it becomes *mingi* (impure) she said that they do not have anything like this. When entering the house goats do not become impure. Once, Karre brought a newborn kid into Kidoa's house. It stayed next to her jerry can for a few hours and was protected against the sun. During my second stay, Kidoa had a chicken sitting on the left side in the back of her house. Kidoa even built a shelter out of *alang* branches in the house to protect the chicken. During night, some chickens and a cock were sleeping on the roof of her house, too. Kidoa explained that in a house like hers a chicken may only sit on the women's side and not on the men's side. In a house like Nakwa's, it could also sit on the men's side if it were behind a *noono* (wall-like cradles).

The entrances of all the houses in Aoga faced towards the same direction: the west. I asked Nyabba and Nakwa for the reason and they said if the door were towards the other direction, the women would sit on the “wrong” side.<sup>120</sup> Nyabba said that among the Fargaaru clan the entrance must not head towards any other direction.<sup>121</sup>

Even though their houses were very small, Kidoa and Nakwa spent a big deal of their time inside in them during the day. I had the impression that Nyabba spent most of his daytime in Kidoa’s house and Nakwa confirmed this. Nyabba slept more often in Kidoa’s house, too. Nakwa said that it is very full in her house because of her eight children and thus Nyabba prefers going to Kidoa.

Inside a Dassanetch house most areas can be seen and are accessible except for the area on the *kub* (loft) or behind the *noono* (wall).



Picture 26: Donnee, a young woman, builds her house



Picture 27: Donnee covers the house’s strestle with *alang* bush

Kidoa told me that a woman gets her own house after she has married. But often, like in her case, the girl is still young when she marries. When the girl gets older the first wife, a female relative, or the girl herself build the house, Kidoa said. This first house is often a house made of *alang* bushes. After a few years she builds a house of leather and iron sheets. Kidoa told me that after she married Nyabba, she lived together with Nakwa. Some years later Nakwa helped her to build her own house.

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<sup>120</sup> In the following section I discuss what is considered the wrong and right side in Dassanetch houses.

<sup>121</sup> I did not find out any other reason for this. Gabbert reports that in Arbore the entrances of the houses always face towards the side where the first members of that clan came from (Gabbert 1999: 41). Almagor who stayed among the Tuurnyerim clan of the Inkabelo section gives the following explanation “Huts face east, the direction symbolically associated with masculinity; the doorway of a hut symbolises a woman. So by facing the doorway towards the east, the relation of a married women’s fertility to masculinity is indicated” (Almagor 1978: 86). Unfortunately I cannot give any further explanation about the doorways among the Fargaaru clan. Additional research would be necessary to make clear statements.

After I had left from my first stay, Nyabba's family moved to the other side of the Omo. Both women did not move at the same time. In the beginning of October Nakwa moved together with Nyabba. Nakwa loaded all the hides, milk containers, and calabashes on a donkey. She took the whole house with her. Kidoa stayed in Aoga with the children. Some time later Kidoa moved, too. About half a year later Nakwa returned to Aoga and Kidoa went to the *foritch* (stock camp) with Nakwa-Tini and Nautcho.

Kidoa told me that when she came back from the stock camp she built her house by herself. Only her younger sister Angutee helped her. Nakwa had moved earlier than Kidoa but directly went to Aoga and built her house there by herself. This was before Becky was born.

Nakwa told me that after she came back from the other side of the river, she built her house by herself. As a girl she spent much time in the *foritch*. This is where she had learned how to build a house just like Orib did then. Orib did not have a house yet but in the *foritch* she had built an *alang* house for her husband and her sister Kolokhon.



Picture 28: Kidoa's sister Angutee builds her house anew

When building a house, the women first built a trestle like Kidoa's sister Angutee does in picture 28. Afterwards they covered this trestle with either *alang* bush or leather skins and iron sheets. The vertical sticks of the trestle are called *hjelo*, the horizontal ones *galitee*. Both were sticks from the *miedi* tree. Once I observed how Nakwa repaired her house and saw that she tied the straw mats and leather skins together and to the trestle with bark of the *miedi* tree.

### 1.1.1 Arrangement of Nakwa's and Kidoa's houses

In Dassanetch the number of houses of one homestead varies depending on how many wives a man has. Each one of a man's wives usually lives with her children in her own house. Nyabba's homestead consisted of two houses, one for Nakwa and her children and one for Kidoa and her daughters.<sup>122</sup>

Nakwa's and Kidoa's houses were arranged in a way that is typical for Dassanetch, Nakwa said. The arrangement reflects the status of the women: one can see whether a woman is a first or second wife.<sup>123</sup> During my first and second stay Kidoa's house was right of Nakwa's house. Nakwa told me that her house is on this side because she is Nyabba's *min gudoha* (first wife).



Picture 29: Nakwa's bil baaroot (left) and Kidoa's bil iisha (right)

There was no fence around Nyabba's homestead that distinguished it as his homestead, but it occupied a certain area within Aoga. This area included Nakwa's and Kidoa's

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<sup>122</sup> Nyabba told me that these houses belong to him. Nakwa on the other hand told me that her house and all the things on the "women's side" belong to her. I was surprised and asked if they do not belong to Nyabba, she said "*Eeh, heella Nyabba ubaa*". (Yes, this is also Nyabba's.) She explained that everything belongs to both. It is the same in Kidoa's house; everything belongs to Nyabba and Kidoa, she said. In the following I refer to the houses as Kidoa's and Nakwa's houses because they were responsible for building and cleaning them and spent more time in the houses than Nyabba.

<sup>123</sup> This arrangement is not only typical for Dassanetch but also for Arbore. In one session during the workshop in Jinka the Arbore woman Shauki reported of that (Shauki, workshop session Bashada-Kara-Arbore, October 6, 2002). I do not know whether the arrangement of Dassanetch houses within the village reflects any order, like for example in Gabra where the "order of tents in the north-south line reflects phratry, clan, and family seniority" (Wood 1999: 42).

houses, the goat and cattle enclosures, and the sorghum and maize stores. There was no central shade tree in Aoga where one could escape from the sun during the day.

During my first stay, Aoga was close to two big acacias where Nyabba and his age-mate Aiebet sometimes took a nap. During my second stay all the houses were situated several metres away from bushes and trees, so that there was no natural shade within the village. Instead the men, women, and children used the place beneath the *buiti* (sorghum store) as shade. In this *gaatch* (shade) they spent their daytime. Kidoa often went into her mother's *gaatch* when crushing tobacco leaves. Nyendite sat in Nakwa's *gaatch* when removing the maize grains from the cobs. Nyabba took his post-lunch-naps in there. It was only when the sandstorms got very bad that they moved inside their houses.

In the mornings and evenings when there was shade next to the houses, Kidoa and Nakwa sat in front of them and prepared chewing tobacco, ground sorghum, shaved the children's hair etc.



*Picture 30: Kidoa sits in front of her house and shaves Nakwa-Tini's hair*

### **1.1.2 *Bil baaroa* – Nakwa's leather house**

Nakwa and her children lived in a *bil baaroa* – a house made out of hides, straw mats and iron sheets. Kidoa told me that when Nakwa had built her house, she used old cow

hides for the outside of the house. Nakwa said that she did not buy the hides, straw mats and iron sheets herself. It was her and Nyabba's family who gave them to her.

Nakwa's *bil baaroa* had wall-like "cradles" as vertical separations. Such a *noono* (cradle) was made of branches and leather ribbons by the women themselves. In Nakwa's house there were five *noono* which were arranged like walls along the house. She had made them all except for one which Nyabba's mother had made for her. Behind her *noono* Nakwa stored objects for everyday use like calabashes and plastic bowls as well as Nyabba's gun, clothes or firewood. Each of the *noonos* in Nakwa's house was tied onto an *iketch* (stick) in between. This *iketch* was also used for hanging on *kurrums* (milk containers) and *durrums* (gourd containers for producing butter). Nakwa told me that her *iketch* is made of *miedi* (kind of tree).

Besides being used as a wall, the *noonos* may also be used as bags when moving. Before Nakwa moved to the other side of the river in October 2002 she explained that she will fill these *noonos* with her cooking pot, calabashes, and *kurrums* and put them on a *mule* (donkey). That is how they travel, she said.



Picture 31: *Kurrums hanging on a stick in front of a noono in Nakwa's house*

### 1.1.3 *Bil iisha* – Kidoa's grass house

Kidoa's house was made out of *alang* bush only. This is why the house is also called grass house. This type is usually the house of a newlywed wife, Kidoa said. Kidoa was

still a young wife. She told me that when she has been married for a long time she will build a *bil baaroa*, a house like Nakwa's.<sup>124</sup>

Nakwa told me that her first house had been one like Kidoa's, a *bil iisha*. After she had given birth to Loichama, she had built her *bil baaroa*.

Like all *bil iishas* Kidoa's house had a specific feature: a *kub* (loft). Unlike lofts in Bashada houses, her loft was not very solid and very low due to the small size of the house. Kidoa used it for storing calabashes, clothes, tobacco, coffee etc.<sup>125</sup>

When the women and girls live in the *foritch* for some time, they build a provisional house there, Nakwa told me. This is usually a *bil iisha*. Thus not only young wives have this kind of house. But I suspect it to be most common among them since newlyweds often do not have enough hides and iron sheets yet to build a *bil baaroa*.

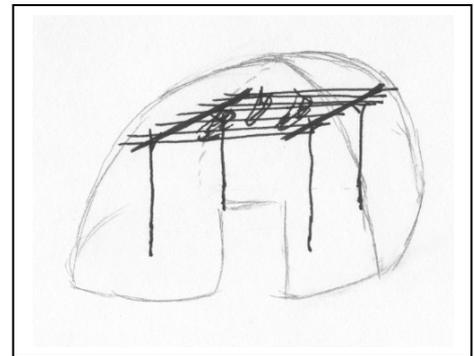


Figure 9: A *kub* (loft) in a house

## 1.2 Inside a house

### 1.2.1 Sitting order – differentiation by gender and age

Like all Dassanetch houses, Kidoa's and Nakwa's houses were divided several ways. One division was *bil afu* (entrance area; literally: house's mouth) and *bil gerre* (living area; literally: house's interior). These two areas were marked through a *nyakhulante* which can be a big branch as in Nakwa's house or a metal stick as in Kidoa's house.

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<sup>124</sup> Kidoa told me when she will build her *bil baaroa*, there will be no special ceremony. She will simply build it.

<sup>125</sup> In Hamar brides sleep on the loft. "At night the *uta* [bride] sleeps on the loft, in the day she comes down. So it is for three evenings or five days, just a short time" (Lydall, Strecker 1979b: 141). It is the same in Bashada where the bride may even stay on the loft for several months (Epple 1995: 65). In Dassanetch a person does not fit on the loft.

*Bil afu* represents the entrance area where the fireplace was and where firewood and water containers were stored. The inner part, *bil gerre*, was where one sat, slept, ate and drank. The very back part was called *bil ello*. It was used for storing grains and tobacco leaves.

Another division consisted of a women's and a men's side. *Bil algalyiet* (left side [looking at it from the door]) was the females' side. This was where girls and women sat, did their tasks and slept. Kidoa and Nakwa always sat on the place directly next to the fireplace while I sat more in the back but also on the left side. The right side is *bil algalyab*. This was where boys and men sat and slept.<sup>126</sup> This division into a side for women and men does not only apply to the inside of a house but also to the outside. When sitting outside women are supposed to sit on the left side while men sit on the right side.<sup>127</sup>

*From my diary (30.1.04): In the evening I ate rubba ubaa haamo (sorghum with beans) with Nakwa and Nyendite. We sat on a tiny hide and the ground left from the*

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<sup>126</sup> Nakwa and Kidoa told me of two exceptions: the Randal and Kuoru section. Among the Randal, the sides are completely the other way around: the men's side is the left and the women's side is the right – in and outside of the house. Inside the house, the Kuoru have the same side ascription as in Nakwa's and Kidoa's house: the left side is the women's side and the right side the men's. But outside the house, the order is opposite: the left is the men's and the right the women's side.

<sup>127</sup> There are many examples of ethnic groups where the dichotomy right-left is associated with the dichotomy male-female. The Marle (one section of the Arbore) have the same sitting order like the Dassanetch – the left side is the women's side and the right side the men's side. In Gandarab (another Arbore section) there is another sitting order within the house but women always sit left of their husbands (Ballo and Gabbert, personal information, July 3, 2004). In Gabra men sit and sleep on the right and women on the left side, too (Wood 1999: 49). Among the Marakwet in Kenya women are said to be on the left side of the men, too. In the compound the cooking house which is the wife's domain is situated on the left side while the sleeping house which is associated with the husband is on the right side (Moore 1986: 55,45). This right-left dichotomy is also found in Bangladesh where men are associated with the right and women with the left. A wife who wishes to behave respectful remains to the left side of her husband while eating, sitting and sleeping. Lindenbaum proposes that this right-left association carries connotations of prestige, honour and authority (Lindenbaum in Harris 1987: 334). In that, she agrees with Hertz who considers this right-left dichotomy an asymmetry with preponderance of the right. To him the right side is associated with the male side because it is strong and active. The female side is weak and passive and thus belongs to the left side. He relates this universal asymmetry to the preponderance of the right hand and thus bases his argumentation on biological facts (Hertz [1909] 1960: 91-98). The Arbore Ginno Ballo gave a similar explanation about this dichotomy in Arbore. He said that men sit right because the right hand is strong and men are stronger than women. Thus women use the left side (Ballo and Gabbert, personal information, July 3, 2004).

According to what Nakwa told me (the right hand is the strong hand and the left hand the weak hand) the Dassanetch also see an asymmetry concerning right and left. Thus I propose that similar to Arbore and Hertz's theory, Dassanetch men sit on the right side because they are associated with strength just like the right hand. Women, on the other hand, are considered weak like the left hand and thus sit on the left side. But the components of this pair should not be dealt with separately. The connotations of right and left result from them opposing each other.

*entrance. Nyabba and the boys sat right from us. Afterwards Nakwa brought him his huge cow hide and he lay down over there.*

Unlike *bil afu* and *bil gerre*, the women's and men's sides were not visibly separated. In Nakwa's and Kidoa's house a big *lokhodu* (cowhide) was spread out and covered both sides. Nakwa explained to me that usually hides are used inside the house. Only when there is none, they will put an *isa* (goat skin) on the ground. Kidoa and Nakwa cleaned their *lokhodu* every day several times, at least once in the mornings and evenings. Each morning and evening Nakwa turned the *lokhodu* on the other side. When Nyabba took a nap in the afternoon he used the newest hide. Nakwa used a smaller one when she went to the field or cleaned the beans. Kidoa told me that the hides are from cows which they had slaughtered when they were very old.<sup>128</sup>

In Kidoa's and Nakwa's house the *getcham* (fireplace) was on the left side in the entrance area. I told Kidoa that in Hamar and Bashada the fireplace is always on the right side within the house. Kidoa insisted that in Dassanetch houses the *getcham* has to be on the left side.<sup>129</sup> If it were on the right side, the wife would curse her husband and he could die. I asked Kidoa jokingly whether she would put the fireplace on the right side if she were really angry with Nyabba. Kidoa just laughed and said that he would get a big stick and beat her.

Kidoa's fireplace consisted of three big stones which were anchored in the shape of a triangle in the ground. Two of these stones faced *bil afu* and one faced *bil gerre*. Kidoa told me that all women use this pattern when making their fireplace because this way the cooking pot is more balanced. It cannot fall into the *bil gerre* this way.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> I told Kidoa that Choke Baje (a Hamar and close friend of Ivo Strecker and Jean Lydall) had told me in Jinka that the Hamar bring hides to the Dassanetch who in return give them tobacco, calabashes and *makhate* (Baje, personal information, January 10, 2004). Kidoa confirmed this. The Dassanetch trade cow hides, goat skins and cooking pots with the Hamar and Bashada, she said. She told me that she does not have anything from Hamar at the moment because there is no peace and the Hamar do not come to Omorati.

<sup>129</sup> There is one exception Kidoa explained to me. Among the Randal section, the *getcham* is always on the right side. This is due to the fact that the female and male side is opposite to that of the other sections. Among the Randal, the women's side is on the right side and the men's side on the left side. Thus, the *getcham* is on the women's side.

<sup>130</sup> Sobania indicates another unique feature of Randal houses. Similar to the Rendille, the Randal hearth consists of six stones (Sobania 1980: 204).

In between these three stones the women put twigs and branches. In the middle, there is always fire or embers, so that the fire can be lighted when needed, Nakwa told me. This is theory. In practice, the women went very often to neighbours to get some embers because theirs had gone out.

Kidoa told me that on special occasions such as *dimi* the women put up a second fireplace next to their *getcham* because much coffee needs to be prepared. But unlike Hamar, Dassanetch women do not put up the fireplace outside the house, she said.

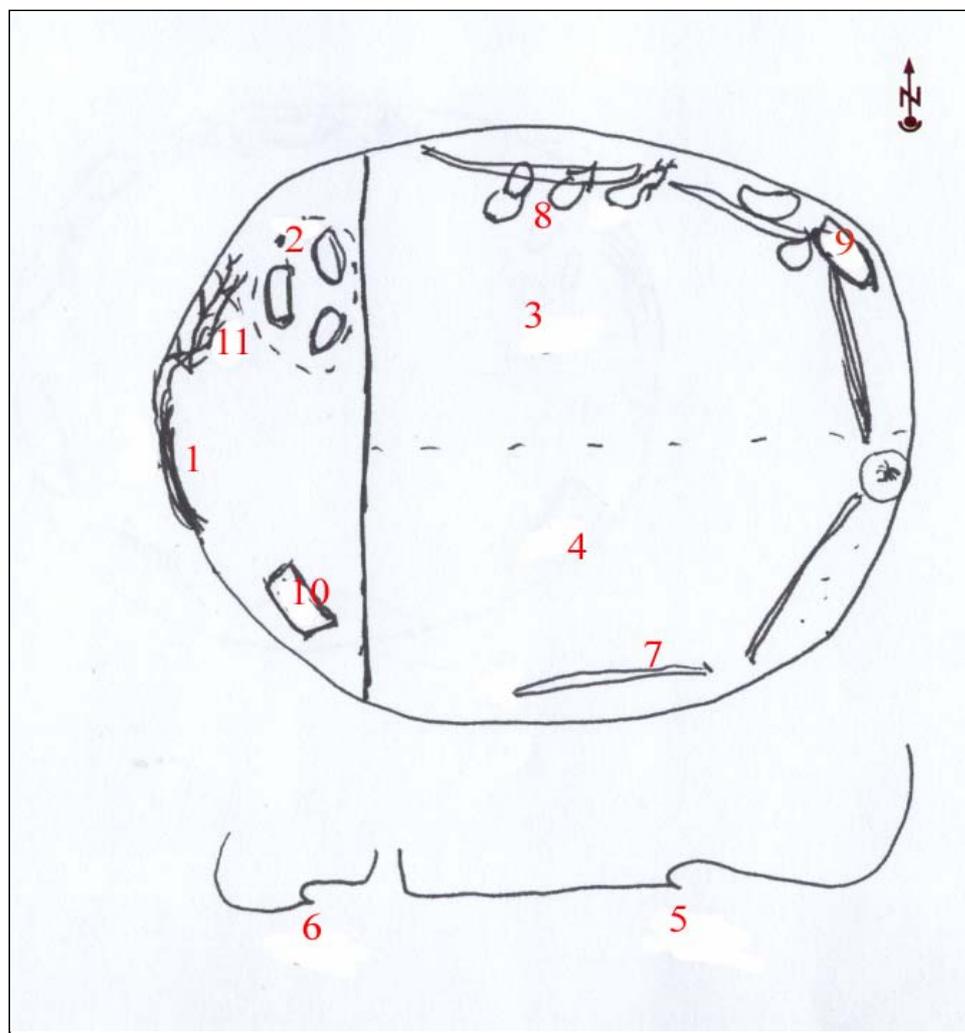


Figure 10: The interior of Nakwa's house: 1- bil afu (house's entrance), 2 -getcham (fireplace), 3- bil algalyiet (women's side), 4- bil algalyab (men's side), 5- bil gerre (living area), 6- bil afu (entrance area), 7- noono (cradle), 8- milk containers, 9- grinding stone, 10- water container, 11- firewood

In Nakwa's house, all cooking tools and household utensils were stored on the left side, the women's side. The coffee calabashes hung on one of the sticks forming the trestle of

the house. Nakwa kept her cooking pot directly next to the fireplace but often also hid it behind a *noono* when she went to the fields because she did not want to lend it to anyone. The spoons and beater were stacked in the wall behind the branches, where Nakwa also hung fresh sorghum for drying. The *kurrums* (milk containers) and *durrums* (gourd containers for making butter) hung on an *iketch* (stick) on the left side. During the night, Nakwa put the *kurrums* for goat milk on the right side, so that no one would mix up the *kurrums* for goat milk and those for cow milk.<sup>131</sup> Nyabba's gun, his shirts, and his shoes were kept on the right side of the house.



