Transformations of Hierarchies in Western Ethiopia: The Case of the Mao

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Abstract

This thesis explores a social category called “Mao”, which conveys identity, ethnicity, and social positioning in an area at the border between the Benishangul Gumuz and the Oromia Regional States in Western Ethiopia. It investigates how “Mao” does not carry one unified meaning and how its consequences vary for different individuals who may all claim that their respective living conditions, languages, and cultural expressions represent “true Maoness”. I question why Mao is so nebulous, contested, and heterogenous and why this one identity is stigmatising for some groups yet honourable for others. To answer this, I combined ethnographic fieldwork and archival research. My analysis goes beyond an exclusive focus on ethnicity to examine the overlaps between various ethnic, linguistic, and hierarchical identifications and thereby provide a dynamic understanding of local power relations, social stratification, and positionality.

This study argues that being classified as “Mao” does not determine the lifestyle and social status of an individual. Instead, the position of an individual within the local hierarchies of their community affects what Mao means. Social hierarchies are shaped by logics from the past, particularly concerning the lingering memories of slavery, as well as newer disparities created by the division of the area into two regional states. The way in which Maoness interacts with other characteristics (socio-economic, racial or in terms of “ancestral purity”) may strengthen the persisting prestige of some individuals while it may deepen others’ experiences of marginality and exclusion. This research examines how Mao pervades people’s experience of everyday life in relation to political alliances and strategies, education, religion, marriage, and labour, and how different ways of being Mao in practice (“doing Mao”) influence its meanings. These perspectives illustrate how the concept of Mao at the local level interacts with changes at the regional and national level, and how the resulting historical transformation of hierarchies affects people’s realities.

Dedication

To all people of Ethiopia. May you live in peace.

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Glossary

Term	Meaning	Language
abīd	slave	Arabic
agälgay	servant	Amharic
ashkär	servant	Amharic
ashkari	servant	Oromo
awraja	Sub-province (Derg)	Amharic
balabbat	imperial landlord	Amharic
baläsəlṭan	individual with formal authority	Amharic
bärha	desert/ bush	Amharic
barya	slave	Amharic
borana	stratum of "pure" Oromo	Oromo
bəher, bəheräsäboč əna həzboč	Nations, Nationalities and Peoples	Amharic
däjazmač	military rank in the Ethiopian imperial government	Amharic
dereba	labour agreement concerning taking care of cattle	Oromo
fira	relative	Oromo
firuma	kinship	Oromo
fitawurari	military rank in the Ethiopian imperial government under *däjazmač*	Amharic
gäbbar	tribute-paying peasants (the *gäbbar* system is the Ethiopian feudal system)	Amharic
gabbaro	Stratum of adopted Oromo or clients/ serfs	Oromo
gadaa	traditional social and juridical system that is organised into different age and generational levels	Oromo
garba	slave	Oromo
gosa	clan	Oromo (also Amharic)
guddifacha	adoption	Oromo (also Amharic)
gurracha	black	Oromo
həzb	people	Amharic
kabajaa	honour	Oromo
kəbər	honour	Amharic
kəflä hagär	province (Derg)	Amharic
mana	house, clan	Oromo
maoumma	"Maoness"	Oromo (not a real word)
moti	king	Oromo
näfṭäña	rifle bearers (soldier settlers in the Imperial feudal system)	Amharic
oda	sycamore tree that is a symbol for the Oromo Nation	Oromo
qäbäle	sub-district	Amharic
qomo	clan	Oromo
qorro	imperial landlord under a *balabbat*	Oromo

qote qotanna/ anso	labour agreement on use of oxen	Oromo
saba, sablammootaa fi uummattoota	Nations, Nationalities and Peoples	Oromo
ṣalāt	prayer (often meaning the five daily prayers of Islam)	Arabic
səlṭan/ səlṭannät	authority, power	Amharic
shari'a	Islamic law	Arabic
taayitaa	authority, power	Oromo
ṭäqlay gəzat	imperial province	Amharic
ṭəqur	black	Amharic
wäräda (ləyu wäräda)	district (special district)	Amharic
warra	family, clan	Oromo
zär	ethnicity, ancestry, or race	Amharic
zega	subject or citizen	Amharic
zegənät	citizenship	Amharic
ədəl	chance (or fate)	Amharic
ənjära	soft flat bread (staple food)	Amharic

Ethnic and Linguistic Designations

Term	**Language**	**Explanation**
afaan Oromoo	Oromo	Oromo language
Ak'mo Wandi	Hozo	Language designation meaning "the mouth of Mao"
Amam	Arabic origin?	Outdated term, later largely replaced by "Mao"
Dina	Oromo	Outdated term for previous inhabitants in Western Welega, also meaning "enemy"
Gwama	Gwama	Ethnic and linguistic designation
Hozo	Hozo	Clan name (in linguistics used as a term for the language)
Isbege	Gwama (lowland dialect)	"People of Begi"
Kiring/ Kirin		Place name also understood to designate highland Mao people around Tongo
Komo	Komo	Ethnic and linguistic designation
Kwama	Gwama	Ethnic designation
Macha	Oromo	Founding forefather of an Oromo-speaking "maxi-clan"
mana Dawd	Oromo	"House of Dawd", meaning descendants of the ancestor Dawd (c. 18th century)
Seze	Seze	Ethnic/ clan and linguistic designation
shanqəla	Amharic	Outdated, derogatory designation for enslavable people