Picture 32: The women's side inside Kidoa's house: the fireplace, coffee calabashes and milk containers

Nakwa explained to me that women's tasks like cooking or grinding sorghum should only be carried out on the women's side. The grinding stone, just like other cooking utensils, should also be kept only on the left side.

The division of the house is obviously gendered: it is divided into a man's side and woman's side. Nakwa said that all the women's activities and objects used by females are placed on the women's side. But would it still be the women's side if these activities

<sup>131</sup> A *kurrum* consists of two parts: – the bigger vessel which is also called *kurrum* and the smaller lid *kulu*. Nakwa told me that she made her *kurrums* herself. For making them she used wood from the *doshite* tree which has very soft wood. First, she burnt the inside out and then scraped the wood off. She repeated this process of putting fire inside and scraping the wood off several times. For carving she used a *nyebidit* (file). Such a *nyebidit* consists of two parts: a wooden handle (in this case from a tree called *kelelte*) and *kibo* (iron). Nakwa had made her file herself. On the edges of the *kurrum*, she sewed a piece of leather (either from cow or goat skin). The outside she colored with battery acid. Nakwa said they collected batteries in Omorati. The outside of a *kurrum* is colored with charcoal and oil, Nakwa said. She also sewed a *saab* (leather ribbon) on the outside, so that the *kurrum* could be carried and hung. Quite often they are decorated with *vieru* (cowrie shells) and *boolong* (aluminium pieces).

took place and objects were stored on the other side or anywhere? I do not want to discuss this in detail but conclude that “behaviour and space are mutually dependent” (Ardener 1993: 2). It is space that defines the people and objects in it but at the same time the presence of the individuals and objects in space determines their nature.

In everyday life the girls and women did not always follow this ideal, gendered division. When Kidoa took a nap in the afternoon, she sometimes slept on the men’s side. Nyendite ground sorghum on the men’s side. Nakwa covered all the hide with tobacco leaves and seemed not to care where the women’s and men’s side was. This supports the fact that gendered spaces and objects are not static. They are reconstructed in the interactions of females and males again and again. Just like the left-right dichotomy, the men’s and women’s sides need to be regarded as a pair. Right and left determine each other just as male and female.

### **1.2.2 When guests come – preparing and serving coffee**

Every morning I drank coffee in Kidoa’s house. Preparing *bie kulla* (coffee; literally hot water) was one of Kidoa’s first tasks in the mornings. Usually she still had some water left from the day before, but if she did not she borrowed some from her sister Angutee or went to fetch it from the river. Already before I arrived she had made fire. She had lit the embers and put branches and twigs in the fireplace. These she had collected the day before. Sometimes, Kidoa sent Karre collecting firewood. I asked whether that was not the task of girls but she answered that it is no problem in this age but otherwise it is a task of the girls.

When I entered Kidoa’s house around seven o’clock, Kidoa and Nyabba and sometimes a male guest were already drinking coffee. Kidoa always sat next to the fireplace, the first place on the left side. Nyabba sat opposite to her, the first place on the right side. The male guest sat next to his right side. I sat next to Kidoa to her left, mostly with Nakwa-Tini between us. Nakwa confirmed to me what I observed: Nyabba (or the wife’s husband) always sits on the front place on the man’s side while she (the wife) sits next to the fireplace. According to their age male guests visiting sit to Nyabba’s right, with the oldest directly next to him and the youngest in the back of the house. No man

except Nyabba is allowed to sit on a *kara* (headrest) inside her house. If another man would do that, he would offend Nyabba, she said.

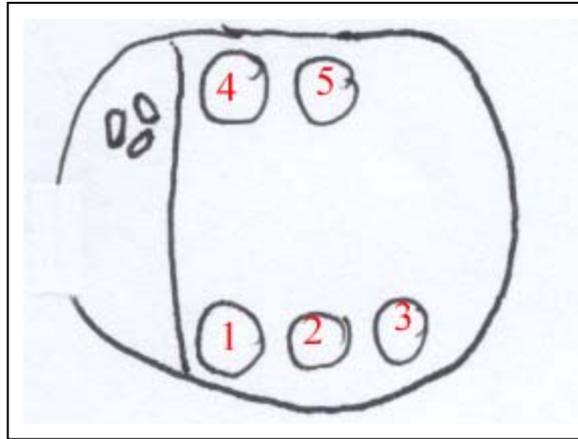


Figure 11: The sitting order within Kidoa's house  
(1- Nyabba, 2&3- male guests, 4- Kidoa, 5- I)

Several times I observed how Kidoa prepared coffee. First, she filled the *khaale* (metal pot) with water. Then she put about two hands full of *eshu* (coffee shells) in the water. She, Nyabba or I used to buy these in Omorati. She boiled it up and let it simmer for a while. Kidoa liked to put salt or ground ginger into the coffee. Nakwa, on the other hand, preferred sugar.

Usually one should use a *makhalle* (gourd ladle) for filling coffee into the calabashes. A *makhalle* is a small dried gourd that is tied to a branch. Nakwa told me that such a ladle can also be used for drinking coffee or milking. But Nakwa's was broken and Kidoa did not have one. Thus Kidoa used a small plastic cup or another calabash for pouring coffee into the calabash.

Coffee was handed out in a certain order. I had already observed this during my first stay and Kidoa explained it to me. First, she gave coffee to her husband, Nyabba. Afterwards the male guests were served, according to the sitting order. The eldest was served first. Then female guests got coffee and Kidoa herself took the last serving. The calabashes were not put on a garland as they were in Bashada and Hamar, but they were put on the ground, held and slightly shaken the whole time.

For drinking, each person had his/her own *daati* (calabash). In many households, also in Kidoa's and Nakwa's there were only few calabashes. Kidoa explained to me that every woman has to have two calabashes: one *daat eshu* (coffee calabash) and one *daat eenu* (food calabash). These are the husband's. One can have more, she said but these two are

the minimum. Kidoa and Nakwa only had one coffee calabash each. In the mornings and when guests came, they always borrowed each other's calabash or one from their neighbours. Each morning when I drank coffee in Kidoa's house, Kidoa sent Nautcho to Nakwa's house in order to bring a *daat eshu*. If there still were not enough calabashes, one had to wait for receiving and drinking coffee. Especially during my first stay, this was often the case since we were three guests instead of only one.

*From my diary (28.1.04): This morning Nyabba's brother came to Kidoa. Kidoa told me to finish my bie kulla (coffee) quickly because we have only one calabash and she wants to give something to him, too.*

Kidoa used Nyabba's calabash for drinking when he was finished. In the evenings we often shared one calabash which means that I drank first, she second, I third, and so on. Kidoa and Nakwa prepared coffee not only in the mornings but several times per day. In the mornings Kidoa and Nakwa drank the left-overs from their coffee. Nyabba, on the other hand, drank coffee at both houses. Kidoa told me that first he drinks coffee in Nakwa's house, then in her house.



*Picture 33: Coffee calabashes in Kidoa's house*

Kidoa and Nakwa often gave Nyabba and guests, including me, milk in the coffee. Their children never drank pure coffee either, but a mixture of coffee and milk, although more milk than coffee. When mixing coffee with milk everyone took care that no cow milk touched the coffee calabash.

Guests just passing by like Kidoa's sister Angutee stopped by a few times daily at Kidoa's house, and sat in the entrance area, usually did not get served coffee. I have noticed that this mainly refers to women. Angutee and Lotte came, had a small chat with Kidoa and moved on. Men coming for a visit such as Nyabba's age mates stayed for a longer time and also entered the house. They sat down in the *bil gerre* and were served coffee, which Kidoa had prepared especially for them.

Sometimes guests came and stayed overnight, for example, in the beginning of my second stay the mother of Orib's husband came for a few days. She worked on Orib's field on the riverbanks where Nakwa and Kidoa had their field, too. One day Nyabba's age mates came and stayed overnight. Kidoa confirmed what I had observed. Male guests sleep outside, mostly next to the goat kraal where they are a little sheltered. Female guests sleep inside in the house on the women's side.

### **1.2.3 Serving and processing milk**

I already indicated that milk, cow milk especially may not be used without restrictions. Women having their monthly period are not allowed to drink and use the milk of a cow. During the twelve days of the period, Kidoa told me, they may only drink goat milk. I was puzzled about this length but Kidoa and Nakwa confirmed it every time I asked. I was unsure whether this length of their period might be connected with circumcision.<sup>132</sup> But Kidoa told me that they only have their period for three days. She said this prohibition of drinking cow's milk lasts twelve days because it is their tradition. If a woman would drink cow milk or out of a vessel in which cow milk had been before, she might die or become infertile. The cow that gave the milk could die or become infertile,

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<sup>132</sup> Hanny Lightfoot-Klein writes that among women who are cut „the pharaonical way“ (the clitoris and labia are removed and the left skin is almost completely sewn together) the menstruational blood flows off very slowly. It often takes more than ten days (Lightfoot-Klein 1997: 77). Though the Dassanetch do not practise this kind of circumcision I was not sure whether circumcision might have a similar effect.

too.<sup>133</sup> I discovered this taboo by accident: I wanted to fill cow milk from a *kulu* into a calabash. Nyabba told me very strictly that this is forbidden. Cow milk must never be put into a coffee calabash.<sup>134</sup>

I asked why I always received cow milk without even questioning whether I could have my period. They told me that the taboo is valid only for Dassanetch, not for *ferenjjs* (white people). Kidoa told me that her mother told her about a woman who had drunk cow milk during her period and died afterwards. Only after their menopause, women are free to drink every kind of milk without any restrictions.

Because women having their period may not drink cow milk, good care is also taken that a woman does not accidentally touch this milk by preventing some household utensils touching the milk. In that way the taboo concerns men, too. Not only women but also men obeyed the restrictions in the use of certain objects. One of these utensils was the coffee calabash. When Kidoa had milked the goats, she poured goat milk into my calabash. But when Nakwa milked the cows during lunchtime, she put the milk into a *kulu* and added some coffee to it. Putting cow milk into a coffee calabash is not allowed, she said. Just as with her coffee calabash, Nakwa took care that her *kimedde* did not touch milk. If it did, she told me, she would have to wash it before continuing to use it.

This “cow milk taboo” is also the reason why Nakwa, Kidoa and Nyabba always took care that the children would not mix the *kurrums* (milk containers) for cow milk and goat milk.<sup>135</sup> The *kurrums* look almost identical and are produced in the same way. The

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<sup>133</sup> There are plenty of taboos concerning milk in Southern Ethiopia and Eastern Africa. For example in Hamar and Arbore women are not allowed to milk after they have married (Lydall n.d.: 2; Peller 2000: 81). The Pokot, an agro-pastoralist society in western Kenya, have a restriction similar to the Dassanetch. Women are restricted from using cow milk and milking cows during menstruation because they are considered polluted and polluting. It is feared that if a menstruating woman drinks cow milk this may have an ill effect on the health and fertility of the cow and the rest of the herd (Meyerhoff 1981: 99). Meyerhoff proposes that by claiming to be dangerous women can temporarily retreat from their tasks and rest (1981: 108). This does not apply to the Dassanetch since Dassanetch women are still allowed to milk cows even though they may not touch and use the milk of a cow.

<sup>134</sup> I suppose that this is done because of precaution in case someone having her period would use that calabash.

<sup>135</sup> The Dassanetch also use *een wala* (sheep milk). Nakwa explained that for sheep milk the same rules apply as for goat milk. It may even be put in the same *kurrum* and mixed. I never saw this milk getting used. During my first stay Kidoa told me that she cannot milk sheep because it is difficult. During my second stay there were no sheep at all in Aoga.

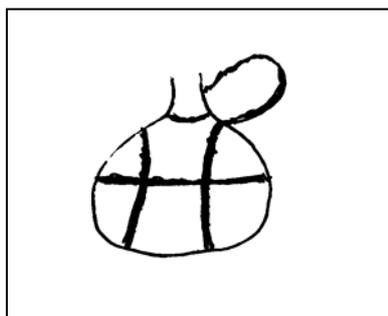
only difference is that the *kurrum ou* (cow *kurrum*) is bigger than the *kurrum aye* (goat *kurrum*) and that they are used for different kinds of milk.

*From my diary (31.8.02): A kurrum is not only a kurrum but the taboo with the cow milk plays a very important role. It is these things which determine the use of the objects.*

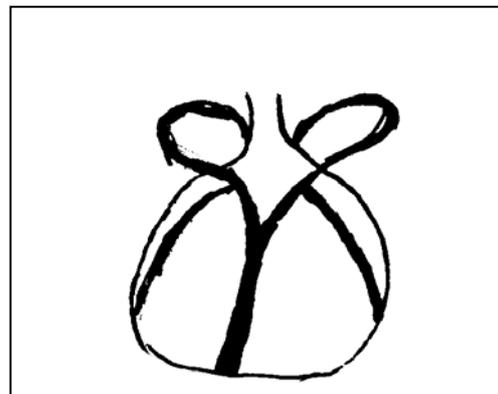


*Picture 34: Kurrums and durrums in Kidoa's house*

Most of the milk of the cows and small stock was used for drinking or mixing with food. Additionally Nakwa used some of the cow milk to make *salab* (butter). This is produced by shaking a *durrum*. A *durrum* is a vessel made of a dried gourd around which a leather ribbon is twisted. Similar to the *kurrums*, there are *durrums* for goat and cow milk. During my second stay Kidoa only had a small *durrum* for keeping butter. Nakwa had a *durrum aye* (goat *durrum*) and *durrum ou* (cow *durrum*) and took good care that they would not get mixed up since the same taboo applies as for milk because these are also vessels used in connection with milk.



*Figure 12: A durrum aye – for goat's milk*



*Figure 13: A durrum ou – for cow's milk*

One can tell which *durrum* it is by looking at the way the ribbon is tied around it and by its size. As shown in the sketch above the *durrum aye* is a bit smaller and has only one bow. The *durrum ou* on the other hand is bigger and has two bows.

*From my diary (1.2.04): Nakwa just showed me how one can shake the durrum. She tied the ribbon on a hjelo and shook it like the women in Bashada do.*

Nakwa produced butter as follows: she put milk in a *durrum* and shook it until the top layer became stiff. Then she removed the butter from the whey. Usually she put the butter in a smaller *durrum*. The whey was used for drinking. Depending on which *durrum* (and milk) it was, she shook it in a different way. When shaking the *durrum aye* she grabbed through the bow and held the handle and shook it for some time on her lap. When shaking the *durrum ou* she held one bow with one hand and the other bow with the other hand. By moving her arms she shook the *durrum*.

Kidoa told me that men are not allowed to shake the *durrum* when a woman is in the house. Old men may shake it when their wives are not at home. Young men are not allowed to do it because it is the work of a *nyakhataran* (bride), she said.

A woman who has her period is not allowed to put butter made of cow milk on her body either. She may make butter by shaking the *durrum* but it is forbidden to use it. If she touches it, she has to wash her hands. Kidoa explained to me that there is a way of being allowed to use this butter even though a woman has her period. If a woman heats the butter, adds some water and lets it stand one day, it may be used, Kidoa said.



Picture 35: Nakwa makes a *durrum*

#### 1.2.4 Preparing food and eating

The basic staple food of the Dassanetch is *rubba* (sorghum).<sup>136</sup> Very seldom, Kidoa and Nakwa cooked *nakhabuono* (maize) or *haamo* (beans). Even though Kidoa and Nakwa had harvested large quantities of beans during my second stay, they did not use them for cooking but rather sold them on the market in Omorati. There are also leaves called *hotcholotch* that the women collected and added to sorghum porridge but very seldom only. Kidoa made this only twice and Nakwa never.<sup>137</sup>

Kidoa and Nakwa prepared food twice a day: in the late morning and in the evening. The main dishes they cooked were *nyaadu* (sorghum porridge) and *rubba* (plain cooked sorghum grains).<sup>138</sup>

*From my diary (28.1.04): We drank coffee first. Ulli was complaining and almost crying. Nakwa laughed and said that he does not want to have coffee but nyaadu because he is hungry. Eventually, Nakwa cooked porridge. The children have to wait quite long until they get their first meal.*

Preparing and cooking food is an activity monopolised by women. I have never seen Nyabba or any other men cooking food.

*From my diary (30.1.04): Nakwa is in the field and Kidoa has gone to Omorati. We sat with Nyabba and Becky-Nini in the shade when Nyabba told me that there is no one who can cook for us because both women are gone. We have to wait until they are back. I ask why Nyendite won't do that. He said that she is too small.*

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<sup>136</sup> Almagor reported that the Dassanetch cultivate thirty-five varieties of sorghum (Almagor 1978: 41). Nakwa and Kidoa planted different kinds, red and white and a kind of yellowish sorghum. Both women told me that the white sorghum is the best.

<sup>137</sup> I do not know the reason why they seldom eat this but one reason certainly is that there are not many trees of that kind because the surrounding land is sparse. Another reason is that just like fishing, gathering has a social stigma, too. "The vast majority of gathering is done by the poorer Dassanetch and it is considered to be a very low status subsistence means" (Carr 1977: 200).

<sup>138</sup> Nyabba had lots of goats and cattle but they were only slaughtered for ceremonies and not just for consumption. During my first stay, Nyabba and his age mates ritually slaughtered two goats and roasted the meat. During my second stay we had once a bit of goat meat when one of the villagers got married and gave some meat to Nyendite. Nyendite and Okhul boiled it and we ate it – not like a real meal, but rather between two meals. Almagor also reports of these differences: that men who take part in ritual slaughtering eat roasted meat (women must not take part) while individually consumed meat is boiled (Almagor 1972: 80).

Jean Lydall examined women's monopoly over cooking and preparing food in Hamar. She does not regard cooking and other domestic tasks as a burden the men put on the women but rather a domain the women monopolise. Lydall claims that in Hamar women limit activities such as cooking and preparing food to their sphere in order to gain power. Even small boys are ridiculed when they play at grinding sorghum. According to Lydall women limit domestic chores to their sphere in order to "get their husbands dependent on them" (Lydall 1994: 220). Or like Elizabeth Meyerhoff stated concerning the Pokot in Kenya "by excluding men from this province women give themselves some leverage in their relations with men" (1981: 109). In other ethnic groups, Tsamai and Arbore, for example, men are also prohibited from touching cooking utensils and engaging in the cooking process (Melesse 1994: 54; Gabbert 1999: 49). I suppose that these restrictions concerning men and cooking in Dassanetch can also be explained as some kind of "dominance play" where women exercise "control and power" over men. As can be seen in the above excerpt from my diary, Nyabba was dependent on Nakwa and Kidoa in terms of food.

#### GRINDING SORGHUM

Grinding sorghum is a work of the women and girls, Kidoa explained to me. Men are not allowed to grind sorghum. They must not even touch the *yeeritch* (grinding stone). It is only women who are allowed to carry the very heavy stone from house to house. Once Konrad wanted to help Kidoa but she answered that men must not touch it. It is no problem for small boys who do not know any better but not for men. If they would touch the grinding stone, that would be an affront against the woman who owns it. She said that the woman could even die. If a man would grind sorghum or touch the grinding stone, he not only curses the owner of the stone but his age mates will make fun of him. They will tease him by saying "Are you a woman?" and beat him.

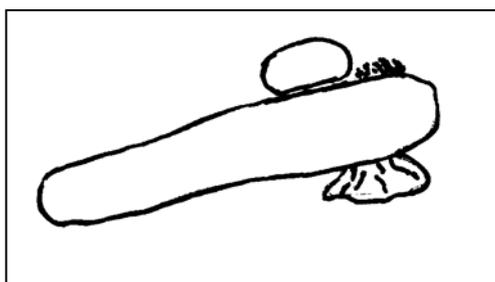


Figure 14: The grinding stone

For grinding, the women and girls use two stones: the *yeeritch* (grinding stone) and the *ummiti* (smaller upper stone). The *yeeritch* which is the bottom stone, is about 20 to 30 centimetres long, up to ten centimetres wide and five centimetres high.

Grinding sorghum starts before the actual process of grinding. Since only two women in Aoga (one of them was Nakwa) owned a grinding stone, they had to borrow one from someone else.<sup>139</sup> Kidoa did not have one and always borrowed Nakwa's. But Nakwa's *yeeritch* was often elsewhere, so Kidoa went to look for it. Having found it, she carried the big stone on her back while holding it with both arms and the smaller one on her head. Next, she spread out a hide. Onto this skin, she put the *yeeritch*. To make it lie in a sloping position, she put either a stone or a small sack filled with sorghum or beans beneath it. She knelt behind the "high" side and moved the *ummiti* back and forth. At the same time, she put some pressure on the front side of it, so that the sorghum grains lying between were ground to *dulu* (flour). During my first stay, Nakwa had told me that they also like to grind *tiisha* (fresh, green sorghum) because it is easier to grind but I have seen it only once. Porridge made of *tiisha* is called *bud-budde*. But usually the girls and women ground the dried sorghum grains and made *nyaadu* out of that.



Picture 36: Nyendite grinds sorghum

Sorghum was ground inside as well as outside the houses, but always on the women's side, Kidoa and Nakwa told me. During my first stay, I did not know about this rule and got the impression that it might be ground anywhere. And also, during my second stay, Nyendite ground sorghum on the men's side in the house without any obvious reason. When grinding sorghum during the day, the girls and women often went inside the

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<sup>139</sup> To me a grinding stone seemed a very essential household item – Kidoa cooked *nyaadu* at least once a day – but there were only a couple of *yeeritch* in Aoga. Kidoa said that a *yeeritch* is very rare. Nakwa's was from Jinka; a relative from Nyabba had bought it there and brought it to them.

house in order to escape from the wind and the constant sandstorms. But in the early mornings and evenings sorghum was also ground outside. In the mornings Kidoa and Nyendite ground sorghum on the men's side because the shade was on that side in the early hours of the day. In the afternoon and evening, they ground on the women's side which was then the shady side. When the sun went down, young girls came to Nakwa or Kidoa and ground their sorghum there. Sometimes three or four girls gathered around Nyendite when she was grinding and all girls joined singing their favourite dancing songs.

*From my diary (13.2.04): Kidoa is grinding sorghum. While grinding she sings one of her favourite songs ("Soda, soda, woiny, woiny, aimale, ...") How I will miss hearing her voice.*

## COOKING FOOD

Kidoa and Nakwa mostly cooked *rubba* (sorghum grains) and *nyaadu* (sorghum porridge). Cooking *rubba* took a shorter time overall because sorghum did not need to be ground. Nakwa especially preferred cooking *rubba*. This might be because she had to feed eight children while Kidoa only had to cook for her two daughters. Besides Nautcho did not like the plain sorghum and refused to eat when Kidoa cooked it.

Kidoa cooked *nyaadu* at least once a day. During my first stay, Kidoa had an *ibille* (clay pot) which had been produced in Bashada.<sup>140</sup> During my second stay, she usually used her big *khaale* (metal pot).<sup>141</sup>

The process of cooking *nyaadu* was as follows: First, Kidoa made the water boil. When it boiled, she put the *dulu* (flour) into it and boiled it up while continuously stirring it with a *nyabokholotch* (big wooden spoon). None of my host mothers had their own *nyabokholotch* but borrowed their neighbour's when cooking. As soon as the mixture became a porridge, Kidoa stirred it with a *kimedde* (beater). She took the *kimedde* in between her hands and moved them quickly, so that the porridge got well stirred

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<sup>140</sup> Although the women liked these pots, they were very rare. Kidoa said that merchants come to Omorati and sell them there. During my second stay, none of the women had these clay pots from Bashada. The reason was that conflicts between Dassanetch and Hamar had broken out and thus trade was cut off.

<sup>141</sup> The metal pots Kidoa and Nakwa used during my second stay they received when they took part in the workshop at the SORC in Jinka in October 2002. Each of the participants could choose between a sack of sorghum and a cooking pot as present.

without lumping or burning. Nakwa told me that only women may touch and use the *kimedde* because it is for cooking *nyaadu*.

There are several variations of a *kimedde* and it can be made of different materials. During my first stay Kidoa had a very special *kimedde*: on the top of a 20 centimetre long branch a goat's vertebra was tied. She had made it herself. During my second stay, Nakwa and Kidoa had a *kimedde* which they had simply cut off from a tree in the sorghum field, they said. Kidoa said the *kimedde* can be from any wood.

I have previously described the basic *nyaadu*. Kidoa was fond of adding salt to it while Nakwa used sugar. They added salt or sugar when the *nyaadu* was already stiff. They bought the spices in Omorati but only occasionally.

One day Kidoa added *hotcholotch* leaves into the porridge. Because the leaves did not have to cook as long as the porridge, she had cooked them first and added them later to the *nyaadu*.

Once, Kidoa wanted to make *balasha* (pancake of ground sorghum). She ground the sorghum, mixed it with water and poured some on a lid of a cooking pot. But it stuck to the lid and Kidoa could not turn it around. She pointed to the sorghum which was a mixture of red and white sorghum and said “*Heella dehn*” (This is bad.) So she made *nyaadu* instead. *Balasha* is only good with white sorghum, she said.

It is usually the married women and not the girls who cook, even though young girls know how to make *nyaadu*. When Nakwa was not present, Nyendite cooked sorghum or porridge for her younger siblings and father.

## EATING

After the *nyaadu* was prepared, Kidoa and Nakwa distributed it into calabashes and plastic bowls.<sup>142</sup> When Nakwa cooked, she always put something in a *daat eenu* (food calabash) and stored it behind the *noono* on her side. Nakwa told me that this is for Nyabba who will eat it later when he comes back from Omorati. The calabashes for food were much smaller than those for coffee and only used for porridge, sorghum or maize.

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<sup>142</sup> Nakwa told me that calabashes break very easily, for instance when one of the children steps on it or drops it. It is also difficult to buy them, and that is why many plastic containers were in her house.

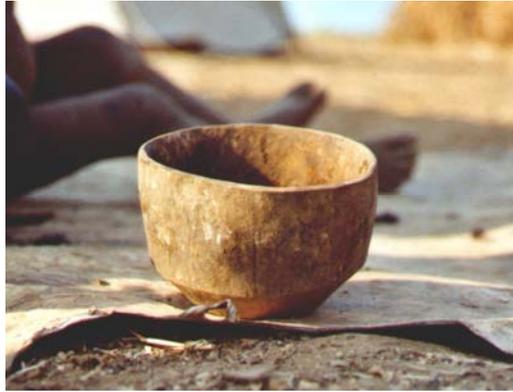
*From my diary (1.2.04): We eat nyaadu at Nakwa's house. I eat only with two fingers because I don't want to have a dirty, sticky hand. Nyendite tells me that this is wrong. She takes her right hand, stuffs it into the nyaadu and says: "That is right."*

Nakwa and Kidoa always ate with their children. A few times Kidoa was in Omorati and Nakwa cooked for all the children. Nyabba was in Kidoa's house and ate there. This gave me the impression that men and women might not eat together as a friend had told me about her experience in Mursi (LaTosky, personal information, January 23, 2004). When I told this to Nakwa, she started laughing and said that they eat together. But her house is very small and thus Nyabba prefers to eat in Kidoa's house.

The various ethnic groups in South Omo differ in many things. One of them is the eating habit. Compared to Bashada where I had seen that one calabash with food is put in the middle and everybody takes some and to Mursi about which I had heard that every person gets his/her own bowl, the Dassanetch share to some extent but not all the people share one bowl. To me it seemed like men and women do not eat from the same calabash. For example, when Nakwa cooked *nyaadu* in the late morning, she had several food calabashes and plastic bowls into which she divided the food. When distributing them she clearly said who should eat from which bowl. "*Heella Loichama ubaa Karre ubaa Ulli. Heella Arba Nech. Ankoi ubaa. Heella Nautcho ubaa Nakwa-Tini. Heella Becky ubaa yu.*" (This is for Loichama and Karre and Ulli. This is for Arba Nech. Also for Ankoi. This is for Nautcho and Nakwa-Tini. This is for Becky [Peggy] and me.) After distributing the food, Nakwa took one *kurrum* with fresh cow milk and poured milk into the bowls and calabashes. Sometimes, she added sour milk to the *nyaadu*. Unlike coffee calabashes, there is no problem with putting cow milk into the food calabashes. Nakwa and Kidoa used to spread the porridge along the sides of the calabash, so that it cooled down quickly.

*From my diary (23.8.02): The best moments today were those with Nyabba's second wife. First we drank coffee and she showed me step by step how to cook nyaadu. We began with grinding sorghum. This is quite exhausting and I am very bad at it – too slow, even in comparison with Kolokhon who is ten years old. Afterwards we cooked the porridge and ate it. Kidoa and I shared one bowl, the men received one and Nautcho and Nakwa-Tini shared a small bowl.*

Nakwa had a *kadditch*, which is a small wooden container from the tree called *kelelte*. She said jokingly that this is Arba Nech's *daati* (calabash) and explained that when Arba Nech was a baby, she put his *nyaadu* into the *kadditch* and he ate out of it.



Picture 37: Nakwa's *kadditch*

Unlike men, Dassanetch women must not eat with a *muogo* (spoon) but use their hands. If a woman would eat with a spoon, her children will be cursed and could die, Nakwa said. Nevertheless Kidoa and Nakwa often used the spoon when eating *nyaadu*. Once while eating I asked Kidoa why she sometimes uses a *muogo* if it is forbidden. She said she does not eat with it like the men do but only licks it.

Once Loichama had already started eating with a spoon but Nakwa could not find another to give to me. Since I had already begun eating with my fingers, I refused the *muogo* and Nakwa said: “*Kuuni Dassanetch*” (You are a Dassanetch) because I ate like Dassanetch women.

When eating one should eat with the right hand, Nakwa explained. It will be no problem if someone eats with the left hand but usually the right hand is the strong one. This is why one uses the right hand, Nakwa said.<sup>143</sup>

Men may only use the *muogo* for eating. The *nyabokholotch*, the big wooden spoon which the women use for cooking, must not be used for eating. Both kinds of spoon can be bought in Omorati. Nakwa said that she bought her *muogos* there since nobody in Aoga knows how to make them. In Kidoa's house, there was only one *muogo* – for Nyabba. In Nakwa's were several. She said that every man has his own spoon that he uses for eating. Nakwa stored them on the women's side, stuck behind a *hjelo* (horizontal stick of the house's trestle).

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<sup>143</sup> Above I described the right-left dichotomy in detail. See footnote 127.

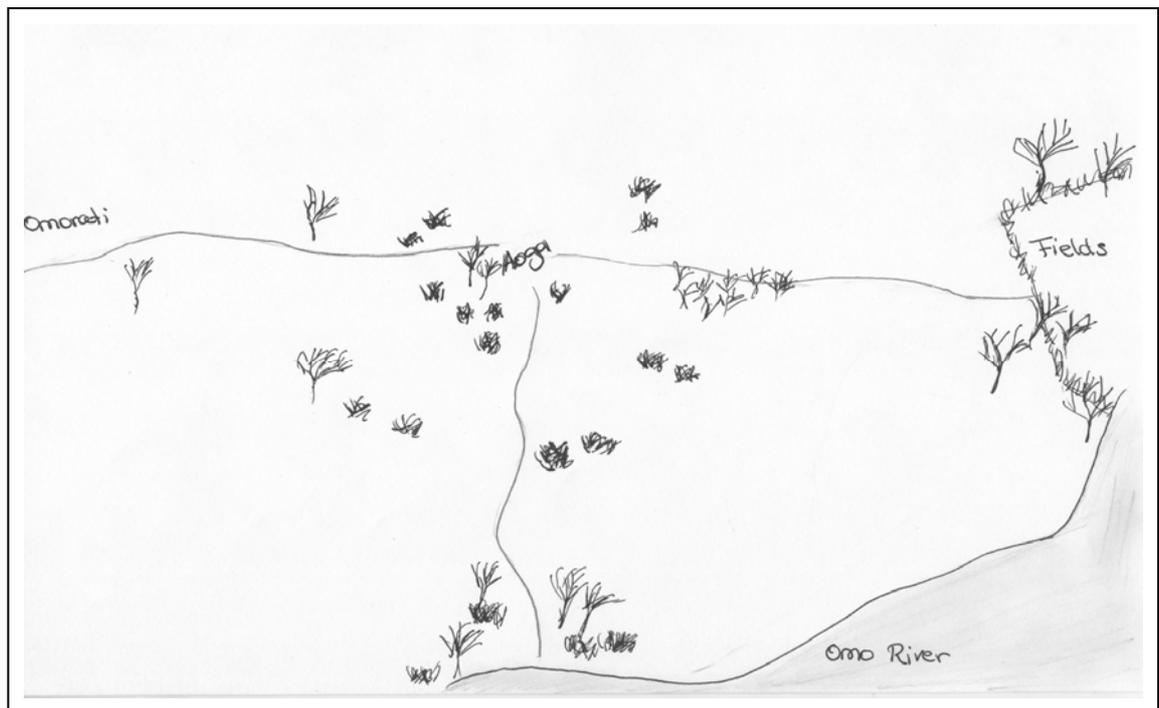


*Picture 38: Spoons and beater in Nakwa's house*

## 2 Around the house – girls and women on the move

The house can be considered the domain of women as I already discussed above. Nevertheless females must not be regarded as bound only to the house. In some way girls are even freer than boys. Young boys herd goats, sheep and cattle. They are bound to them the whole day. Girls, on the other hand, move around: to the cattle and goat kraals, to the fields, or to the river. Women also go to Omorati quite often to engage in buying and selling at the local market.

When comparing females and males, a certain pattern evolves. As in Hamar, Dassanetch men are primarily concerned with pastoral activities and women with agricultural activities (Lydall 1988: 86). This is not exclusive. Men, for example, help with digging the fields. Women also tend cattle and small stock and thus move into the spheres of men but their main tasks refer to the domestic sphere and the fields.



*Map 8: Aoga and the surrounding land (to the Omo River ten minutes walking distance, to the fields fifteen minutes and to Omorati fortyfive minutes)*

## 2.1 The cattle and goat kraal – women in the men’s sphere?

Each family had its own kraals near its houses. Some cattle and small stock were kept in there, mainly for providing milk for the family, but the majority of cattle was in the *foritch* (stock camp) far away. The kraals of Nyabba’s goats, sheep and cattle were next to Nakwa’s and Kidoa’s house. The *karr ou* (cattle kraal) and *karr aye* (goat kraal) each had one entrance which was near the entrances of Kidoa’s and Nakwa’s houses.

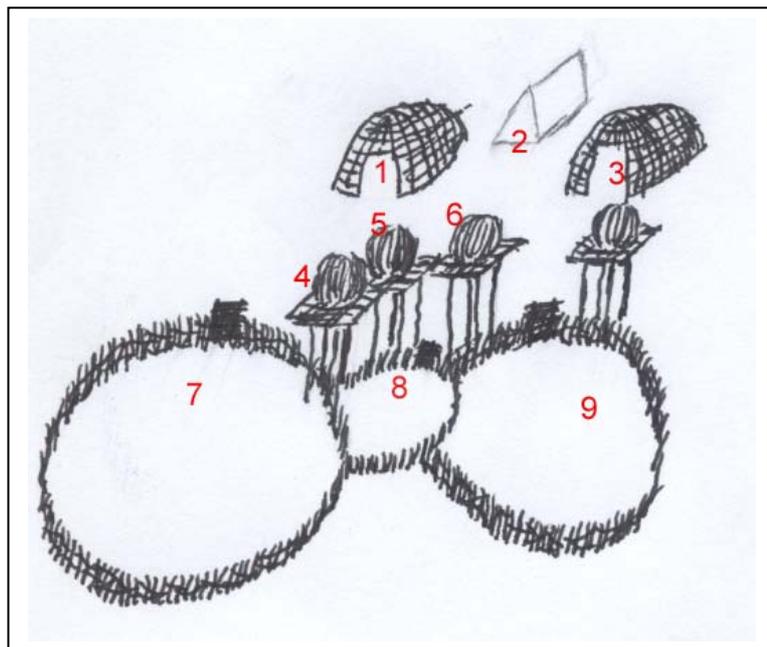


Figure 15: Nyabba's homestead in 2004 (1- Nakwa's house  
2- my tent, 3- Kidoa's house, 4- store, 5- cattle  
kraal, 6- goat kraal, 7- shelter for kids)

The goats stayed in an enclosure made out of branches and thorny bushes during the night and were thus well protected against hyenas and thieves. The fence of the cattle kraal was less solid and even vanished after a while because the women used the branches as firewood in the evenings. The kraals each had a thorny bough as a door, which was pulled into place for security at night.

*From my diary (4.2.04): It is a funny phenomenon which I have already observed during my last stay. With each day the enclosure of the cattle kraal becomes smaller and smaller. In the evenings when Nakwa and the other women need firewood, they take the branches of the cattle enclosure.*



Picture 39: Nyabba's cattle kraal



Picture 40: Nyabba's goat enclosure

Herding the cattle and small stock was predominantly a task of boys and young men. If a family did not have boys, girls fulfilled this task. But even if there were enough boys like in Nyabba's family, females were involved in herding.<sup>144</sup> Orib and Kolokhon were in the *foritch* during my second stay and before I left for Germany Kidoa told me that she would go to the stock camp soon. The *foritch* where the cattle graze is far away near Lake Turkana, Orib told me when she came. There are many cattle and many people, she said. She and Kolokhon took care of Orib's husband's and Nyabba's goats, sheep, and cattle.