Sit Shwala	Gwama	Ethnic designation meaning “black people” (corresponding to *ttwa sit shwala*)
Ttwa Sit Shwala	Gwama	Language designation meaning “the mouth of black people”
waṭawiṭ		“Arab” (Sudanese/Nigerian) immigrants intermarried with local Berta-speakers

Abbreviations

Acronym	**Full name**	**Comment/meaning**
BGPDUF	Benishangul Gumuz People’s Democratic Unity Front	Merger of different parties in Benishangul Gumuz Regional State
BNWEPDUP	Benishangul North West Ethiopia People’s Democratic Unity Party	Party established under the leadership of the BPLM
BPLM	Benishangul People’s Liberation Movement	Liberation movement in the name of the Benishangul People
EECMY	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus	Ethiopian national Lutheran church
EPRDF	Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front	Leading political coalition in Ethiopia 1995-2019
GPLM	Gambela People’s Liberation Movement	Liberation movement in the name of the Gambela People
HPR	House of People’s Representatives	Lower house of the Ethiopian Federal Parliamentary Assembly
ISEN	Institute for the Studies of Ethiopian Nationalities	Institute established by the Derg government in 1983
KPDO	Komo People’s Democratic Organisation	Liberation movement in the name of the Komo People
MPDO	Mao People’s Democratic Organisation	Liberation movement in the name of the Mao People
ODP	Oromo Democratic Party	Formerly OPDO
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front	The first liberation movement established in the name of the Oromo People
OPDO	Oromo People’s Democratic Organisation	Political party established by the EPRDF in the name of the Oromo people
TPLF	Tigray People’s Liberation Movement	Liberation movement in the name of the Tigray people

Alphabets/ Note on the Languages

In the thesis, all Amharic words are transliterated except proper names. For names of places, I have used the most common spelling by the Ethiopian government to not confuse the reader. This is always without diacritics. Amharic names of individuals are always spelled the way they spell them, e.g., in their publications.

The transliteration used for Amharic words in this thesis is a slightly simplified version of the system used by the *AETHIOPICA International Journal of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies*. I have followed the following system:

Vowels:

1st order: ቡ *bä* as in b**a**g
2nd order: ቡ *bu* as in b**oo**k
3rd order: ቢ *bi* as in b**ee**
4th order: ባ *ba* as in b**a**th (British)
5th order: ቤ *be* as in béb**é** (French)
6th order: ብ *bə* as in rob**e**d (unstressed sound)
7th order: ቦ *bo* as in b**oa**t

Particular consonants:

ቸ *čä* – as in **ch**ild
ኘ *ñä* – as in se**ñ**ora
ዘ *zä* – as in Ebene**z**er
ዠ *žä* – as in gara**g**e (French)
ጀ *ǧä* – as in **j**et

ጠ *ṭä* – ejective t-sound
ጨ *č̣ä* – ejective ch-sound
ጰ *p̣ä* – ejective p-sound
ጸ and ፀ *ṣä* – ejective ts-sound
ቀ *qä* – ejective k-sound

For Oromo words, I use the official *qubee* spelling which is written with the Latin alphabet. I use the spelling found in the dictionary of Hinsene Mekuria who e.g., spells "slave" *garba* and not *gerba*. The following consonants are special in the Oromo language:
ph – ejective p-sound
c – ejective ch-sound
x – ejective t-sound
q – ejective k-sound
dh – implosive d-sound

For Gwama words (Koman Mao language), I use the official spelling. For the Hozo (Omotic Mao language), I use the working orthography by SIL.

Examples and exceptions:

Spelled in the thesis	Other spellings	Comment
qäbäle	qebele, kebele	
wäräda	woreda, wereda	
ənjära	enjera, injera	
shanqəla	Shankilla, Shanqilla, Shankalla, Shanqela	Transliteration of the Amharic word and not capitalised as a proper noun
afaan Oromoo	Afan Oromo, Oromo	In English, the spelling "Oromo" is used, but when it is in the Oromo language as in *afaan Oromoo*, the *qubee* spelling is used
Welega	Wollega, Wäläga	Not transliterated because it could be either in *qubee* (Oromo) or in Amharic. The most common spelling in Ethiopian government sources is used
Kondala	K'ondala, Qondaalaa	The most common spelling is used despite the inconsequent lack of marking the ejective k-sound
Kelem	K'elem, Qellem	The most common spelling. Exception: "Leqa Qellem" for the clan name
Asosa	Assosa, Assossa	
Dabus	Dabbus	

Note on Citation of Ethiopian Authors

References for Ethiopian authors are cited and listed alphabetically under the first name and not their second name (father's name) or third name (grandfather's name). This conforms with the common practice in Ethiopia and is least prone to confusion although some authors may be cited with their other names in other publications.

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

On a rainy day in July 2020, I visited the home of Qasim Hamsa and his family. Qasim is a farmer who lives outside the town of Tongo, around thirty km from the border with South Sudan. My travel companion was Jiregna Gemechu, a student from a village around fifty km east of Tongo, close to the Dabus River. We had travelled across the whole of the former Begi District (Begi *Wäräda*), from east to west, from the Dabus bridge at less than 1400 m.a.s.l. to Tongo at approximately 1800 m.a.s.l. On the way from Oromia Regional State across the border to Benishangul Gumuz Regional State, we passed forests and fields of maize, sorghum, beans, and peanuts; it is a beautiful and fertile rural area.