Above I describe the house being the women's domain. What about the kraals and cattle camps? "Like many other pastoralists, Dassanetch identify men with cattle." Rights in stock are vested by males and while all male members of one household have rights in some stock women only have milking rights in the stock in their household (Almagor 1978: 65). Taking Almagor as a starting point the answer could be obvious: the stock kraals and camps are men's domains. I do not want to contest it but rather supplement it in that way that girls and women cannot be completely left out of this sphere. Women and girls build and clean the kraal, take care of the kids and calves and milk the stock. In that way they play an important role. Thus the kraal is not exclusively a men's sphere, but it is a place where men and women assist each other.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Almagor also described this. Because the movements with herds are labour-intensive it "...requires all the available labour of women as well as that of elders and boys" (Almagor 1978:50). In Arbore and Bashada girls are also involved in herding as Lago and Arti explained in the workshop. "The girl tends the cattle and brings the cattle to the water-hole, but the water-hole itself ...is done by the men", Baro, an Arbore woman, explained (Baro, Lago, and Arti, workshop session: Kara-Bashada-Arbore-Ari-Maale, October 8, 2002).

<sup>145</sup> Unfortunately I cannot go into detail about the *foritch* where Nyabba's livestock was because I did not go there and only heard about it.



Picture 41: Nakwa's son Loichama herding the cattle

### 2.1.1 Taking care of the kraals and feeding the kids

The girls' and women's tasks concerning the cattle and small stock within the homestead were to clean and repair the kraals, to feed the kids, to assist in driving the goats home and to milk the stock.

In the late afternoon Nyendite cleaned the goat and cattle kraal. She swept all the dung together with her hands and put it on a small hide. She piled it all up and later on it was burned. Nakwa and Kidoa from time to time brought big branches from the field or Omo which they used for repairing the goat and cattle enclosures.

Another task was to feed the kids and calves with green fodder because they stayed in the enclosure all day. Once during my first stay Kidoa went to get *alang* and grass for two sick goats that stayed in a small shady enclosure next to the big kraal. First, Kidoa chopped off huge bunches, tied them together with a rope of bark of the *miedi* tree and carried these bunches on her head back to the kraal. She made big holes in the ground in which she put the branches, so that the sick goats had something to eat.

*From my diary (2.2.04): We were just in the midst of drinking coffee when Karre came. He brought a dead kid. Kidoa immediately went outside. She cut the stomach open and Karre carried it away.*

In the evenings after the goats were milked, Nyendite, Nakwa and Kidoa helped to drive in the goats when Nyabba was not available. When he was in Aoga this seemed to be a task of the whole family. When the sun went down Karre and his friends returned with

the small stock. Nyabba went towards them majestically carrying his stick. Ankoï, Nautcho and Arba Nech ran towards their father and tried to chase the goats in the right direction.

### 2.1.2 Milking the goats and cows

In Dassanetch, men and women, boys and girls are allowed to milk goats, sheep, and cows.<sup>146</sup> Usually it was done only by females while young boys assisted in holding the kids and calves. Kidoa told me that men usually do not milk. Small boys help their mothers and may milk. Men usually do not milk because it is a woman's job, Kidoa said.<sup>147</sup> When neither Kidoa nor Nakwa were present in the evenings, Nyabba assisted Nyendite in milking, too. Ulli and Ankoï very often milked the goats but only to take a little for themselves.

Nyabba's goats and cows were milked twice a day: the goats in the early morning and evening and the cows in the late morning and evening.

#### MILKING THE GOATS

In the mornings Kidoa and Nyendite got up and milked the goats. Afterwards Karre took over the care of the goats. Nyendite helped him to drive the goats out and then he went to the Omo to water them and did not return until late morning. While he let them rest under one of the rare shade trees and next to the *alang* bushes Karre returned to Nakwa's house where either Nakwa or Nyendite had prepared food. After this break Karre left again.

In the late afternoon, the girls and women got prepared: they smoked the *kurrums* (milk containers). This was usually done by Nyendite. She put a glowing piece of wood inside the *kurrum*, closed it and left the wood inside for a few minutes. Afterwards she took a *sontee* (cloth) and cleaned the *kurrum*. This process of smoking disinfected the *kurrum*

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<sup>146</sup> In Hamar married women, for example, are not allowed to milk (Strecker 1976: 116).

<sup>147</sup> Almagor says that men are permitted to "milk only in the *foritch* camps" which goes along with my observations that usually the women and girls milked and Nyabba only assisted when his wives or daughters were not around (Almagor 1978: 105).

and gave the milk a characteristic taste. Before using a new *kurrum* for the very first time, she washes the inside with water and smears it with butter, Nakwa told me.

*From my diary (1.9.02): The sun is going down slowly and the sky is covered with the most beautiful colours which I am not even able to describe. The goats come home. Kidoa and Nakwa milk them in a great hurry before the kids rush to them.*

Kidoa and Nakwa also helped when driving the goats into the kraal but were mainly occupied with milking. Driving the goats home was Karre's job.

*From my diary (31.8.02): The women run around like crazy. They carry some kids away or run after the goats for milking them. I hope we get some milk today.*



*Picture 42: Nyendite milks a goat*

The girls and women milked the goats as follows: first they got the goat's kid. They let it suck a few times before they put the goat's left back leg beneath their right leg and milked. While Nyendite and Kidoa milked, Ulli and I were occupied with holding the kids. Nyendite used a *kulu* (lid of the milk container) for milking into. When the *kulu* was full she poured the milk into the *kurrum* and continued milking into the *kulu*.

*From my letters (24.8.02): This evening I shall milk the goats, the second wife told me. I hope she forgets about it because I am a little afraid. I am just a town child.*

*From my diary (25.8.02): I guess the women had fun when I tried to milk the goats yesterday. I was always afraid that the goat might kick me. I wasn't milking well*

*anyway because only little milk came out. After a few minutes Nakwa told me to hold the kids instead and she continued milking.*

I wanted to know if Kidoa and Nakwa each have certain goats which they milk. Kidoa said that it does not matter who is milking which goat. All goats are Nyabba's, she told me. And thus Nakwa and she can milk any goat.<sup>148</sup>



*Picture 43: Ulli holds the kids while Nyendite milks*

## MILKING THE COWS

Tending the cattle was Loichama's job. In the mornings he went to water them. After he returned in the late mornings, Nakwa milked the cows. Earlier Nyendite had cleaned the *kurrum ou* (container for cow milk) as described above. Nyendite did not milk herself because she was still too small, Nakwa said.

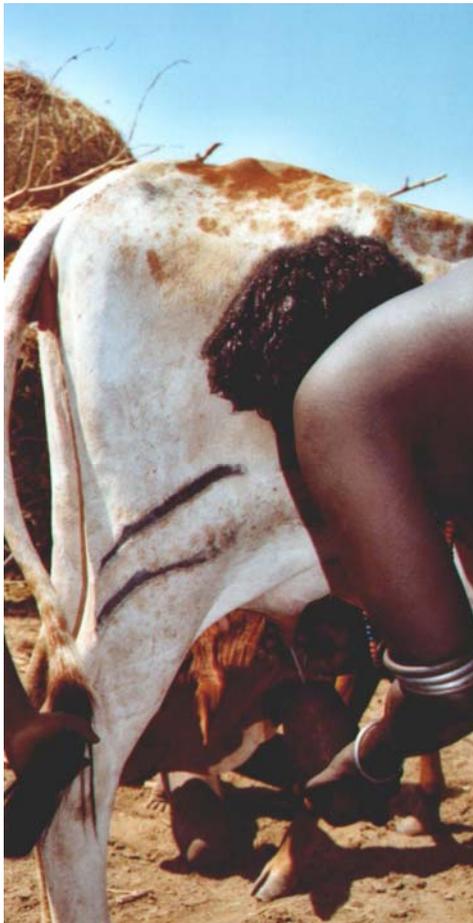
When going to milk the cows, Nakwa used to take a rope made of bark from the *miedi* tree with her. She used this rope for tying the mouths of the calves together. While she milked, directing the milk into a *kulu*, Loichama assisted her and held the calves. When Nakwa had filled one *kulu* she poured it into the *kurrum* and continued milking. Just as

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<sup>148</sup> This seems to be different from Almagor's notes who wrote that wives have milking rights of certain animals (Almagor 1978: 66). But he did not discuss more in detail how the stock is divided among a husband's wives. In Turkana for example each wife has "her" cows she may milk (Schultz, Scholz 1994:17).

the kids were nearby when the goats were milked, so were the calves when milking the cows.<sup>149</sup>

Usually Nakwa milked Nyabba's cows. I have never seen Kidoa milking the cows, maybe because she was often away in the late morning but there may be other reasons, too. Nakwa explained that preferably someone who is related to them should milk Nyabba's cows. When Nakwa was in the field or in Omorati, Okhul milked Nyabba's cows and took care that each of the children afterwards got a *kulu* filled with milk.<sup>150</sup>



Picture 44: Nakwa milks a cow

Nakwa told me that if no one related to them were in Aoga, a “stranger” could milk, too. But this never happened. I told Nakwa that the Bashada differentiate cows by their original location or whether they are stolen or bought. She told me that the Dassanetch do not differentiate the cows by their origin. The milk is differentiated because it is either cow or goat milk, she said. The only taboo they have to obey is that women and girls having their period must not drink cow milk.

Even though women having their period must not drink cow milk they are allowed to milk the cows. The girl or woman milking, however, has to pay attention to a couple of things. For example, when leaving the kraal, if a woman has looked carefully and a cow has “hidden” nothing will happen, Kidoa said. But

if the woman knows that a cow was lying down and did not make her get up this cow as well as the woman can become infertile. Another rule a woman has to obey is that she needs to wash her hands after milking.

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<sup>149</sup> When a calf has died, the women make a *madiyes* from the skin of the dead calf filled with grass. It is an imitation of the calf and is put next to the cow when milking it. This is how the cow can be milked even though the calf is dead.

<sup>150</sup> Okhul was one of Nyendite's best friends although being a bit older (about sixteen years). Okhul's father Aiebet was a classificatory brother of Nyabba and thus Okhul could milk his cows.



*Picture 45: Some of Nyabba's cattle*

### **1.3 The fields**

During my second visit it was harvesting time and almost all women from Aoga spent their days working in the nearby fields. Harvesting was exclusively a women's task although men also engage in agricultural work such as digging. Nevertheless the work in the fields was associated with women and thus the sphere of the field has a gendered connotation. The fields were a place where women exerted control: they decided what to sow and they decided when to harvest the crops. Nakwa and Kidoa produced the food for their households. These fields were also places of common activity and meeting places because the women harvested their crops in small working groups. These groups I have witnessed were almost exclusively female except for a few small boys such as Ankoï.

### 2.2.1 Nakwa's and Kidoa's fields

As already mentioned in chapter one, the Dassanetch practise flood retreat cultivation on the river banks and flats. Thus the fields are seasonal.<sup>151</sup> When I was in Aoga in January 2004 it was harvesting time and Nakwa's and Kidoa's fields were close by (within fifteen minutes walking distance) on the banks of the Omo. The area was fairly large and surrounded by thorny bushes. Some trees – acacias and fig trees – were there, too. Many women from Aoga and nearby villages cultivated mainly sorghum in the fields as well as maize, beans, and tobacco.

In 2002, the women had harvested, too, but the fields were far away (two and a half hours walking distance). Nakwa stayed in the fields for several days with her son Ankoï. From time to time Nyendite and Nyabba went to the fields but stayed there only for the day.

*From my diary (8.9.02): After two and a half hours we finally made it. Already from far away I heard voices, singing, and laughing and was glad to finally be there. The field does not consist of one field only but of many and there are houses in between and highstands on which they laid out sorghum for drying. After walking for what seemed like an eternity through the fields, we reached Nakwa's field. She looked happy. We sat in the shade and munched the sugar-cane-like stalks.*

While in 2002 I was in the field only once; during my second stay I was quite frequently in the field and helped Kidoa and Nakwa. That way I got an impression of what Nakwa, Nyendite, and Kidoa did when they went to the field.

Kidoa and Nakwa each had their own field; these were next to each other. The field consisted of one huge area that was divided in many small strips. These strips were not visibly divided from each other or marked any other way. Between the single fields were houses, sorghum stores, and sometimes even cattle enclosures. The area where Nakwa had her field during my first stay resembled a village on its own. Nakwa had

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<sup>151</sup> There are also a few people in Aoga who have all-year fields along the Omo. These banana, papaya, and mango fields are irrigated by wind driven water pumps. Missionaries from the Norwegian Lutheran mission which was about one kilometre away from Aoga had constructed these pumps and hoped that the farmers would earn some money through selling the fruits on the local market in Omorati. I have observed that the few people who owned a farm had more trouble with the pumps than they sold fruits. Kidoa also told me during my first stay that she used to have such a farm, too, but everything was flooded and she could not cultivate there anymore.

built a house of grass there. She had some cows for milk, too. The house in the field resembled her house in Aoga in that it was also divided into different areas. The fireplace was also on the front left side. She stored the milk containers on the left side, too, just as she did in Aoga.



*Picture 46: The fields nearby Aoga in 2004*



*Picture 47: Nakwa's "house" for storing her sorghum*

During my second stay, when the fields were close, Nakwa and Kidoa each had a small "house" (see picture 47). This was made of sorghum stalks simply bound together. In this "house" they stored the harvested sorghum before they threshed it.

### **2.2.2 Working in the field and harvesting**

Every woman worked only on her own strip except during the harvesting time. Then they got together in small groups and harvested together one woman's field and a few days later another group (the composition of the group varied according to kinship) worked on another woman's strip. In the first two weeks of my second stay, Nakwa, Kidoa, Orib (Nyabba's sister) and Nakhote were busy harvesting Nakwa's sorghum.

Afterwards they together harvested Kidoa's sorghum, which was much less than Nakwa's.<sup>152</sup>

*From my diary (8.2.04): Kidoa just came back from the field, finally. She was there with Angutee, her mother, Nakwa and Orib. We quickly stored the grains in the buiti (store) and she left a second time, with Nyendite and Orib.*

In everyday life women do much work on their own, when preparing coffee and food, grinding, repairing their house etc. Harvesting is a time and opportunity when they meet with other women and work together.

*From my diary (10.2.04): I asked Kidoa why she is going by herself to the field today. The last days Nakwa always went with Nyabba's sister, Kidoa, and some other woman. Kidoa said that there is not much sorghum any more. She already wanted to be finished the day before but the birds have come and spread the sorghum all over.*



*Picture 48: Sorghum stalks in Nakwa's field*

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<sup>152</sup> Lydall, Epple, and Melesse describe "work parties" in Hamar, Bashada and Tsamai. When a woman wants to harvest her crops she brews much beer and invites her relatives to come and help harvest (Epple 1995: 88; Melesse 1994: 128; Lydall 2004: 8; Lydall, Head F1991). I do not know whether the Dassanetch also have these "work parties" but I have not observed anything alike. The Dassanetch work groups I witnessed did not exceed five women. In that it is similar to *ergo*, a kind of work party in Kara (Gezahegn 2000: 27).

When the women left for harvesting their fields, they left very early in the mornings and came back very late, often not until the sun started to go down. Nakwa told me that harvesting the fields is women's work only. Men help only with digging, Nakwa said. Sowing, weeding and harvesting are all women's tasks, she explained. When harvesting the women used a *nyawulo* (machete) and chopped the sorghum heads off. They piled these on the ground and from time to time carried these on their heads to a nearby highstand where they were put up in the shape of a pyramid. Later on, the stalks were stored in a "sorghum house". When the field was harvested and the grains dried Nakwa and Kidoa threshed the sorghum with a *nyesish* (flail). They sifted the chaff from the grain by pouring the sorghum from one gourd or pot into another so that the wind could blow away the chaff.



*Pictures 49-51: Nakwa threshes sorghum on the field*

*From my diary (8.9.02): Harvesting in Germany means much more rush and stress. One wants to work as quickly as possible and there is less mutual help. Watching the women and men here, it all seems more relaxed. But probably it is also harder working in this sun and thus they work a bit slower. Today I helped Nyendite removing the grains from the stems. This is not a job that makes one's hands tender.*

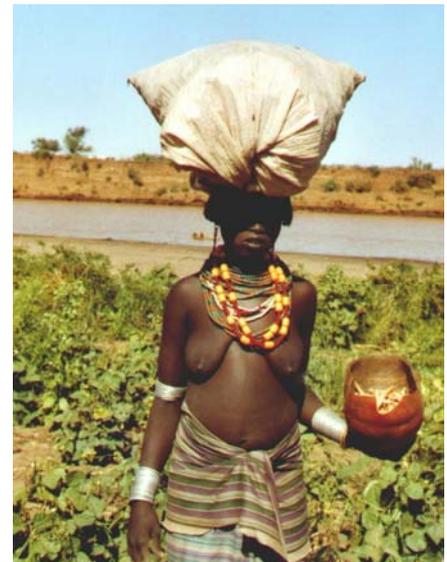
Besides harvesting sorghum and maize, Nakwa and Kidoa also cultivated *haamo* (beans). The bean field was closer to the Omo River than the sorghum field. One day, I

went with Kidoa to the field to pick beans. Unlike during the sorghum harvest, the women did not help each other with their bean harvest.

The beans were picked when the husks were dried. Kidoa had planted two kinds of beans, big white ones and small green ones. The big white ones were only few and I picked them into a calabash. Kidoa had many small green beans that we collected in one of the sacks. After having picked them all, Kidoa cut a few tobacco plants and we returned to Aoga.



*Picture 52: Kidoa picks beans*



*Picture 53: Returning from the field*

Kidoa's and Nakwa's crops were meant primarily for household consumption. What they harvested they stored in their *buiti* (store) or in the house and used it later. During my second stay, when Nakwa's and Kidoa's harvest was plentiful they also sold some sorghum and beans at the market in Omorati.

### **2.2.3 Bringing the sorghum home**

When returning from the fields in the evenings Kidoa, Nakwa, and Nyendite brought sacks filled with either sorghum, tobacco plants, or beans with them.

*From my diary (28.8.02): That was such a wonderful evening. When Nakwa came from the field, bringing the sorghum home and all her children ran towards her, I thought that the time after work is nowhere nicer than here. We ate sugar cane and fresh sorghum. Everybody was in front of Nakwa's house and laughing and joking.*

The sorghum was stored directly in the *buiti* (store). Nyendite and Nyabba climbed up the highstand. Nakwa and I filled a calabash and pot with sorghum grains which we handed to them. They poured it into the *buiti* and handed the calabash and pot down. This continued as long as all the sacks' contents were stored in the *buiti*.

Each of the women, Kidoa and Nakwa, had her own *buiti* where she stored sorghum. Even though Orib did not have her own house yet, she had her own *buiti* which was next to Nakwa's.

During my second stay, Nakwa built a new *buiti* directly next to her sorghum *buiti*. The new one was supposed to be for maize.

*From my diary (13.2.04): Building a store is a woman's job (like most other things, too). But unlike building a house every woman builds it by herself and they don't help each other.*

The process of building took several days. Nakwa did not work on it all the time but rather when she had some spare time and did not go to the field or Omorati.

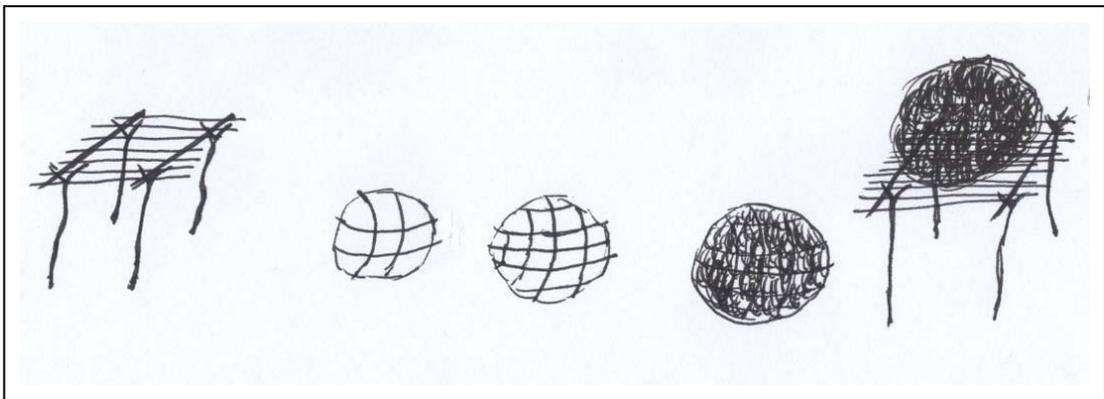


*Picture 54: Nakwa makes her new buit*

A *buiti* consists of a highstand and a body which is put onto it. First, Nakwa built the body. She made a rough trestle by tying four branches of *miedi* tree together. These branches were tied onto each other with *miedi* barks (Nakwa had soaked these barks beforehand, that they could be bent). After the main trestle was ready, Nakwa tied more branches around the trestle, so that the body of the *buiti* resembled a finely woven basket. She used *alang* branches and *iisha* (grass) to surface the trestle and make it

water- and air-tight. Nakwa did not cover the body completely but left a hole on the top for filling the grains in and taking them out later on. She covered this hole with some grass.

A few days before, Nakwa had brought several tree trunks and big branches from the field. She told me that she had cut these some time ago but left them in the field. Now that she had taken the wood to Aoga, she put it carefully away, so that no one might mistake it as part of the kraals or would use it as firewood.



*Figure 16: Steps of making a buiti*

First, Nakwa made holes in the ground where the new legs of the *buiti* should be placed. After having dug a hole deep enough, she put the first leg into it and filled the hole up. She repeated this three times. Afterwards she placed one big stick on two legs and laid many smaller branches across these two sticks. Nakwa left again and brought some *alang* which she used to cover the branches. Now, when the highstand was completed, she put the silo on top of it. After Nakwa had finished the maize *buiti*, Nyendite, Aifack and I peeled the maize grains from the cobs that Nakwa had brought home during the preceding days. We sat in the shade, beneath the *buite* and all afternoon peeled the grains off. From time to time one of the girls or women passed by, helped for a while and moved on. When we were finished, we cleaned the grains and Nyendite stored it all in the new *buiti*.

*From my diary (14.2.04): Finally we are finished with peeling the maize grains from the cobs. I am so exhausted and my hands hurt. Nyendite cleans the grains in the wind and now we have to store it in the buiti. I am so tired.*



*Picture 55: Kidoa stores sorghum in her buiti*

Unlike sorghum and maize Kidoa and Nakwa stored beans not in a *buiti* but in small sacks in their houses. Before they stored the beans in sacks, they cleaned them by removing the beans from the husks. For this Kidoa used a stick of wood which she called *kara madyat* (headrest of the women). This was a piece of wood from the *miedi* tree. Kidoa said that she also uses it for resting her head when sleeping.



*Picture 56: Nakwa cleans beans*

#### 2.2.4 Producing chewing tobacco

During my second stay in Aoga it was not only sorghum and maize harvesting time, but also tobacco harvesting time. Kidoa, Nakwa, and many other women from Aoga had planted tobacco plants in their fields.

One day I went with Nakwa to her tobacco field and she explained to me how they sow tobacco. First, one collects the seeds when they are dry. These have a brownish colour and are called *dambu* just like the plant and the final product, the pieces of chewing tobacco. After collecting them, one takes the seeds home and keeps them in a small calabash. After the river has flooded the field or it has rained, one sows the *dambu* seeds. After three days, Nakwa said, there are small plants. After two months these have grown very high – tobacco plants grow up to 1,50 metres high – and one can harvest them. When Nakwa and Kidoa harvested the tobacco plants they cut the stems with a *nyawulo* (machete) and carried these home.

In their homestead they continued their work. Nakwa and Kidoa were very busy harvesting tobacco plants and making the leaves into chewing tobacco so that I had many opportunities to observe this process. Each woman prepared the tobacco by herself, sometimes with the help of Nyendite or other girls who never refused when asked for help. Even though the women worked by themselves, they never sat alone in front of their houses or in the shade. Kidoa for instance used to prepare the *dambu* in her mother's *gaatch* (shade). Her younger sister Angutee often sat next to her while playing with her baby son Loichama.

The process of preparing chewing tobacco is as follows: First, the women removed the leaves from the stems and spread them out in the house or sun to let them dry. During the day, Nakwa sometimes spread *dambu* all over the cow hides so that there was almost no place to sit inside her house. Next, the leaves were crushed. Kidoa used to put the leaves in a *karitch* (burnt-out tree trunk). In there she cut them into pieces with a *holte* (kind of knife) and crushed them with a *waar* (stone). She put some liquid, either water or saliva, into the porridge-like mass and formed it into small, round pieces. For drying, she put them on a piece of wood which she put on her sorghum store. Nakwa often put them on her roof for drying. These pieces usually needed more than one day to be completely dry. In the evenings Kidoa and Nakwa collected them; Nakwa put hers in

a big, broken *durrum* and Kidoa hers on her *kub* (loft). The next morning, they laid the *dambu* pieces in the sun again. When dried, they put them in a *orgotch* (leather sack) that they had sewn of old leather pieces.



*Pictures 57-59: Kidoa prepares chewing tobacco*

“Making *dambu* is a task of the women.” Kidoa told me that men do not make chewing tobacco. Just as with food, Kidoa and Nakwa also had responsibility of and control over preparing tobacco. They stored it and decided with whom to share it. The money earned through selling the *dambu* they could not completely keep themselves. It was for the whole family.

*From my diary (2.2.04): A few days ago, I was sitting in front of Nakwa’s house while she was making tobacco. A young man came, sat next to me and explained how one makes tobacco. Nakwa roared with laughter and told him that he didn’t have any idea about how to make dambu.*



*Picture 60: Pieces of chewing tobacco*

The women mainly sold the *dambu* but also kept a little for themselves or gave it to friends.<sup>153</sup> Kidoa gave some *dambu* to her sister Angutee but also chewed it herself. When chewing tobacco, Kidoa liked to chew a bit of the salty *makhate* with it. But she

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<sup>153</sup> Already von Höhnel stated that the “...Reshiat are very fond of chewing tobacco and taking it as a snuff” and that “both sexes are very fond of chewing it” (von Höhnel 1894: 157, 167). In Aoga I observed that those using chewing tobacco always had a little piece with them. Kidoa’s sister Angutee often had a tiny piece stuck behind her ear. Kidoa’s mother Kokhoi had a *koide* (small plastic container) filled with *dambu* on her necklace. Several older men had a *koide*, too, but tied onto their *kara* (headrest).

only had little of this valuable spice which she kept in her sack with chewing tobacco. The Dassanetch also sell it to the Hamar or *ushumba*. Kidoa explained to me how to make *makhate*. One first takes branches from a bush called *shade*. These branches are burned completely until only ashes remain. Then the women will take the ashes home and put them on a cow hide. The ashes are mixed with sour milk and this mixture is kneaded very well and dried.

### **2.3 The Omo River**

The Omo River which was only a few minutes walking distance from Aoga was one place where the girls and women spent time. In the following pages, I show that the Omo River was connected with girls' and women's tasks such as fetching water but also a place to get together. Girls and women could exchange the latest news or simply chat with each other and spend some time together. In that way the Omo River can be regarded as important for females. The Omo is just as important for males because, for example, they drive the cattle across it, they fish in it, they build boats for it etc. Thus the Omo, unlike the house, is not an exclusively women's domain.

#### **2.3.1 Fetching water**

In the mornings, when the sun was not yet standing high, the girls and women went to the Omo to fetch water for the first time of the day. It took about ten minutes to walk to the river, which was so close by Aoga that no one suffered from water shortage. The path to the Omo led through dry and sparse grassland. A few *alang* and thorn bushes lined the beaten path. More bushes and even some trees appeared closer to the river. The path seemed somehow hidden and it took me more than two weeks to remember at which bush to turn. In the late afternoon, when the sun went down, the girls went a final time. Nyendite often had to go in the heat of the afternoon sun as well because Nakwa was out of water and wanted to prepare coffee.

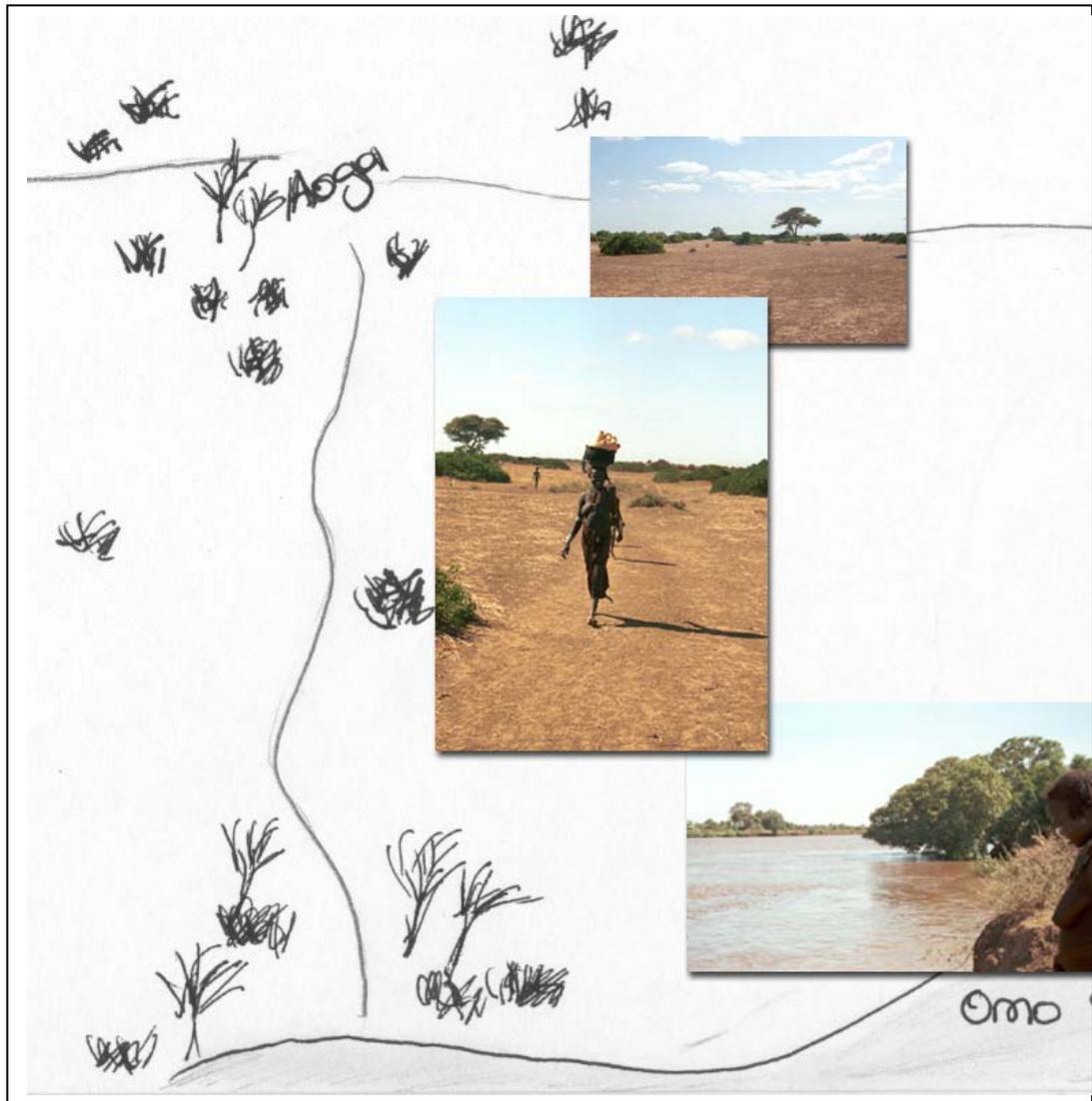


Figure 17: Kidooa on the way to the Omo River

The girls and women used a *nyagiti* when carrying their vessels filled with water home. A *nyagiti* is a garland made out of branches from the *alang* bush. These branches were wrapped up with bark from the *miedi* tree. Every woman and every girl, even the small ones, had their own *nyagiti*, the girls told me on the way to the river. Very often the girls did not have such an *alang nyagiti* but made a temporary one from cloth or a necklace that they wound into a garland.



Picture 61: Nyendite's nyagiti

Each girl and woman put a *nyagiti* on her head and a cooking pot, calabash or jerry can onto it. The *nyagiti* helped keep the female's balance and protected her head from the often completely sooty pots. Having filled their containers with water, Nyendite and the other girls used to put a few *alang* branches into them. These

branches helped in keeping the balance, too, because they broke the water surface which made it less likely to run over.

The banks from which the girls and women used to fill their jerry cans was very steep, muddy and slippery. One could easily slip and fall into the river. Thus there was cooperation – the older girls used to help the younger ones. For example, Okhul and Nyendite often stood up to their knees in the river and filled their containers and those the younger girls handed them. Later on, I helped them to lift their heavy jerry cans onto their heads.

Fetching water belongs to the women's and girls' responsibilities. Sometimes small boys helped their mothers and fetched water for them but men did not do that. When Nyabba was thirsty, he told Nakwa or Kidoa to prepare coffee for him. When I was in Aoga in August 2002, Konrad also went fetching water. Arkriet, a young man, made fun of him when he saw it. He said he did not understand why Konrad fetches water since this is a women's task. One day during my second stay, Nakwa needed water but Nyendite was in the field with Orib. So she sent Ulli to get some. First he refused, but when he saw another small boy going, he hurried and went along with him.

The girls and women fetched water first of all for cooking and drinking. Once I met Takhan, a girl of about twelve years of age while fetching water. She told me that she fetches water for her father's goats. Some of them were pregnant and could not walk to the river any more. For some while, Kidoa fetched water for two sick goats, too.

I observed that fetching water is mainly a job of girls. Only young women with very small children (under six years of age) went to the river. Women like Nakwa usually sent their daughters or sons to fetch water.



*Picture 62: Kidoa and a friend fetch water*

### **2.3.2 Beyond fetching water – the Omo as a meeting place**

When the girls went to fetch water, they rarely went alone but in small groups. While Kidoa and Nakwa often went on their own to fetch water, Nyendite usually went with her friends Nadyaut, Aifack, and Okhul. During my first stay, the girls very often stopped by on their way to the river and asked whether I would come with them. During my second stay, I usually accompanied them, too, but it was often for my own reasons.<sup>154</sup> Because I did not need water myself, I fetched water for my mothers – either for Nakwa or most often for Kidoa – like a Dassanetch girl is expected to do.

Fetching water was not only a task but also an opportunity to meet each other. When fetching water, the girls used this time for chatting, laughing, and even exchanging beads or bracelets. On the way to the Omo, the girls sang and danced, told me stories or taught me songs.

*From my letters (3.9.02): I have bought a second jerry can and hope I don't have to go to the river that often anymore. I don't like it that much. Either I go on my own*

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<sup>154</sup> Maybe the girls did not ask me because they knew I had brought my drinking water with me that time and did not need water from the Omo for drinking and cooking.

*and have to stand in the mud and draw water. My second option is going with the girls who draw water for me and I stay “clean” but they keep talking the whole time and I don’t understand a single word. Quite often they tell me the names of each of them and I have to repeat them until I finally pronounced it correctly.*

Having arrived at the Omo, Nyendite and her friends filled their jerry cans, calabashes and cooking pots with water. Afterwards they often took off their skirts – always taking good care that their hands covered their private parts – and splashed around a little and took a quick wash. It happened more than once that Aiebet, one of the elders in Aoga, was scolding about his daughter Lalotte and her friends who did not return from the Omo. Once the girls bathed naked in the river even though a man was standing only ten metres away busy washing his skirt. This puzzled me but the girls did not seem to mind.



*Picture 63: Nyendite and her friends playing in the Omo River*

Above I state that fetching water is mainly a girl’s task. Because of this it is also mainly a meeting opportunity for girls, just like women spend time together when harvesting. Unlike girls, women never take off their skirts when they wash themselves at the Omo, Nakwa told me. She assured me that this never happens.

*From my diary (30.1.04): I went fetching water with Kidoa. Kidoa only sprinkled a little water on her arms. Then, we used my soap and washed Nautcho carefully.*

But from time to time the women washed their cloth skirts. Then they took them off.

*From my letters (2.2.04): After having eaten the fish, I went to the river with Kidoa and Nautcho. We wanted to wash ourselves, I was in desperate need for water. Kidoa even took her skirt off and washed it, too. Suddenly I saw how much she is pregnant and that she will give birth in a few months only. She looked so pretty that I thought it might be nice to be pregnant. I am afraid I become a little weird in the bush.*

## **2.4 The town Omorati**

Another place in which Kidoa and Nakwa spent their time was *rati* (Omorati) which lies about four kilometres north of Aoga. Like other women and men of Aoga, they quite frequently went there to engage in selling and buying at the market and shops. Besides trade, socialising was another reason to go to town.

In the following section I describe Omorati a bit more carefully, especially the relations between Dassanetch and Amhara as I witnessed them. I also deal with the contacts between the sexes. Nakwa and Kidoa mainly went to Aoga to sell their chewing tobacco. Thus this section mainly deals with these activities. Unfortunately I never spent the whole day with Kidoa or Nakwa in Omorati but only a few hours and thus only got a glimpse of an idea what they did there.<sup>155</sup>

### **2.4.1 Omorati – a place of culture and gender contact?**

In the small town Omorati was a daily market, where first and foremost coffee was sold as well as other things like onions, ginger, bread, and, occasionally, bananas and mangos. In the shops that were held by *ushumba*, how the Amhara are called by the Dassanetch, one could buy noodles, oil, milk powder etc. The *ushumba* did not engage in livestock herding but rather had small restaurants, bars and shops or worked in the government office. There were even two small hotels (mainly for tourists) in Omorati.

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<sup>155</sup> I have explained the reasons why I did not spend much time with my friends in Omorati in chapter two.

It was in the market, in the shops and tiny restaurants that Dassanetch and Amhara got into contact with one another. The relations between each other were not the best ones; both spoke negatively of each other, as I observed and heard many times. The Amhara who could not speak the language of the Dassanetch looked down on them and often made fun of the bare-breasted women. The Dassanetch said the Amhara were bad people.<sup>156</sup> I have never heard of escalations such as fights but I noticed this resentment against each other in everyday life; when I accompanied Nakwa into the shops and she was treated like a second-class person.

Omorati – a place of contact? This question is manifold just as the answers are. I showed that it is a place of culture contact regarding Dassanetch and Amhara. One can also regard Omorati as a place of contact between men and men and between women and women. Nyabba often went to Omorati. After we had coffee together in the early morning he told me that he would go to Omorati that day to buy coffee. Sometimes he asked me for one *birr* for coffee. He always left in the early morning but did not return until the sun had gone down. When I asked Nakwa what Nyabba did all day long in Omorati she said that he met with age mates or with his brother who lives in town. From time to time, he came home drunk.

Nakwa's and Kidoa's activities went far beyond their homestead in Aoga. Like Nyabba they went to Omorati, but unlike him they went to sell their *dambu* (chewing tobacco), beans, or sorghum. The two women left in the early morning when the sun was not standing high yet but they often returned around noon or in the afternoon. Once, when I went with Kidoa through Omorati I saw that the women had gathered in small groups. Nakwa sat together with Lotte and some other women from Aoga in a shady spot near the market and had their *dambu* laid out in front of them. They chatted happily and seemed to enjoy being together.