Jiregna had never been to Qasim's village. Although they both self-identify as Mao, they speak different languages and their communities do not usually intermarry. The elderly Qasim and his wife Lelise welcomed us warmly. After dinner and several cups of coffee, the two men started talking. Qasim was keen to learn about Jiregna's language and his clan's rituals. They conversed for hours and were happy to find similarities between their communities. Late in the evening, when the women had already gone to bed, Qasim put his hand on Jiregna's shoulder and started to give the younger man some advice. According to Jiregna, who later retold the story, Qasim had said the following:

> The Mao in Tongo, Benishangul Gumuz, and the Mao in Oromia, all of us, we should not divide. You shouldn't give any other name to your people [than Mao]. Seze, Gwama, etc., are names of *gosa* [clans] and that is ok. But together we are all Mao. The government in Oromia makes it difficult. Stay together to make your people and the culture grow. Mao languages should also be present in Oromia, if you want, in religion or school. But […] in Oromia the Oromo will do whatever they can to stop you as they prevented us from uniting when drawing the border [between the Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz Regional States]. They will try to destroy any measures done for you![1]

This seeking for a common "Mao agenda" may seem puzzling. Why did Qasim feel it was necessary to discuss and create a connection between his and Jiregna's interpretations of Maoness?

[1] Interview no. 72. I remember that Qasim said this to Jiregna, but to get consent to use the statement, Jiregna later retold it to me in a formal interview.

1.1. Introduction

The current political system of ethnic federalism builds on an essentialist interpretation of ethnicity. Citizens are primarily identified as members of "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples" (*bəher, bəheräsäboč əna həzboč*). These are assumed to represent consistent ethnic, linguistic, and cultural entities. "Mao" is portrayed as one ethnic group which has a different language, culture, lifestyle, and appearance from other ethnic groups. "The Mao, like other nationalities in our country and region, are people with a rich cultural heritage," reads a publication called *Study of Mao National Cultural Values* by the Benishangul Gumuz Regional Culture and Tourism Office (Melkamu, Gemechu and Habtamu 2018: 16).[2] The Mao population is estimated to be 43,535 in Ethiopia, which is 0.059% of the Ethiopian population (*Summary and Statistical Report of the 2007 Population and Housing Census* 2008). The census reports Mao settlements to exist predominantly in several districts in the Western Welega Zone of the Oromia Regional State (mainly Begi, Kondala, and Babo Gambel) and the districts of Bambasi and Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* in the Benishangul Gumuz Regional State. In the area of this research, Mao make up about 10% of the local population. The demographically largest group in the area is categorised as Oromo.

In the centre of the Mao area is Begi, a town of local historical importance. With its estimated 10,000 inhabitants, it is the largest town in the Begi District (*Wäräda*).[3] A visitor walking across Begi in 2020 would not have imagined that this quiet, rural town had often been the site of major political tensions. In the early 1990s, Begi became the centre of a dispute over territorial control between the newly-established regional states of Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia. According to the principle of ethnic federalism, every Ethiopian nationality should ideally have its own territory. But which nationality should control Begi *Wäräda*? How could the boundary between ethnically defined regions be traced when the ethnicities present within these regions are themselves contested? In 1995, the government settled the conflict by dividing the area into two. The western part was integrated into Benishangul Gumuz and the eastern, including Begi town, into the Oromia Regional State. However, in 2021, different groups with contrasting views about their respective rights to political representation clashed again and ravaged the town and its surroundings with unprecedented violence. The problem of complex identities and boundaries in the area has, until today, not been solved.

[2] Original wording: "የማኦ ብሔረሰብ ልክ እንደሌሎች የሃገራችን እና የክልላችን ብሔረሰቦች እምቅ የባህል ሀብት ያለዉ ህዝብ ነዉ።።"
[3] Central Statistical Agency: "Population Size of Towns by Sex, Region, Zone and Wereda," 2020 estimation.

From the perspective of ethnic federalism, it is puzzling that an ethnic category, like Mao, does not convey a single meaning. Mao people speak different languages, construct their past differently, partake in different material and intellectual traditions, relate to their neighbours in contrasting ways and do not all interpret Maoness similarly. Some individuals judge the label "Mao" as honourable, whereas, for other groups, it is inherently stigmatising. The manifestation of this identity changes according to location; as a political category, "Mao" interacts with different realities on each side of the regional border. In Benishangul Gumuz, the ethnic groups Benishangul (Berta),[4] Gumuz, Shinasha, Mao, and Komo are recognised as indigenous, as opposed to Oromia, where only Oromo is considered indigenous (Revised Constitution of the Oromia Region 2001; Benishangul Gumuz Regional State Revised Constitution 2002). Although "Mao", usually, refers to communities with a lower status than Oromo (as it is largely understood as a group of "non-Oromo" or "pre-Oromo" people), marginalised families exist not only among Mao but also within Oromo communities, some of which may experience being socially inferior to Mao families.