Just like in Aoga, men's and women's spaces in Omorati were apart from each other. Nyabba and Nakwa and Kidoa often went to Omorati, but Nyabba never accompanied them nor did they spend time in town together. While Nakwa and Kidoa were selling chewing tobacco together with their friends, Nyabba was with his age mates. Looking at

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<sup>156</sup> These are the impressions I got from my stays in Omorati and when I talked with Amharas living in Omorati as well as Dassanetch living in Aoga.

my question posed above in that way, Omorati is not a place of contact, at least not between the sexes. Between Amhara and Dassanetch Omorati is a place of contact but this is mainly limited to trade.

#### 2.4.2 Selling their agricultural products

Kidoa and Nakwa most often went to Omorati to sell their *dambu*.<sup>157</sup> But Kidoa complained more than once that they do not get much money there. The Dassanetch give them only one *birr* for three pieces and the *ushumba* rarely bought the tobacco at all. Kidoa said that if they sell it to the Hamar they could make much more money.<sup>158</sup>

Kidoa and Nakwa often went to Omorati but did not sell much actually. Many times they returned empty-handed. Nakwa told me one day that she had not sold anything because the people had said that her *dambu* is bad. When I asked her how she knows if the *dambu* is good or not, she said she does not know because she does not chew tobacco.

Besides selling chewing tobacco, Nakwa and Kidoa also sold other agricultural products like beans or sorghum. During my second stay Nakwa sold a small sack of sorghum for five *birr*, she said. She explained that this is all she can sell because she needs the rest of the sorghum for preparing food for her children and Nyabba. The harvest was bad, she said, and thus she cannot sell more than this little amount of sorghum.

Kidoa on the other hand wanted to sell beans in Omorati. She had cultivated big white and red beans. These she wanted to sell to the *ushumba* because they like these big beans.

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<sup>157</sup> Besides selling the *dambu* on the market in Omorati, Kidoa and Nakwa also traded it in exchange for goods. Kidoa, for example, traded twelve pieces of chewing tobacco in exchange for car tyre shoes from a boy who lived in Aoga.

<sup>158</sup> Before I left in February 2004, Kidoa and Nakwa often joked with me and asked me to take their *dambu* to Jinka and sell it there on the market. In Jinka were a lot of Hamar, as Nakwa knew from the workshop at the SORC, and they hoped to gain money by this.

### 2.4.3 Buying products for everyday use and the household

When Kidoa and Nakwa sold chewing tobacco, sorghum or beans they used the money in different ways even though Nakwa told me that all the money she and Kidoa earn belongs to Nyabba and will be used for buying goats and cows.

*From my diary (15.2.04): Nakwa just showed me the dambu which is spread all over her house. Pointing to a small pile, she said that this is hers. The bigger pile is Nyabba's, he will buy goats from it, she said. She showed me a big cowhide and said that it cost 25 birr. She had bought it from the money she had earned by selling dambu. I can hardly believe that she has sold that much tobacco if I look at how much is kept for buying goats.*

*From my diary (10.2.04): Kidoa sold some of her sorghum in Omorati, for four birr. But she had to give two birr to Nyabba whom she met in Omorati. I think this is unfair.*

During my stays Nyabba did not buy any goats. Sometimes he brought *eshu* (coffee shells) with him. But otherwise Kidoa and Nakwa bought the things they needed for the household. The women often bought *eshu*, *inyebil* (ginger) and *shungurut* (onion) which they put in the coffee or chewed in order to cure their and their children's cough. From time to time Kidoa also bought *berbere* (chili powder) which Nyabba used as a medicine for the sick goats.

*From my diary (5.2.04): Nakwa just came back from Omorati and brought a goat skin with her. She bought it at the market and wants to make a skirt for Kolokhon. She said that it cost four birr. Where did she get the money from? From tobacco?*

Kidoa and Nakwa usually bought their items at the market and not in shops. Once Nakwa bought sugar at a shop. When she showed it to me she complained that it is only so little and that the *ushumba* are bad. As already described above the relations between Dassanetch and Amhara were rather hostile. Another incident proved this. Kidoa and I went into a small shop where I wanted to buy a *dogo* necklace for her. The Amhara shop assistant refused to give her a *dogo* until I showed that I had ten *birr* for paying for it.

## Summary

In this chapter I have dealt with girls' and women's spaces. Illustrated by Nakwa, Kidoa and Nyendite I showed where they spent their days. Women's tasks are closely related to the domestic sphere and thus Kidoa and Nakwa spent a lot of their time in and around their houses. Unlike early feminists who regarded "woman's" affiliation to the domestic sphere as a sign of denigration, I explained that this may also empower them. Here I followed Jean Lydall's argumentation. Kidoa and Nakwa were responsible for cooking food and serving it. When they were in Omorati, their children and also Nyabba had to wait for them in order to get something to eat. In that way Nyabba was dependent on his wives.

The girls and women spent their days not only in the house, but moved around: to the kraals where they were responsible for cleaning it and for milking the stock, to the Omo River where they went to fetch water, to the sorghum fields where they went to harvest and to Omorati where they sold chewing tobacco and other agricultural products. I adhere to Henrietta Moore's argumentation who states that gender specific domains and spaces are constructed through the interaction of individuals (Moore 1994:72-74): As an example one can take the spatial separations in women's and men's side in the houses. Women shall sit, sleep and do their tasks only on that side just like the men's side is supposed to be only for men. But I witnessed many occasions such as when Nyendite ground sorghum or Nakwa napped on the men's side when this was not the case. This shows that spatial ascriptions are nothing static but that they are constructed in everyday life; through sitting on the women's side and claiming it to be the women's side that space receives a gendered connotation. At the same time Kidoa defines her gender through sitting on the women's side, too. Thus one may speak of a twofold process (Moore 1986: 116).

## V. Concluding remarks

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In the 1970s gender studies were dominated by the concept of a universal category of “woman” which was regarded as inferior to the (universal) category of “man” (Moore 1988: 7-10). Nowadays this concept of universal categories has been overtaken. Researchers, females and males, have studied sex and gender relations in many areas of the world and shown that gender identity is both constructed and lived and that a great variety of gender concepts exist (Moore 1988: 11). Being a woman does not have the same meaning everywhere. Although this is widely accepted in gender studies, literature about the different ethnic groups in South Omo, Ethiopia, does not display this. Girls and women, and gender questions in general seem to have been neglected when studying these groups. Only few researchers, like the British anthropologist Jean Lydall, have studied women’s worlds. John Wood also dealt with women’s worlds in Gabra when writing about when men are women. The works about Dassanetch show similar shortcomings as do the majority of ethnographies about South Omo. For instance, Uri Almagor and Claudia Carr seldomly speak explicitly about women and almost never let their voices be heard. Dassanetch girls and women are “muted” in these texts.

The intention of this thesis was to give an impression of what it means to be a woman in Dassanetch. Following Lila Abu-Lughod’s claim for “ethnographies of the particular”, I have described the role of certain individuals, my host mothers Nakwa and Kidoa and their daughters. My descriptions are based on what I have observed and what I was told during two trips to the field in 2002 and in 2004.

To be a girl and to be a woman is expressed through their responsibilities and activities but also through special jewellery, clothing and hairstyle that I have described. On their way to womanhood girls undergo certain rituals such as circumcision, marriage and birth of the first child. All of these rituals may be regarded as *rites de passage* (van Gennep 1960 [1909]: 19). The females move from one world to another by going through an intermediate stage. This moving between two different worlds is obvious to

everyone because the girls change their outward appearances; for example, they put on a new skirt or change their hairstyle.

The girls and women spend much of their time together. Girls, even the little ones, are needed because they assist their mothers and other relatives with domestic chores. At the same time, the older relatives serve as role models. That way girls learn about their tasks and responsibilities but also how they should behave.

Girls and women move in certain gendered spaces.<sup>159</sup> Females spend much time in the homestead and in the house which is organised according to gender. The house's interior and outside is divided into a women's side and a men's side. Though this spatial separation seems to be static in that the women obey this pattern when building a new house, one can look at it from a different perspective. Through sitting on each of the sides and claiming this to be the men's or women's side, men and women reconfirm the definition of that side. In that way space organises gender but gender also influences the organisation of space. This is a twofold process (Moore 1986: 116).

But girls and women also move around; they go to the fields, to the river, or to the nearby town Omorati. Not all spaces have such clear-cut gendered divisions like the house. There are certain spaces which are closely connected with women, such as the fields, while there is no such clear connotation, for example, with the cattle and goat enclosures because women and men both share activities regarding livestock there; herding is also not an explicit activity of men.

Since the 1970s researchers have shown that one cannot speak of a universal denigration of the woman. I followed Lydall's argumentation about Hamar women's self-esteem and power and have shown aspects in Dassanetch everyday life where women exercise power (Lydall 1994). Activities such as grinding sorghum, cooking, and distributing food placed the women in firm control of the food resources. This may be regarded as a way of expressing power and control.

When talking about women's status one should also take into account that Dassanetch like to have daughters because when the girls are married off, their father and mothers

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<sup>159</sup> I base my argumentations about women's spaces on Moore's book about the Marakwet (Moore 1986).

receive cows, goats and sheep as dowry. Men are also interested in fathering a daughter very early because to have a daughter is a prerequisite to go through the *dimi* ceremony. Every man needs to go undergo this ritual in order to acquire the status of an elder. A man must not undergo it if he has no daughter yet. One could argue that the first daughter heightens her father's status because it is because of her that he can go through this ritual.

Throughout my research it became apparent that ideal and practice of social life in Dassanetch differ. It was often that, for example, Kidoa told me about a rule, such as that women may not eat with a spoon, and in the very next moment she took a spoon and used it for eating. Nakwa and Kidoa told me that they like having the other one nearby but in everyday life I noticed that they often quarrelled with each other. My methods of fieldwork (interviews combined with participant observation) proved to be an useful advantage to learn about discrepancies like these. In many cases I observed that ideals do not always correspond with practice because ideals are adapted to the context.

As I have closely lived together with one family, it was mainly through my host mothers and host sisters that I learned about girlhood and womanhood in Dassanetch. In this thesis I explained and described women's worlds in Dassanetch, illustrated by their everyday life and by what they told me. I chose to concentrate on the descriptions of a few females for this thesis because I did not want to generalise my findings. Generalisations have the disadvantage that they give a consistent picture of a culture and thus neglect that no culture is consistent with itself (Abu-Lughod 1991:49). But nevertheless my descriptions of what it means to be a girl and a woman do have further validity than only one homestead in Aoga. The worlds of females in another Dassanetch village, also in another tribal section of the Dassanetch will not be exactly the same as I have observed the women's worlds in Aoga but they will be similar because they share the same features and ideals.

## Appendix

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### Appendix A: Glossary of Dassanetch words

This glossary does not claim to be complete. Instead, I want to present the Dassanetch words used in my thesis. It is intended to be a help while reading the thesis and thus shall contribute to a better understanding.

I oriented the spelling of Dassanetch words on Tosco's "The Dhaasanac language" but adapted the spelling of the words as much as possible to the English spelling.

#### Notes on pronunciation

"a" is pronounced like German "a", for example in "Land"

"kh" is pronounced like German "ch", for example in "Bauch"

"ng" is pronounced like Spanish "ñ", for example in "Señorita"

"tch" is pronounced like English "ch", for example in "chocolate"

"th" is pronounced like English "th", for example in "thing"

"y" is pronounced like English "y", for example in "yes"

double vowels such as in "khaale" indicate a longer pronunciation of the vowel

DASSANETCH	ENGLISH
<i>abbuni</i>	rear skirt of the girls' skirt
<i>afu</i>	language; literally: mouth
<i>alang</i>	kind of bush; used for example for building houses
<i>ammiti</i>	kids (goats and sheep)
<i>angatch</i>	ribbons of <i>doshite</i> wood and clay worn as jewellery by girls in the marriageable age
<i>ara</i>	formal political leaders of the generation set system; literally: bulls
<i>arakit</i>	local alcohol
<i>aye</i>	goats
<i>baadiyet</i>	outside; name of one moiety
<i>balasha</i>	kind of pancake; made of sorghum
<i>bangatch</i>	special milk container (lid consists of a cow's knee)
<i>beel</i>	female friend; greeting between two women
<i>beetch</i>	fish
<i>bel</i>	husband
<i>berbere</i>	chili powder, also used as medicine for goats
<i>berisho</i>	breakage ritual
<i>bie kulla</i>	coffee; literally: hot water
<i>bil</i>	house; sub-group within a clan

<i>bil afu</i>	entrance area in a house; literally: the house's mouth
<i>bil baaroa</i>	house made of leather and iron sheets
<i>bil ello</i>	back part in a house
<i>bil gerre</i>	living area in a house; literally: the house's interior
<i>bil iisha</i>	house made of <i>alang</i>
<i>bil khaalia</i>	house made of iron sheets
<i>birr</i>	money; Ethiopian currency; one <i>birr</i> is equivalent to approximately ten Euro cents
<i>boolong</i>	aluminium bracelet worn around the arm; aluminium pieces used as decoration, for example on a milk container
<i>bud-budde</i>	porridge made out of fresh green sorghum
<i>buiti</i>	elevated store for keeping sorghum or maize
<i>byieso</i>	„second husband” (the man with whom a widow lives)
<i>dafarre</i>	women's cloth skirt
<i>dambu</i>	chewing tobacco; tobacco plant; lat. <i>nicotiana rustica</i>
<i>daati</i>	calabash
<i>daat eshu</i>	coffee calabash
<i>daat eenu</i>	food calabash
<i>dehn</i>	bad
<i>derda</i>	cooked, clotted butter
<i>dimi</i>	ceremony that is undergone by men who have fathered a daughter; the daughter is blessed and the father becomes an elder moiety
<i>dolo</i>	
<i>doshiti</i>	kind of tree; very soft wood, used for making milk containers
<i>dulu</i>	sorghum flour
<i>durrum</i>	container used for making butter; made of dried gourds
<i>durrum ou</i>	container for making butter from cow's milk
<i>durrum aye</i>	container for making butter from goat's milk
<i>eeh</i>	call and reply to call used by females; term of affirmation
<i>eenu</i>	milk
<i>een aye</i>	goat milk
<i>een guo</i>	cow milk
<i>een wala</i>	sheep milk
<i>eshu</i>	coffee shells
<i>eye</i>	mother, name of reference
<i>ferenji</i>	white person; stranger
<i>foritch</i>	stock camp, grazing ground far away from the village
<i>gaatch</i>	shade; place beneath the sorghum stores
<i>galitee</i>	horizontal sticks that form the house's trestle
<i>galte</i>	kind of tree; seeds are used for making necklaces
<i>gamana</i>	sour milk
<i>gele</i>	girls' leather skirt, composed of a front and a rear skirt
<i>gergi</i>	womb; name of one moiety
<i>getcham</i>	fireplace

<i>gintot</i>	special stone with a depression; used at boys' circumcision
<i>goiti</i>	part of the women's hairstyle: three small tails on the backhead, symbol of motherhood
<i>gunni</i>	ant
<i>guo</i>	cattle
<i>haamu</i>	beans
<i>ham gadda</i>	green beans
<i>hari</i>	generation set
<i>herr</i>	circumcision
<i>hjelo</i>	vertical sticks that form the house's trestle
<i>hod</i>	red ochre, used for putting onto the hair to make it pretty
<i>holte</i>	kind of knife, used for crushing tobacco leaves
<i>hotcholotch</i>	kind of plant, its leaves can be eaten
<i>ibille</i>	cooking pot made of clay
<i>iketch</i>	stick
<i>inyebil</i>	ginger
<i>ir</i>	rain
<i>ir gudoha</i>	large rainy period
<i>ir ninika</i>	short rainy period
<i>isa</i>	goat skin
<i>jetsigo</i>	the area around the fireplace
<i>kaabana</i>	men; warriors; age mates
<i>kadditch</i>	wooden vessel, used as food bowl for small children
<i>kara</i>	men's headrest and stool
<i>kara gaal diet</i>	women's stool
<i>karitch</i>	burnt-out tree trunk, used for making chewing tobacco
<i>karr</i>	kraal
<i>karr ou</i>	cattle kraal
<i>karr aye</i>	goat kraal
<i>kelette</i>	kind of tree, used for making boats
<i>kerretch</i>	ribbon made of beads, used by girls to tie into their hair
<i>khaale</i>	cooking pot made of metal
<i>kibitee</i>	single metal bracelet (plural: <i>kibo</i> )
<i>kimedde</i>	beater, used for cooking porridge
<i>kob</i>	leather ribbon decorated with cowrie shells that is worn by twins and their mothers as necklace
<i>koide</i>	small plastic container, used for storing small pieces of chewing tobacco; tied onto a necklace (women) or headrest (men)
<i>kub</i>	loft in the <i>bil iisha</i>
<i>kulu</i>	lid of a milk container, used for milking and drinking
<i>kurrum</i>	milk container of <i>doshite</i> wood
<i>kurrum ou</i>	container for cow's milk
<i>kurrum aye</i>	container for goat's milk
<i>les</i>	land

<i>les Waagiet</i>	flats used for cultivating, literally: land of God
<i>les baba</i>	riverbanks, literally: land of the fathers
<i>lil-metch</i>	bond partnership
<i>lil-metch afu</i>	bond partnership of lips
<i>lil-metch shisho</i>	bond partnership of gift
<i>lil-metch uru</i>	bond partnership of smearing
<i>lil-metch kerno</i>	bond partnership of holding
<i>lil-metch meto</i>	bond partnership of name-giving
<i>lokhodu</i>	cow hide
<i>luggu</i>	chicken
<i>maarti</i>	girl
<i>madyies</i>	imitation of the calf, made of the calf's skin that is stuffed with grass
<i>makhalle</i>	gourd ladle
<i>makhate</i>	salty product of a tree called <i>shade</i> , chewed with tobacco
<i>marle</i>	Arbore
<i>marra</i>	brass bracelet
<i>me danaan</i>	hairstyle of mothers
<i>me suing</i>	hairstyle of girls and brides
<i>me tagniya</i>	hairdressing ceremony of males
<i>miedi</i>	kind of tree, lat. <i>cordia rothii</i> (Sobania 1980:212), used for ritual and everyday purposes;
<i>min gudoha</i>	first wife; literally: big wife
<i>minni</i>	adult woman (a married woman who has given birth)
<i>mithab</i>	good, nice
<i>morieng</i>	beads; necklace made of beads
<i>morritch</i>	women's leather skirt
<i>mule</i>	donkey
<i>muogo</i>	spoon
<i>muul</i>	iron anklets worn by the girls in the marriageable age
<i>naab</i>	meeting and dancing place
<i>nakhabuonu</i>	maize
<i>nigen</i>	boy
<i>noono</i>	wall-like "cradle" inside the <i>bil baaroa</i> ; also used as "bags" when moving
<i>nyaadu</i>	sorghum porridge
<i>nyabokholotch</i>	big spoon; used for serving and stirring food
<i>nyagiti</i>	ring made out of cloth or <i>alang</i> bush; used when fetching water
<i>nyakhataran</i>	bride, newlywed wife who has not given birth yet
<i>nyakhote</i>	leather ribbon decorated with cowrie shells; worn by girls at dances
<i>nyakhulante</i>	stick or metal rod which visibly divides the house's entrance area and the house's living area
<i>nyawulo</i>	machete
<i>nyebidit</i>	file, used for making milk containers or for tanning leather
<i>nyesish</i>	flail