This study was originally concerned with exploring the hypothesis that people who are identified as Mao are marginalised because of their slave descent. However, my research showed that most Mao are *not* classified as slave descendants despite the local discourses that link Maoness to slavery; they consider themselves "pure" according to local ideas of hierarchy. Furthermore, I originally planned to limit the research to one Mao language group, the Omotic-speaking Mao (Hozo and Seze languages). Yet individuals from the same family or clan may speak different languages or call the same language different names. Moreover, many today use the lingua franca, Oromo. This thesis, thus, also represents my own research journey into this puzzling identity as it explores "the Mao dilemma":[5] "Mao" seemingly carries no uniform meaning. I, furthermore, had to realise that ethnic categories do not function as "ethnic groups" to which one may "attribute identity, agency, interests, and will" (Brubaker 2004: 24). Nevertheless, "Mao" is far from meaningless. Investigating the internal variations of Maoness provides an understanding of how and why certain communities benefit from relatively

[4] "Berta" used to be the recognised label for one of the indigenous Nationalities of Benishangul Gumuz Regional State who speak the Berta language. The label "Benishangul" has historically been understood as a synonym to Berta and was in March 2022 recognised as the official label, replacing Berta (Addis Standard 29.03.2022, *Benishangul Gumuz State Council approves renaming of Berta nation to Benishangul*).

[5] An allusion to Lionel Bender's (1975) linguistic working paper "The Beginnings of Ethnohistory in Western Wellegga: The Mao Problem".

privileged social conditions while others remain vulnerable despite major political transformations.

This research investigates how local people in the Begi area experience identity and ethnicity in their daily lives in social discourses and practices related to politics, education, religion, marriage, labour, and migration. Why is "Mao" so nebulous, contested, and heterogenous, and what are the consequences of such lack of consistency in the meanings attributed to this category? To explore Maoness, this thesis analyses how individuals negotiate social hierarchies that occur within and across different ethnic categories. The living conditions of individuals identified as Mao are often explained by their Maoness, yet the place of individuals in the social hierarchy of their communities affects how they construct and interpret Maoness. The meanings and consequences of this category shift depending on the ways individuals "do Mao" (how they perform Maoness) and how Mao "intersects" with their economic circumstances, racial characteristics, ancestral status, and political categorisation (cf. Crenshaw 2003: 47). Consequently, identities in the Begi area cannot be understood exclusively from the perspective of boundaries to other categories and characteristics of difference but how they are perceived, assessed, and recognised in hierarchical terms.

Through the current political system of ethnic federalism, Maoness enables individuals to obtain political power in the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* of Benishangul Gumuz Regional State. By contrast, in the Oromia Regional State, Mao refers to communities with fewer opportunities than the Oromo majority, to the extent that they are severely disadvantaged and excluded. Ethnic federalism provides collective rights to different nationalities in different regions, yet factors other than ethnicity shape individuals' opportunities and positions in society. Ideas of prestige and power relations that linger on from previous regimes and particularly from imperial times remain significant for people's relations despite the hierarchical transformations of the last half-century. Maoness may be advantageous for individuals with prestigious ancestries, especially (but not exclusively) in territories where Mao is a politically recognised identity. By contrast, alleged slave descendants or communities associated with ancestral enslavability, regardless of their ethnic identification and location, remain marginalised; for them, Maoness further increases their vulnerability and contributes to their stigmatisation.

This thesis studies Ethiopian society from below. "What would the history of the state be if not a story of political subjects?" asks Yonas Ashine (2022: 14). Yonas Ashine's argument that social and political power structures create patterns of continuity throughout centuries despite the change in political actors, is what I exemplify in the contemporary context of an internally diverse local community. In fact, Yonas Ashine's book, which was published only months before the completion of my PhD, provides a discourse-historical analysis of a related argument, considering centrally imposed hierarchies over the "*longue-durée*" (ibid: 36). My study enquires into perspectives on ethnicity, hierarchies, politics, and slavery in the last 40 years of Ethiopian history, and thereby provides a particular case of how historical hierarchies imposed by the central government affect the lives of people in the "peripheries". I examine, too, how people identified and self-identifying as Mao develop counter-discourses and counterstrategies to navigate their circumstances. This contributes to advancing our understanding of Ethiopian society and illustrates how disempowered groups exercise their agency by reinterpreting their identities. This research uses a methodological bottom-up approach that focuses on the personal perceptions and experiences of individuals identified as Mao. Its central empirical contribution consists in examining how people, in their everyday life, experience being trapped in a tension between different paradigms of hierarchy. The case of Begi represents a particularly complex circumstance in a country that has turned ethnicity into a central criterion for political participation and citizenship.

1.2. Mao: Past and Present

The Mao area is peripheral and among the least studied in Ethiopia. Just like the Mao were portrayed as people inhabiting the "fringes" of land "controlled by Oromo" (James 1980: 61-62), the Mao are, in the literature, also mainly inhabiting the fringes of academic texts, or, as Alexander Meckelburg (2019: 30) has noted, they "exist largely in footnotes". Another passage from Meckelburg has followed me while reviewing the literature. He writes: "An Anywaa man once told me that, 'the Komo are interesting. We thought they would be gone by now. But they are still here'" (Meckelburg 2019: 176). A similar statement could have been made about the Mao instead of Komo. Local people and researchers alike seem almost surprised that the Mao and Komo "are still here" as if they are timeless, distinct, social groups. By contrast, the literature review below and the rest of this thesis argue that Mao is a category that has been constructed and shaped through historical transformations and varies across time, locations, and persons. This thesis investigates the various aspects of Mao and how individuals who self-

identify as Mao relate to marginality in contrasting ways and use their Maoness for opposing reasons and results.

Early (colonial) anthropology, also in Western Ethiopia, was interested in the social organisation of African "tribes" (Banks 1996). Common for this research were descriptions of the culture and languages of different peoples – e.g., Enrico Cerulli (1930; 1947) on Berta and Frank Corfield (1938) on Koma (cf. Ernesta Cerulli, 1956; Almaz, 1983). Vinigi Grottanelli's *I Mao* (1940) is of particular interest to this research. In his monograph, Grottanelli compares the customs and languages of two Mao "tribes" (*tribù*) which he calls *Mao meridionale* (southern Mao) and *Mao settentrionale* (northern Mao).[6] He describes, among other issues, cultural practices such as clothing, handicraft, food, social life, and religion. Like many other researchers (and local people), he seems almost surprised at their apparent differences although they share the same designation, "Mao". After Grottanelli, there was no significant research done on Mao until the late 1970s.[7]

Wendy James, whose work my analysis builds on, argues that not all Mao are the same or have identical lifestyles (James 1980). She discusses how the Oromo immigration created Mao as a blanket term for "'aboriginal' peoples" (James 1981: 29). She inquires into how labels have changed over time and have different meanings for different people. Unfortunately, her work on Mao is limited to two papers.[8] James elsewhere argues that "tribal labels" are not stable units, but that individuals move between different identities within the constraints of any given situation (James 1971: 197-198). Categories are created as if they were "distinctive 'ethnic' groups" through stereotyping and associating certain people with certain political or religious movements, whereas in practice they remain flexible (James 1994: 142). Wendy James, along with travellers and researchers before her, associated Mao with blackness and recognised it as a racialised category that simultaneously conveyed social marginality. While I use James' insights in my analysis, I also add another angle to it which may not have been as prominent at the time of her fieldwork: so-called "Mao elites". These are individuals and families who self-

[6] Grottaneli's contemporary, Lidio Cipriani (1942: 276), measured physiological features and compared groups he labelled Berta, Coma (Komo) and Mao. Although relevant as a point of comparison, the works of these colonial researchers must be read in light of their biases and prejudices.

[7] As we will see in the next chapter, the Derg engaged in research in the 1970s and '80s, which largely remained unpublished. These had similar aims as earlier studies: Describing the "culture" of the different ethnic groups (at that time already called "nationalities").

[8] Her work on the area in general, however, is much more extensive; cf. her monographs on Uduk (James 1979; 1999).

identify as Mao but do not see themselves as members of the "subject category", which for James was the main interpretation of Mao (James 1981: 29).

The perspective of elites is part of the investigation of citizenship processes in the Western borderland by Alexander Meckelburg (2019), who has done the only contemporary in-depth study on Mao so far. In his PhD thesis, completed in 2016, he examines the area from the earliest sources in the late 19th century to the establishment of the Gambela and Benishangul Gumuz Regional States in the early 1990s. He provides detailed historical evidence, especially on how slavery and power relations, shaped by the imbalance between the centre and the periphery, have continued to produce inequalities for Mao and Komo communities (more on "periphery" below). He examines the interplay between the encroachment of the imperial state into the fringes of the empire starting from the 1880s, the citizenship creation in subsequent decades until today, and the development of Mao as a political category in Benishangul Gumuz.

Meckelburg discusses how ethnic minorities negotiate their identities, belonging, agency and representation in geographical territories and politically determined spaces (Meckelburg 2017: 172; cf. 2019). Although I share this perspective, especially regarding the Mao identity negotiation along the administrative border that today divides the old Begi *Wäräda*, I will consider the situation from the practical perspective of local people's everyday lives. Where Meckelburg focused on the bigger historical picture in Benishangul Gumuz Regional State with a side glance at Gambela, my focus zooms in more closely on current everyday social interactions of Mao. Instead of focusing on citizenship-making among the Mao, I began my inquiry with the question what "Mao" means. I seek to trace the meanings of this label in the whole of the former Begi *Wäräda* (today two-thirds Oromia, one-third Benishangul Gumuz) and investigate how "ordinary people" navigate this identity. Elsewhere, Meckelburg writes that he uses a "macro perspective on marginality" (Meckelburg 2018: 188). This thesis develops a micro-perspective, building on Meckelburg's focus on the macro-level.

Not all Mao use the same criteria to define Maoness. Individuals who all identify as Mao may not acknowledge each other as Mao and they interpret ethnicity and honour contrastingly. Moreover, categories and identities have changed over time. Already in 1981, Alessandro Triulzi noted that tracing ethnic groups in Benishangul through history is challenging because the same people may occur under different labels at different times (Triulzi 1982: 362). In light of my research, we can also argue the opposite; individuals with diverse backgrounds may

employ the same label. I have argued elsewhere that Mao may be used as an ethnic, linguistic, and political term, and a term denoting status (Küspert-Rakotondrainy 2021). Yet in all these circumstances, Mao remains ill-defined since it refers to a variety of contrasting identities.

The Mao area is linguistically extremely diverse and language itself is a contested terrain. Language and ethnic designations may, or may not, coincide. Researchers have tended to assume that people who use the same ethnonym also speak one language and vice versa, and may even have the same appearance. Until today, some non-linguistic scholars seem to operate with the assumption of a "Mao Komo language" in the singular, although these are seven different languages (Abdussamad 2021: 5). Before Lionel Bender's (1975) linguistic breakthrough, "[n]othing appear[ed] to be known of these people or their language" (Bryan 1945: 192). Bender found that the various Mao groups speak languages belonging to entirely different families, Omotic and Koman (Nilo-Saharan).[9] Identifying any Mao language as Omotic was controversial in 1975 because researchers assumed that all the western minority groups spoke Nilotic languages, associated with Sudanic origin (and a dark complexion), as opposed to the "handsome nobles" who were assumed to speak Omotic languages (Fleming 1984: 31).[10] Subsequent linguistic research did not provide substantially new findings regarding designations and languages (Siebert, Wedekind and Wedekind 1994; 2002; Davis, Hussein and Jordan 2011). MA and PhD students have researched each of the different languages and have produced theses of varying quality.[11]