<i>ogo</i>	women's special leather skirt; worn during ceremonies
<i>orgotch</i>	leather sack for keeping beans or chewing tobacco
<i>rati</i>	Omorati
<i>roodotch</i>	lid of a <i>bangatch</i> , made of a cow's knee
<i>roishee</i>	stems of fresh sorghum; can be eaten like sugar cane
<i>rubba</i>	sorghum
<i>saab</i>	leather strip
<i>salab</i>	oil, butter
<i>seetch</i>	acacia
<i>silla</i>	front skirt of the girls' skirt, often decorated with beads
<i>shade</i>	kind of tree; used for making <i>makhate</i>
<i>shobodu</i>	shells of the coffee beans that are used for cooking <i>bie kulla</i> , also called <i>eshu</i>
<i>shungurut</i>	onion
<i>shuro</i>	part of the small children's hairstyle: big tuft on the backhead
<i>shurte</i>	part of the small children's hairstyle: small tuft on the front head
<i>sontee</i>	cloth used for cleaning the milk containers' inside, made of bark
<i>susur</i>	metal beads on the front skirts of the girls' skirts
<i>tiishi</i>	fresh, green sorghum
<i>tur</i>	clan
<i>ummiti</i>	smaller, upper stone that is used for grinding sorghum
<i>unitee</i>	necklace made out of wooden beads
<i>ushumba</i>	Amhara
<i>vieru</i>	cowrie shells
<i>waar</i>	stone
<i>woi</i>	call and reply to call used by males
<i>yeeritch</i>	grinding stone, lower big stone
<i>yie</i>	rod of hippopotamus; used for beating women and children

### **Hamar words used in this thesis**

<i>binyere</i>	necklace made of leather and metal rings that the first wives wear around their neck
<i>micere</i>	rod
<i>mingi</i>	impure
<i>uta</i>	bride

## Appendix B: Special powers of the clans of the Inkabelo section

told to me by Nyabba (Nyabba's clan is highlighted)  
according to Claudia Carr (1977:110)

CLAN	POWER
Ethe	treat eye sickness treat eye sickness on <i>dimi</i> : call the wind to prevent spiders, scorpions etc.
<b>Fargaaru</b>	heal snakebites make fire with <i>biech</i> (sticks) bring rain cure headaches build fire sacrifice small stock to bring millet growth
Gaalbur	power over water chase crocodiles away protect stock from crocodiles when river crossing
Ille	stop pain from scorpion stings cure scorpion bites
Murle	chase away tse-tse flies —
Tiemle	heal liver sickness —
Tuurat	control fire treat burns on <i>dimi</i> : cut ritual tree ( <i>miedi</i> )
Tuurnyerim	heal snakebites converse with God to get help in war on <i>dimi</i> : prepare white and black paint prepare fire

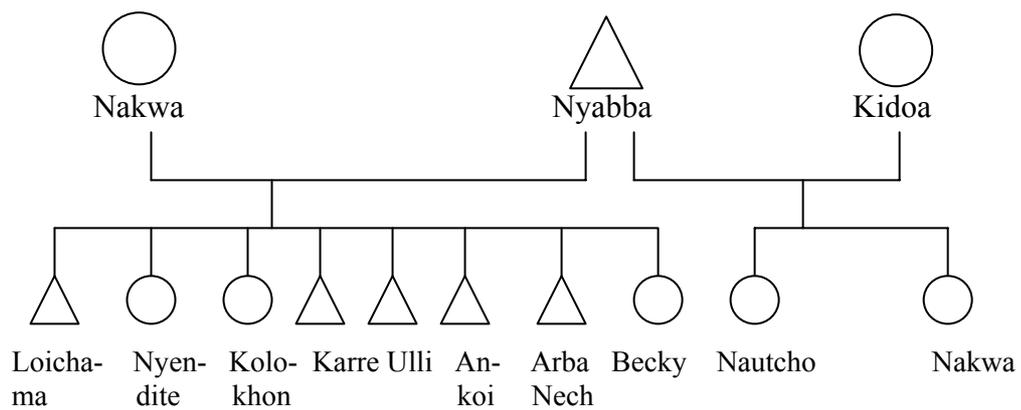
**Appendix C: Importance of economic activities among the different tribal sections**

according to Almagor (Almagor 1972 in Sobania 1980:46)

	AGRICULTURE	ANIMAL HUSBANDRY	FISHING
Inkabelo	mainly	mainly	little
Inkoria	little	mainly	little
Nyaaritch	mainly	mainly	none
Ellele	mainly	little	mainly
Randal	none	exclusively	none
Orru	mainly	mainly	little
Kuoru	little	mainly	none
Rielle	mainly	little	mainly

**Appendix D: Genealogy of Nyabba's family**

excluding Nyabba's deceased wife Nautcho and their children (Kabelle, Chimarre and Orib)



### Appendix E: Husbands and wives in Aoga

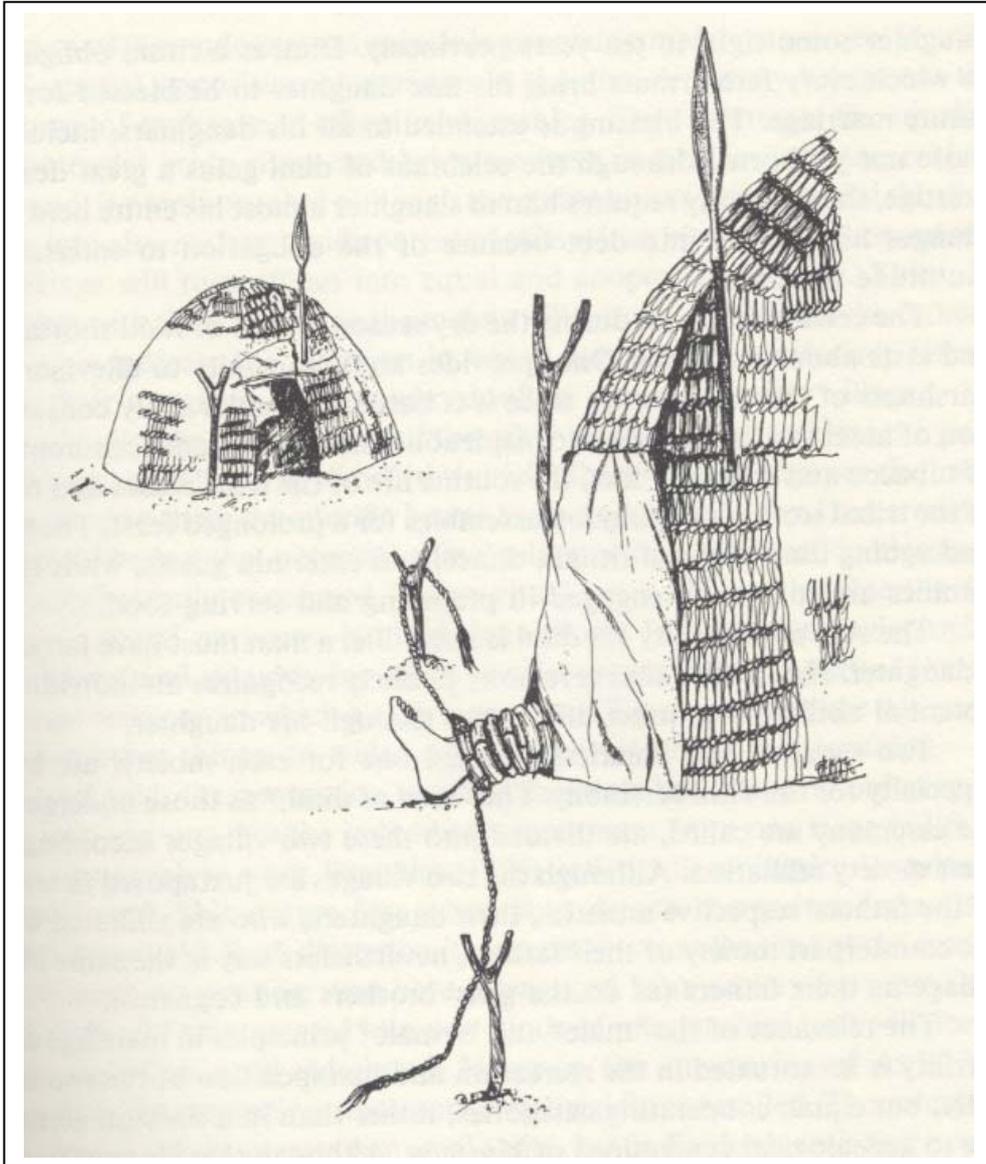
Census made in August 2002

MAN	HIS WIFE	HIS WIVES
Aiebet		1)Lotte, 2)n.n.k.
Arkriet	Bullo	
Giror	Nyanerie	
Guaruk	Nadamete	
Kuraye	Aikun	
Loichama		1)Natun, 2)Yetam
Loichama		1)Kolle, 2)Egura, 3)Gurta, 4)Nakeru
Lokhmokhoi	Orib	
Lokhorio		1)Lyuwan, 2)Maro
Loya	Muruwa	
Loya		1)Haane, 2)n.n.k., 3)n.n.k.
Lowoi		1)Bannash, 2)Nakhote
Nyabba		1)Nakwa, 2)Kidoa
Nyekibat	Obu	
Yerichoi	Nakutye	
Yerimoy		1)Eelle, 2)n.n.k., 3)n.n.k.

n.n.k. Name not known

**Appendix F: Removing of a girl's iron anklets at the wedding**

Source: Almagor 1989: 161



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## Deutsche Zusammenfassung

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### EINLEITUNG

„Was ist eine Frau?“ Vor über 50 Jahren fragte Simone de Beauvoir dies in ihrem Buch „The second sex“, welches sie zu einer Zeit schrieb als die Wissenschaften männerdominiert und -zentriert waren (de Beauvoir [1949] 1975: XV). Auch die Ethnologie war keine Ausnahme. Die Ethnologen, die meist männlichen Geschlechts waren, arbeiteten größtenteils mit männlichen Informanten und gaben häufig eine männliche Perspektive der jeweiligen Gesellschaft wieder. Ein Beispiel ist der britische Ethnologe Paul Spencer, der Frauen als Informantinnen abwertet. In „The Samburu“ schrieb er, Informantinnen seien nicht hilfreich und würden weniger schnell verstehen (Spencer 1965: 231).

Seit den siebziger Jahren beschäftigen sich Wissenschaftler verschiedenster Fachrichtungen, unter anderem der Ethnologie, explizit mit Geschlechterforschung. Gingen die Forscher anfangs von einer universalen Kategorie Frau aus, die von der universalen Kategorie Mann unterdrückt wird, gilt es heutzutage als selbstverständlich, diese jeweiligen Kategorien als kulturelle Konstrukte, die sich nach Zeit und Ort unterscheiden, zu verstehen (Moore 1988: 48; Moore 1994: 49). Etliche Ethnologinnen setzen sich mit den Rollen der Frauen in den verschiedensten Kulturen auseinander, wie zum Beispiel die britische Ethnologin Jean Lydall mit den Frauen in Hamar, Südäthiopien.

In der vorliegenden Arbeit beschreibe ich die Welt der Mädchen und Frauen bei den Dassanetch in Südäthiopien. Diese Arbeit gibt keinen Überblick über das typische Dassanetch Mädchen oder die typische Dassanetch Frau. Stattdessen stelle ich einzelne Personen vor und zwar meine Gastmütter Nakwa und Kidoa und Nakwas Tochter Nyendite. Anhand dieser Mädchen und Frauen, mit denen ich während zweier Feldforschungen<sup>160</sup> in dem kleinen Dorf Aoga<sup>161</sup> lebte, zeige ich, was es bedeutet Frau beziehungsweise Mädchen zu sein. Damit versuche ich Lila Abu-Lughod's Ruf nach „ethnographies of the particular“ umzusetzen (Abu-Lughod 1991: 49).

### ÜBERBLICK ÜBER DASSANETCH

Die Dassanetch leben im Süden Äthiopiens und Norden Kenias und sind unter mehreren Namen bekannt, zum Beispiel Geleba, Marle, Marille, Reshiat, Dathainac (Pauli 1950: 155, Cerulli 1956: 81). Sie leben östlich und westlich entlang des Omo-Flusses und an den Ufern des Turkana-Sees und betreiben Vieh- und Landwirtschaft. Angebaut wird hauptsächlich Hirse, aber auch Mais, Bohnen und Tabak. Fischfang spielt eine

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<sup>160</sup> Meine erste Feldforschung fand vom 16. August bis 16. September 2002 statt. Die zweite vom 25. Januar bis 15. Februar 2004. Bei meinem ersten Aufenthalt lebte ich mit meinem Kommilitonen Konrad Licht in Aoga, beim zweiten Aufenthalt war ich alleine.

<sup>161</sup> Aoga liegt in drei Kilometer Entfernung südlich von Omorati, einer kleinen Stadt am Omo-Fluss.

untergeordnete Rolle und ist mit einem sozialen Stigma verbunden (Almagor 1978: 1). Im Vergleich zu den Hamar und Arbore, zwei Nachbarethnien, sind die Bedingungen für Landwirtschaft in Dassanetch günstig, denn sie sind nicht auf den unregelmäßig fallenden Regen angewiesen. Alljährlich (um den Monat August) steigt der Omo an, überflutet die anliegenden Ufer und ermöglicht eine Aussaat. Oft gibt es zwei bis drei Ernten pro Jahr und die Dassanetch ernten einen „Korn Überfluss“ (Almagor 1978: 40-43). Diese Hirse und auch Tabak tauschen sie mit Hamar, Bashada, Arbore, Turkana, von denen sie im Gegenzug Stoffe, Eisenwaren, Kaffee und Vieh erhalten (Sobania 1980: 105).

Obwohl die Dassanetch sich nach außen als eine ethnische Gruppe darstellen, sind sie nicht einheitlich, da sie sich aus acht *tribal sections* zusammensetzen. Am deutlichsten sind die Unterschiede zu den *sections* Randal und Kuoru, die erst Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts assimiliert wurden und einst den Samburu und Rendille, Nachbarethnien der Dassanetch, angehörten. Randal und Kuoru unterscheiden sich von den „richtigen Dassanetch“ zum Beispiel dadurch, dass sie keine *dimi*-Zeremonie durchführen<sup>162</sup> (Sobania 1980: 54; Almagor 1978: 17).

Allen *sections* ist eine soziale Strukturierung nach dem Alter beziehungsweise der Generation inhärent. Jeder Mann und jede Frau gehört dem *hari* (Generationsklasse) an, die der seines/ihrer Vaters gegenüber steht (Almagor 1978:24). Während über die Zugehörigkeit von Männern zu einer bestimmten Clique innerhalb einer Generationsklasse viel bekannt ist, herrscht über die der Frauen und besonders über die Aktivitäten dieser Gruppen Unwissen. Das ist ein Beispiel dafür, dass sich bislang nur wenig über die Frauen im Süden Äthiopiens geforscht wurde.

## ZUR METHODIK UND FORSCHUNG IM FELD

Während meiner Feldforschung benutzte ich die Methoden der teilnehmenden Beobachtung und Interviews. Bereits während meines ersten Aufenthaltes in Aoga wurde ich in die Familie eines Ältesten – Nyabba – integriert. Als ich gemeinsam mit meinem Kommilitonen Konrad Licht, auf der Suche nach einem Dorf für unsere Forschungen, das erste Mal nach Aoga kam, kam uns ein großer, schlanker Mann – Nyabba - entgegen und lud uns in sein Haus ein. Wir tranken zusammen Kaffee und erzählten ihm von unserem Vorhaben, bei den Dassanetch forschen zu wollen. Er lud uns ein, unser Zelt neben seinen Häusern aufzubauen und in Aoga zu bleiben. Von diesem Moment an war Nyabba mein Vater, seine Frauen Nakwa und Kidoa meine Mütter und seine Kinder meine Geschwister. Diese Einbindung und das Leben mit ihnen gab mir die Möglichkeit aus erster Hand zu erfahren, wie Mädchen und Frauen in Dassanetch leben.

Die meiste Zeit verbrachte ich mit Kidoa (Anfang 20<sup>163</sup>), Nyabbas Zweitfrau, die mir eine sehr gute Freundin wurde. Sie war diejenige, die mir all die Dinge, die eine

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<sup>162</sup> *Dimi* ist eine Zeremonie, die individuell stattfindet und zwar für Väter, die bereits eine Tochter haben. Die Tochter (und alle anderen, auch ungeborene Töchter) werden gesegnet und der Vater erhält den Status eines Ältesten.

<sup>163</sup> Jegliche Altersangaben, die ich hier anführe, sind Schätzungen, da die Dassanetch ihr Alter nicht exakt angeben können.

Dassanetch-Frau tagtäglich macht, beibrachte. Sie hat mich gelehrt, wie man Hirse mahlt, Hirsebrei kocht und Ziegen melkt.

Nakwa (etwa 35 Jahre alt), Nyabbas Erstfrau, hat mir ebenfalls viel vom Leben einer Frau bei den Dassanetch erzählt. Unsere Beziehung glich jedoch eher einer Mutter-Tochter-Beziehung als der zwischen Freundinnen. Nakwa sah in mir ein Mädchen, was noch viel lernen muss und nicht eine erwachsene Frau. Ein paar Mal sagte sie mir, ich solle doch spielen gehen und müsse nicht im Haus sitzen, als ich sie interviewen wollte.

Als ich das erste Mal nach Aoga kam, im August 2002, konnte ich die Sprache der Dassanetch noch nicht. Nach und nach lernte ich einzelne Wörter und Phrasen, aber mir fehlte das nötige Vokabular, um eine flüssige Unterhaltung zu führen. Da ich aber mit den Frauen auch über Themen wie Heirat und Beschneidung sprechen wollte, entschied ich mich, die Hilfe eines Übersetzers in Anspruch zu nehmen.

Dass einen Jungen das „Geschwätz“ der Mädchen und Frauen nicht interessierte, war nur eines der Probleme. Ein weiteres Problem war, dass die Übersetzer schreiben und lesen konnten und sich den traditionell lebenden Dassanetch wie meiner Gastfamilie, die nicht schreiben konnten, überlegen fühlten und verhielten. Dennoch arbeitete ich auch bei meinem zweiten Aufenthalt mit Übersetzer, allerdings nur stundenweise.

Viele der geschilderten Beschreibungen stammen aus teilnehmender Beobachtung. Ich nahm am Alltagsleben teil, das heißt ich holte mit Nyendite, Nakwas Tochter, und ihren Freundinnen Wasser vom Fluss, half beim Essenvorbereiten, pflückte mit Kidoa Bohnen, hielt abends die Zicklein während Kidoa und Nyendite die Ziegen melkten und passte oft auf Kidoas Tochter Nakwa-Tini (zwei Jahre) oder Nakwas Tochter Becky (acht Monate) auf. Diese Methode ermöglichte es mir, trotz geringer Sprachkenntnisse, viel über den Alltag von Nakwa, Kidoa und ihren Töchtern zu erfahren. Auch an meiner eigenen Person lernte ich nach und nach, wie sich eine Dassanetch-Frau benehmen soll.

Wenn ich mit Kidoa und Nakwa Gespräche führte, so war dies häufig informell. Während wir Kaffee tranken, ich mit Kidoa Bohnen säuberte oder Nakwas *durru*m (Gefäß zum Herstellen von Butter) schüttelte, sprachen wir über jene Aufgaben und Tätigkeiten der Mädchen und Frauen. Die Dinge, die ich bei diesen Gelegenheiten erfuhr, habe ich mir gemerkt und später nieder geschrieben.

Die Gründe für diese informellen Gespräche lagen nicht nur an mir, sondern auch an Nakwa und Kidoa. Oft waren die beiden Frauen mit ihren Aufgaben so beschäftigt, dass sie keine Zeit hatten mit mir ein Gespräch zu führen. Außerdem wollte ich sie nicht von ihren Arbeiten abhalten, so dass wir häufig informelle Gespräche zum Beispiel während dem Kaffeekochen und –trinken führten.