In 2015, the confusion regarding linguistic and ethnic designations in the area was revisited. Klaus-Christian Küspert's (2015) socio-linguistic survey confirmed the classification of Bender and made a detailed overview of the languages spoken in the different villages: which labels refer to which languages and their relationships (cf. Appendix A, Figures 2-3).[12] There are

[9] The Omotic Mao languages in the area are Hozo, Seze, and Bambasi Mao (70% cognates between Seze and Hozo [Küspert 2015: 31]). These are distinct from Anfillo Mao (also Omotic but a Kaffa language), and Ganza (also Omotic). The Nilo-Saharan languages in the area are Gwama and Komo. Oromo is a Cushitic language.
[10] Until today, researchers tend to write about Omotic-speaking Mao as Nilotic or Nilo-Saharan (Alemu 2002).
[11] Michael Ahland (2012) on Northern Mao (Bambasi/ *Màwés Aas'è*); Amare Tsehay (2013) on Gwama; Amanuel Alemayehu (2014) on Anfillo; Girma Mengistu (2015) on Sezo; Getachew Kassa (2015) on Hozo; Getachew Ayen (2006) on Kwama (Gwama); Manuel Otero (2019) on the Koman language family. Shiferaw Alemu (2011) includes the Hozo and Seze languages in his linguistic study on the history of Omotic-speaking societies and their agriculture and nutrition.
[12] Küspert estimates the number of speakers to 13,000 for Seze, 6,000 for Hozo (*Ak'mo Wandi* – "mouth of the Mao"), almost 25,000 for dialects of Gwama (*ttwa sit shwala* – "mouth of the black people"), and 1,000-2,000 for Komo in the lowland towards Sudan (Küspert 2015: 36-37). Michael Ahland estimates 2,000-3,000 speakers of Bambasi Mao (Ahland, 2012: 13). There may be 500 speakers of Ganza, an Omotic language on the border to

speakers of the Koman language Gwama both in the lowland towards Sudan and in the highland on both sides of the regional border between Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia. The Omotic Mao languages Seze and Hozo are spoken exclusively in the Oromia Regional State. These communities typically do not operate with clear linguistic boundaries between the languages. Some clans are associated with one language, but its members may speak a different language (Küspert, 2015). Omotic-speaking Mao may not accept speakers of Gwama (Koman) as Mao, while Gwama-speakers, especially in the lowland of Benishangul Gumuz, may also not use this label about themselves but prefer Kwama or (in the highland) *sit shwala* (lit. "black people"). The government officially categorises all of them as Mao and no official "Kwama" category exists in the region. Outside of the area of my fieldwork, "Mao" is further associated with communities in Bambasi and Anfillo.[13]

Unaddressed by Küspert (2015) are hierarchies between the languages in matters of prestige and status, and how this relates to language use and shift. A first investigation into this issue has been done by Küspert and myself regarding the language Hozo (*Ak'mo Wandi*) (Küspert-Rakotondrainy and Küspert 2022). We argue that although today's younger generation may prefer to use languages other than their parents' Hozo mother tongue, many still regard this language as an important part of their self-identification as Mao because it conveys the honour of being of "pure ancestry" as opposed to of descent from alleged "slaves of Oromo". Consequently, individuals who believe that they descend from speakers of any of the minority languages but who today are monolingual in Oromo may still use this connection to emphasise their Maoness.

An increasing shift towards the use of the Oromo language and cultural expressions among Mao may lead to the conclusion that they are being (forcefully) assimilated. The archaeologist Alfredo González-Ruibal argues the "pre-Nilotes" (Gumuz, Gwama, Komo) previously were "free men" because they did not have a chief or king the same way the highlanders had (González-Ruibal 2012).[14] He concludes that they resisted subjugation and assimilation by communities of Amhara or Oromo by not adopting their material culture. Similarly, Álvaro Aparicio (2019) found that the style of organising villages of Komo and Gwama depends on

Sudan on the Ethiopian side (Küspert 2015). No mother tongue speakers of Anfillo Mao are reported to exist anymore (Amanuel, 2014).

[13] The languages Komo and Ganza are usually not associated with the term "Mao".

[14] González-Ruibal takes the term "free men" from the Italian traveller Pellegrino Matteucci who in the 1870s designated the "Amam" (later "Mao", cf. chapter II) as a "generation of free men" (González-Ruibal 2012: 68).

the level of assimilation into the Oromo lifestyle, ranging from remaining in freedom (*en libertad*) to being under the political hegemony (*hegemonía política*) of Oromo (ibid: 20; 298). About the Mao in Oromia, González-Ruibal argues that they resist assimilation by adapting and seemingly becoming similar or "invisible" yet negotiating their otherness in more subtle ways (he calls this mimicry) (González-Ruibal 2014: 301). Other researchers have looked at assimilation into Oromoness within Protestant churches. For example, Tor Dag Kjosavik discusses what he calls "the Oromo's cultural transgressions" (*oromoenes kulturelle overtramp*) vis-à-vis the "*shanqəla*" within the Lutheran Church, with which he means coercion and suppression of their lifestyle (Kjosavik 1992: 137; Küspert 2020).[15]

Researchers who assume that assimilation must result in resistance or accommodation may overlook alternative avenues of analysis (Ortner 1995); both assimilation and resistance may have many different causes, manifestations, and effects (Brubaker 2004: 131; Fassin 2014: 431). Etana Habte (2018) shows how a binary between resistance and collaboration is too simplified in the case of the Macha Oromo community of Gidami during the Ethiopian Empire because "Resistance" (capitalised, cf. Cooper 1994 in Etana 2018: 21) hinders an analysis of other elements of social co-existence. Since we cannot assume that individuals who identify as Mao or other ethnicities act as unified social groups, we also cannot assume that they "resist" as groups. Archaeologists have reasons to argue that these communities were more egalitarian and resisted dominant communities by not adopting their artefacts or building styles. For my anthropological study, I believe that a more differentiated approach that pays attention to the internal hierarchies among both Oromo and "non-Oromo" communities will allow a more comprehensive discussion of the situation.

What the research on linguistics, politics, archaeology and religion in the Begi area has not yet examined is how individuals make sense of their self-understanding and how they perform identity in social interactions. Even though they may self-identify with the same ethnic label, their ways of living may differ substantially, and yet they may claim that their behaviours denote quintessential Maoness. This creates inconsistencies across different regional and local interpretations of what it means to be, and to live as, a "real Mao". Despite the research done on Western Ethiopia and the area of Begi, there is a need to further investigate categories of

[15] For a contrasting perspective (the perspective of the church), see the MA thesis of a Mekane Yesus pastor from Begi which exemplifies the necessary "Oromification" of the "Mao Komo" (not specified) when they convert to Christianity (Teferi Negassa 2016: iii).

difference in this society and study both their effects and what they conceal. Analysing the processes of shifting power relations and their influence on local hierarchies makes an empirical contribution to historiographical and theoretical debates in Ethiopia and beyond.

1.3. Hierarchies and Political Transformations in the Periphery

Local identities in Western Ethiopia transform and adapt to shifting political conditions, while new hierarchies of power do not eradicate old inequalities. Yonas Ashine argues that the state's power evolved "as a process" from structures that originated in master-slave relations and transformed into so-called "state developmentalism" (*ləmatawi mängəśt*) (Yonas 2022: 18-19; 29). In this process "the masses remain the *zega* [subjects], excluded from power" (ibid: 251). This thesis builds on Yonas Ashine's insights and asks, "so what about the *zega*?" How have individuals belonging to a specific category of "subalterns" negotiated their social positions within local hierarchies since the imperial time? With Foucault, "power […] produces reality" for individuals who find themselves both subjects and users of this power (Foucault 1991: 81). Local people in Begi have been affected by, and have contributed to, the social hierarchies which influence how identities are performed and understood.

The revolution in 1974 ended the era of the Ethiopian Empire. The socialist regime, the Derg, connected the periphery to a centralised state through a system which Christopher Clapham calls *encadrement* (Clapham 2002: 20). However, as he argues elsewhere, centralism and a notion of nationhood inherited from the imperial worldview of the *ancien regime* continued under the Derg (Clapham 1990). The revolution brought new hierarchal relations that disguised the pre-existing stratifications while these continued to influence local realities. Donald Donham (1999; 2002) describes how, in the Maale area of Southern Ethiopia, the political changes of the revolution interacted with local power relations and resulted in different interpretations of socialism in more central areas than in their respective peripheries. Today's ethnic federalism adds a new angle to Donham's analysis. Over the nearly fifty years since his study, ethnicity has become a more prominent way of making sense of identities in Ethiopian society. In the past, people were subjects of the throne and then the military regime. Today, citizens are "ethnic subjects" (Abbink 2015: 348). Yet, their interactions with the state as well as local hierarchical relations exist within a century-long continuum. Understanding different viewpoints on this history and how it can help us appreciate the Mao situation is the main aim of the discussion below.

As the Abyssinian Empire expanded from the central Shewan highlands in the late 19th century, it incorporated different areas under the same administration. This resulted in a highly stratified and hierarchical society, characterised by a power imbalance between the centre and the periphery (Clapham 1975). Individuals in the lowland and outside the power centres were assigned a "subaltern status" through different forms of unfreedom – slavery, serfdom, and the state-imposed *gäbbar* system, which resembled feudalism (Meckelburg 2015: 354). Social mobility was easier for those who could "become Amhara" – here meaning part of the Christian Amharic-speaking elite in a process commonly called Amharisation (Donham 1986: 13; Markakis 1989; Kasahun 2004; Yonatan 2010). It is a consistent pattern in Ethiopian history that upward social mobility is conditional to adopting languages or lifestyles related to groups deemed more prestigious – especially those of the central highland, creating lasting hierarchies between different cultural expressions. In contrast to those in imperial Abyssinia, who could achieve social mobility, groups of people associated with slavery in the Western lowland, usually labelled *shanqəla*, "constituted, as it were, a permanent periphery that was never incorporated into the Abyssinian core" (Donham 1986: 12; cf. Pankhurst 1977).[16] As a basis for my argument that past hierarchies still determine identities in the society of Western Ethiopia, let us now look at how these hierarchies have been interpreted in Ethiopian scholarship.