Besonders während meiner ersten Feldforschung, als ich mit einem Mann im Feld war, fühlte ich mich in die Rolle einer Frau gedrängt und benachteiligt. Ich hatte das Gefühl etwas zu verpassen und mich nicht der Forschung widmen zu können, wenn ich Wasser holte und für unsere Gäste Kaffee kochte.

Diese Rollenzuschreibung kam nicht nur von außen, sondern auch ich selber hatte den Anspruch an mich wie eine Dassanetch zu leben, um so den Alltag der Frauen kennen zu lernen. Bei meinem zweiten Aufenthalt steckte ich nicht in solch einem Dilemma, da ich nicht den Status einer Frau, sondern den eines Mädchens inne hatte. Dadurch dass ich alleine in Aoga war, keinen eigenen Haushalt und Kochstelle hatte, hatte ich mehr

Freiheiten. Außerdem setzte ich mich nicht so unter Druck, alles so gut wie Kidoa oder Nakwa zu erledigen.

Bei meinem zweiten Aufenthalt war ich in einer gänzlich anderen Situation, da ich alleine im Feld war und auch keine eigene Kochstelle hatte. Zudem wurde ich eher als Mädchen, denn als Frau wahrgenommen. Das implizierte, dass ich größere Freiheiten genoss und zum Beispiel nicht für Gäste Kaffee kochen musste.

Feldforschung ist eine polyphone Situation. Es ist ein Aufeinandertreffen mehrerer Personen, also eine Situation, in der mehr Stimmen als nur die des Ethnographen zu Wort kommen. Diese Polyphonie versuche ich in meiner Arbeit wiederzugeben und binde einzelne Zitate von meinen Gastmüttern Nakwa and Kidoa ein. Aber nicht nur das Miteinander mit anderen, sondern auch die eigene Situation des Ethnographen ist eine vielschichtige. Die Wahrnehmungen im Feld unterscheiden sich von denen nach der Feldphase. Das eigene subjektive Empfinden des Ethnographen spielt eine, oft nicht unbeträchtliche, Rolle. Wie Elizabeth Tunstall beschrieb, hat dieses subjektive Empfinden einen Einfluss: „My physical, mental, and emotional limitations had a significant impact on the method, form, and content of this project and thus this [thesis]”. (Tunstall 1999: 33) Indem ich Auszüge aus meinen Tagebüchern und Briefen, aber auch Fotos und Skizzen in die Arbeit einbinde, zeige ich, wie ich einzelne Situationen wahrgenommen habe, was ich gedacht und gefühlt habe. Der mosaikähnliche Stil der Arbeit soll die polyphone Situation im Feld widerspiegeln.

## VOM MÄDCHEN ZUR FRAU – AM BEISPIEL VON NAKWA, KIDOA UND NYENDITE

In Dassanetch kann man auf den ersten Blick erkennen, ob ein Mädchen verheiratet ist oder ob eine Frau Kinder hat. Die Art, wie sie sich kleidet, ihre Frisur und ihr Schmuck geben Aufschluss über den Status einer Frau: ob sie ein *maarti* (Mädchen), eine *nyakhataran* (Braut) oder eine *minni* (Frau) ist.

Die Mädchen tragen von klein auf einen *gele* (Lederrock). Dieser ist knöchellang und besteht aus zwei gegerbten Ziegenfellen – *silla*, dem vorderen und *abbuni*, dem hinteren – die um den Bauch zusammengebunden sind. Nyendite hatte an die Schnüre kleine Gegenstände aus Metall, wie Dosenreste, Glöckchen oder Metallfedern gebunden. Ihre Röcke waren mit *morieng* (bunten Perlen) dekoriert und die Ränder des vorderen Rocks schmückten *susur* (Metallperlen), die Nakwa selber hergestellt hatte.

Nyendite als auch Kidoa und Nakwa trugen eine Vielzahl von *kibo* (Ringen) an den Armen. Diese Ringe waren meist aus Metall, viele auch aus Aluminium und wenige aus Kupfer oder Messing. Selbst kleine Mädchen wie die zweijährige Nakwa-Tini hatten bereits einen kleinen Ring über dem Ellenbogen.

Wenn die Mädchen älter werden und in das heiratsfähige Alter kommen (ab etwa zwölf Jahre), schmücken sie sich mit einer Reihe von Dingen, um ihren Status zu zeigen, sagte Kidoa. Dazu gehören unter anderem *muul* (Fußbringe), *morieng-me`imor* (Stirnband aus Perlen) und *angatch* (Bänder). *Muul*, das sind schwere, dicke Metallringe, die die Mädchen um ihre Fußgelenke tragen. Entsprechend ihrer Zugehörigkeit zu einem *hari* (Generationsklasse) tragen die Mädchen *morieng-me`imor*, einen Stirnband aus Perlen. Während meines zweiten Aufenthaltes fertigte Nyendite sich solch ein Band an. Nakwa

erklärte mir, dass Nyendite die Farben rot und blau benutzt, da dies die Farben ihres *hari* sind. Im Gegensatz zu ihrer Freundin Okhul trug Nyendite noch keinen *angatch*. Das sind Bänder, die diagonal um den Oberkörper getragen werden, um schöner zu sein.

Außer im Tragen von spezieller Kleidung und Schmuck drückten Nyendite und ihre Freundinnen ihr Mädchensein durch ihre Tätigkeiten aus. Okhul und Nyendite sagten mir, dass Mädchen Wasser holen, Hirse mahlen, Feuerholz sammeln und Ziegen melken. Sie erklärten beide, dass ein Mädchen dann ein gutes Mädchen sei, wenn es viel und hart arbeitet. In diese Aufgaben wachsen die Mädchen nach und nach hinein und schon die Kleinsten werden zum Helfen ermuntert. Kidoa brachte ihrer vierjährigen Tochter Nautcho die Pflichten und Aufgaben der Frauen und Mädchen bei. Kidoa erklärte mir, dass sie Nautcho nicht erklärt, wie man etwas macht, sondern dass sie die Tätigkeit selber ausführen lässt. Nakwas zwölfjährige Tochter Nyendite kannte bereits die Aufgaben der Frauen und führte sie tagtäglich aus. Sie erledigte die Aufgaben wie eine verheiratete Frau.

Im Alter von etwa zehn bis zwölf Jahren werden die Mädchen beschnitten. Im Vergleich zu den Arbore, einer Nachbarethnie, findet die Beschneidung bei den Dassanetch kollektiv statt. Es werden mehrere Mädchen, die meist Altersgenossinnen sind, am selben Tag beschnitten. Nakwa erzählte mir, dass sie von Naberitee gehalten wurde, während sie beschnitten wurde. Danach gab Naberitee ihr Perlenketten und *gamana* (saure Milch). Die beiden nannten sich von dem Moment an *beel* (Freundin). Beschneidung ist ein Übergangsritual. Die Mädchen gehen von einer Welt in eine andere und passieren dabei ein Zwischenstadium, in dem Restriktionen aufgehoben sind. Normalerweise darf ein Mädchen nur den *gele* tragen, aber nicht den Leder- oder Stoffrock der Frauen, erzählte Kidoa. Nachdem die Mädchen beschnitten werden, tragen sie den Rock ihrer Mutter, erzählte Nakwa. Kidoa bestätigte dies; nachdem sie beschnitten wurde, trug sie den *morritch* (Lederrock) ihrer Mutter. Damit ein Mädchen heiraten darf, muss es beschnitten werden, erzählte Nakwa. Mädchen, die nicht beschnitten sind, werden gehänselt. Ihnen wird gesagt, sie seien wie ein wildes Tier oder wie ein Mann, weil sie noch den männlichen Teil, die Klitoris haben. Nakwa erzählte, dass die Mädchen so sehr gehänselt werden, dass sie schließlich beschnitten werden möchten (Nakwa, workshop session: Hamar-Dassanetch, 6. Oktober 2002).

Oft heiraten Dassanetch-Mädchen, wenn sie noch klein sind, erzählte Kidoa. Sie selber heiratete Nyabba als sie so alt war wie Nyendite. Kidoa erzählte, dass Nyabba viermal zu ihren Eltern kam und Kaffee brachte. Nach dem vierten Mal war beschlossen, dass sie ihn heiraten sollte. Zunächst weigerte sie sich und wollte nicht mit ihm gehen, erzählte Kidoa. Schließlich willigte sie ein. Als sie mit ihm nach Aoga kam, fand dort ein großes Fest statt und es wurden viele Kühe und Ziegen geschlachtet. Kidoa musste vier Tage im Haus bleiben. Nach vier Tagen ging sie mit einer Tante von Nyabba eine Kuh melken. Nachdem sie die Kuh viermal melkte, durfte sie sich frei im Dorf bewegen.

Außer dieser Art der Heirat, die auch „Kaffee-Weg“ genannt wird und die ideale Form der Heirat ist, gibt es noch andere Arten. Findet die Hochzeitszeremonie statt, wenn das Mädchen noch sehr klein ist, so werden die fünf Kühe gegeben, aber das Mädchen bleibt bei den Eltern und zieht erst viele Jahre später zu ihrem Mann, erzählte Nakwa.

Manchmal passiert es, dass sich ein Junge und ein Mädchen verlieben, zusammen weglaufen und ohne Erlaubnis der Eltern heiraten. Oder ein Mädchen verliebt sich in einen Jungen. Wenn sie ihn unbedingt heiraten möchte, drängt sie ihn und irgendwann stimmt er ein, sagte Nakwa. Dann gehen sie zu seinen Eltern, bringen Kaffee und verhandeln. Eine andere Form der Heirat ist Brautraub. Ein einzelner oder mehrere Männer stehlen eine Frau oder ein junges Mädchen, gegen deren Willen. Oftmals werden dann im Nachhinein die Brautpreiszahlungen vereinbart.

Der Brautpreis wird idealer Weise vor der Hochzeit arrangiert. In Fällen, wo der Mann seine Braut stiehlt oder das Paar durchbrennt, wird der Brautpreis erst nach der Hochzeit vereinbart. Als ich einmal bei Kidoa war, fragte mich die 15-jährige Naberu, warum es in Deutschland keinen Brautpreis gibt. Die Eltern passen auf das Mädchen auf, geben ihm zu essen, kaufen ihr einen Lederrock, Perlen, Arm- und Beinringe. Deshalb verlangen die Dassanetch einen Brautpreis, wenn das Mädchen heiratet, erklärte sie mir.

Wenn ein Mädchen geheiratet hat und die Fußringe von ihren Knöcheln entfernt sind, ist sie für immer mit diesem Mann verheiratet, erzählte Kidoa. Bis die Braut ein Kind bekommen hat und den Status einer *minni* (Frau) bekommt, kann sie sich aber scheiden lassen. Kidoa erzählte, dass eine Scheidung dann möglich ist, wenn das Mädchen noch keine Kinder hat und noch nicht schwanger ist. Ist sie bereits schwanger oder hat Kinder, so ist die Scheidung nicht mehr möglich.

Nach ihrer Heirat wird die junge Frau *nyakhataran* (Braut) genannt. Diesen Namen trägt sie solange bis sie das erste Kind bekommt. Mit der Geburt des ersten Kindes erhält sie den Status einer Frau. Äußerlich drückt sich dies dadurch aus, dass das Mädchen die Frisur einer *minni* tragen darf.

Kidoa und Nakwa, aber auch Nyendite und ihre Freundin Okhul vertraten die Meinung, dass es gut ist, viele Kinder zu bekommen. Für die Mädchen bekomme man viele Ziegen und Kühe, wenn sie heiraten und die Jungen würden auf das Vieh und das Gehöft aufpassen.

Kidoa und Nakwa gingen sehr zärtlich mit ihren Jüngsten um. Während Kidoa Tabakblätter zerkleinerte, nahm sie Nakwa-Tini immer wieder in die Arme, sang für sie und forderte sie auf zu tanzen.

## RAUM UND GESCHLECHT – WO SICH DIE MÄDCHEN UND FRAUEN AUFHIELTEN

Die Mädchen und Frauen hielten sich tagsüber an verschiedenen Orten auf: in und vor den Häusern, im Kuh- und Ziegenkral, sie gingen zum Omo-Fluss, zu den Feldern und in die Stadt Omorati. Mit diesen Sphären waren verschiedene Pflichten und Aufgaben verbunden. Die meiste Zeit jedoch verbrachten sie im Haus und waren mit Tätigkeiten wie Kaffee zubereiten, Hirse mahlen und Hirsebrei kochen beschäftigt.

Die Größe des Gehöfts und Anzahl der Häuser einer Familie ist abhängig davon, wie viele Ehefrauen ein Mann hat. Da Nyabba zwei Frauen hat, bestand das Gehöft aus zwei Häusern – eines für Nakwa und ihre Kinder und eines für Kidoa und ihre Töchter. Außerdem gehörten zu dem Gehöft Kidoas und Nakwas Hirsespeicher (Silos auf Hochständen) und das Ziegen- und das Kuhgehege. Kidoa erzählte mir, dass junge

Ehefrauen mit im Haus der Erstfrau oder der Mutter des Mannes wohnen, bevor sie sich ein eigenes Haus bauen. Kidoa selber lebte eine Weile bei Nakwa bis diese ihr ein eigenes Haus baute.

Fährt man von Omorati nach Aoga, sieht man schon von weitem die iglu-ähnlichen Häuser (*bil*). Es gibt mehrere Arten von Häusern: *bil iisha*, das aus *alang*-Busch hergestellt ist, *bil baaroa*, welches aus Blech, Strohmatte und Leder besteht, und *bil khaalialia*, das nur aus Wellblech gebaut wird. Allen Häusern haben gemeinsam, dass sie sehr klein sind: der Durchmesser von Kidoas und Nakwas Häusern war nicht mehr als vier Meter und die Höhe betrug etwa 1,50 Meter. Die Eingänge sind meist geöffnet. Nachts verschlossen Nakwa und Kidoa die Eingänge mit Leder oder einem Brett, damit es im Haus nicht kalt wurde und keine Tiere ins Haus kamen. Kidoas *bil iisha* war horizontal geteilt, das heißt es gab einen *kub* (Dachboden), auf dem sie Kalebassen, Kleidung, Tabak oder Nyabba Gewehr lagerte. Nakwas *bil baaroa* hatte diese horizontale Trennung nicht. Stattdessen besaß das Haus mehrere *noono* (Wände) als vertikale Abtrennungen. Hinter diesen Wänden, die Nakwa aus Zweigen und Lederbändern gewebt hatte, lagerte sie ebenfalls Alltagsgegenstände.

Sowohl Nakwas als auch Kidoas Haus waren nach einem bestimmten Muster aufgeteilt und strukturiert. Die linke Seite (von dem Eingang aus betrachtet) war *bil algalyiet*, die Frauenseite. Hier saßen und schliefen die Frauen. Auf dieser Seite verwahrten Nakwa und Kidoa Milchgefäße, Kalebassen und Kochgegenstände. Nur dort sollten sie ihre Tätigkeiten wie Hirse mahlen oder Kautabak herstellen ausführen. Auch die *getcham* (Feuerstelle), war auf dieser Seite, allerdings noch im *bil afu* (Eingangsbereich). Die Feuerstelle bestand aus drei großen Steinen, die dreiecksförmig im Boden verankert waren. Die *bil algalyab* (rechte Seite) war die Seite, wo die Männer saßen und schliefen. Es gab eine bestimmte Sitzordnung, die mir Kidoa erklärte. Der Ehemann, also Nyabba, sitzt immer auf dem vordersten Platz auf der rechten Seite, sagte sie. Andere männliche Besucher sitzen nach dem Alter geordnet neben ihm (mit dem ältesten Gast direkt neben Nyabba). Kidoa selber saß auf dem vordersten Platz auf der linken Seite, also direkt neben der Feuerstelle. Weibliche Gäste nahmen neben Kidoa Platz.

Eine weitere Aufteilung der Häuser ist die in *bil gerre*, den Wohnbereich, und *bil afu*, den Eingangsbereich. Diese beiden Bereiche sind durch eine *nyakhulante* optisch voneinander getrennt. In Nakwas Haus war dies ein großer Ast und in Kidoas Haus eine Metallstange.

Die oben geschilderten Aufteilungen und die mit ihnen verbundenen Konnotationen sind fest gelegt, aber werden im Alltag immer wieder neu konstruiert. Mit dieser Argumentation folge ich Henrietta Moore, die behauptet, dass die Bedeutungen, die mit den einzelnen Bereichen, zum Beispiel, dass Frauen auf der Frauenseite Hirse mahlen sollen, verbunden sind, durch Interaktionen von Individuen entstehen (Moore 1994:72-74). Die Frauenseite in Kidoas Haus wurde auch dadurch zur Frauenseite, da Kidoa sie immer wieder als Frauenseite deklarierte und dort ihre Tätigkeiten ausführte, dort schlief und saß. In ihrem täglichen Miteinander konstruierten Kidoa und Nyabba die Bedeutungen der Orte.

Durch das Zusammenspiel mehrerer Personen im Alltag, auch unterschiedlichen Geschlechts, erhalten bestimmte Orte, eine gewisse Konnotation. Ein weiteres Beispiel sind die Hirsefelder. Hirse säen, Unkraut jäten oder Getreide ernten sind Aufgaben der

Frauen, erzählte mir Nakwa. Dadurch, dass Nakwa, Kidoa und die anderen Frauen auf den Feldern arbeiteten, Nyabba und die anderen Männer hingegen nicht, lassen sich die Felder als eine Sphäre der Frauen verstehen. Diese Konnotation ist nichts Statisches, sondern ein Konstrukt durch Interaktionen im Alltag.

Am Beispiel von Kidoa und Nakwa zeige ich, dass das Haus eine Domäne der Frauen ist. Kidoa und Nakwa verbrachten ihre meiste Zeit im Haus und waren mit Aufgaben in der häuslichen Sphäre beschäftigt. Wie aktuelle Literatur, zum Beispiel von Jean Lydall (1994) zeigt, lässt sich die Zugehörigkeit der Frauen zur häuslichen Sphäre nicht mit ihrer Unterdrückung gleich setzen. Im Gegenteil, denn durch ihre Verantwortungen und Pflichten bezüglich der Nahrung hatten Nakwa und Kidoa eine Position inne, in der sie Kontrolle und Macht ausüben konnten.

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Frau- beziehungsweise Mädchensein in Dassanetch drückt sich durch bestimmte Dinge aus, wie ich im Alltag mit Kidoa, Nakwa und Nyendite lernte. Zum Frausein gehört viel zu arbeiten und fleißig zu sein, wie mir Nyendite erzählte, bestimmte Kleidung und Schmuck zu tragen, wie mir Kidoa erklärte und Kinder zu bekommen und Mutter zu sein, wie ich am Beispiel von Nakwa sah. Die Mädchen und Frauen hielten sich an verschiedenen Orten auf und führten dort bestimmte Aufgaben aus. Durch diese Aufgaben erhielten die Orte eine Konnotation. Gleichzeitig definierten sich die Frauen aber auch dadurch, dass sie sich an diesen Orten aufhielten und die damit verbundenen Tätigkeiten ausübten.

Obwohl ich nur einen Einblick in die Welt der Frauen bei den Dassanetch in Aoga gegeben habe, lassen sich gewisse Verallgemeinerungen machen. Etliche Charakteristika und Rituale, die ich beschrieben habe, kommen auch bei anderen *sections* der Dassanetch vor. Sie sind nicht identisch, aber ähnlich.