Areas outside of the power centre – in the Ethiopian empire referring to the power nucleus around the Emperor – are often called peripheries (Triulzi 1982; Clapham 2002; Abbink 2009; Markakis 2011). Although this usually refers to remote regions, communities geographically located at the centre may also be peripheric as a "defining feature of the periphery" is "powerlessness, economic exploitation and cultural discrimination" (Markakis 2011: 7). The Western fringes are peripheral in a double sense (geographically and socially). Researchers focusing on other parts of Ethiopia have examined how peripheral areas respond to events at the political core (Donham and James 1986; Donham 1999; James *et al.* 2002; Abbink 2009; Boylston 2018). In turn, alleged peripheries contribute to changing social and political conditions at the centre. At the local level, new "centres" and new "peripheries" emerge particularly along regional borders and develop dynamics that are neither uniform nor always comparable. Begi is a "centre" in the periphery where local people manoeuvre a complex and

[16] As we will discuss in the next chapter, *shanqəla* is today an outdated and derogatory term associated with slavery in the western borderland. Previously, it was often used to refer to populations who speak Gumuz and to a certain extent Komo. At times, Mao people are also included into this category.

changing political environment that, influenced by local hierarchies, gives rise to new forms of social relations.

Numerous scholars have looked at power dynamics in the imperial periphery and their relations to politics at the centre. Bahru Zewde (1976) examines how, until the Italian invasion, Western Ethiopia was ruled through middlemen such as *sheikh* Khojele al-Hassen in Asosa. Triulzi (1981: 181) describes the area of Bela Shangul (today Benishangul) in terms of its "double peripherality" as a "no-man's land" between Ethiopia and Sudan, removed from central state processes. Yet, he also acknowledges that it was a centre for trade – in slaves and other goods (cf. Johnson 1986: 241 on "jugglers" between different countries). "The periphery" was and is not one unified society of equally disadvantaged communities. The elites in the periphery were vertically related to the emperor but also engaged in power struggles against each other (Bahru 1970; Raga 1983; Triulzi 1986; Binayew and Alemseged 2014). The "Arab"[17] ruling class around Asosa (among them *sheikh* Khojele) and their political integration into Abyssinia, have had a long-lasting influence on local hierarchies and power balances in the Mao area (Atieb 1973; Yirga 1973; Rashed 1995).[18] Some local identities became associated with this prestigious group whereas others were further excluded.

The immigration of Oromo-speaking communities of the Macha branch that came from the south of today's Ethiopia has shaped relations of power and prestige in Western Ethiopia. Starting from the 16th century, these communities developed a society with landowning kings, tenants, and slaves. In this period, some individuals started to accumulate wealth and surpass the spiritual leaders in importance and authority (Mohammed 1996).[19] The hierarchies that arose were different from the imperial hierarchies but also merged with them. For example, several so-called "strong men" (*moti* – "kings") in Western Ethiopia in the 19th and 20th centuries became imperial middlemen, some with titles of nobility (Paulos 1984: 39). Among these are the contemporaries of *sheikh* Khojele, *moti* Jote Tullu of Gidami and the *moti* of Nekemte, Kumsa Moroda[20] who used the support from the Abyssinian centre to expand their

[17] In this context, "Arab" refers to descendants of immigrants from the Funj Sultanate (today Sudan) who settled in the Asosa area and in the 19th century established powerful *sheikhdoms*.
[18] Several of these and other authors were students at Addis Ababa University – some from local elite families. This gave them access to valuable insights. None of the students identifies with any "minority" groups such as Mao.
[19] For a discussion on the Gibe history seen from another perspective, see Werner Lange's (1982) *History of the Southern Gonga*.
[20] Christian (baptismal) name: Gäbrä Əgziabəher (r. 1889-1932) (Marcus 1994: 106; Meckelburg 2021: 80).

territory and power. Prestige remains in these dynasties until today and individuals from these families tend to continue benefitting from their historical advantage (Meckelburg 2019: 90) – a phenomenon not uncommon also in other areas of Ethiopia (Donham 1999; Boylston 2018). This history explains the dual hierarchies within which the Mao category operates – the imperial and that of the Macha Oromo.

This thesis examines how a highly stratified local society, after seventeen years of socialist dictatorship (1974-1991), adapted to ethnic federalism without abandoning all the logics of the pre-revolutionary past. In the last years of the imperial rule before the 1974 revolution, students in larger cities inspired by Marxism rebelled against class divisions, economic hardship, and social inequalities (Balsvik 1998; Aalen 2011a; Bahru 2014; Abbink 2015). Elsewhere, peasants protested against the feudal system and famine through a series of insurgencies, among others in Kelem, south of Begi (Marcus 1994; Gebru 1996; 2009; Etana 2018; Østebø 2020). The subsequent revolutionary regime attempted to redistribute resources and land. However, local communities increasingly started interpreting the continuing inequalities as inherently ethnic. This development resulted in ethnic nationalist movements, also in Western Ethiopia, which eventually caused the Derg regime's downfall (Young 1999; Etana 2007). Within two decades, the society of Begi went from a feudal system to being influenced by a socialist class ideology to an ethnic political organisation, while these transformations did not fundamentally shake entrenched social disparities. Despite the ruptures from one generation to the next, from one political system to the other, history functions "cumulatively" (Di Nunzio 2019: 5). The rapid shifts of governments, yet the lingering "sediments" of past ideologies, are part of what makes examining the transformations of identities in Begi particularly interesting.

Today, Ethiopia has attempted the "bold experiment of marrying federalism with ethnicity" (Yonatan 2010: 187). With this, it has "gone further than any other African state (and almost any state worldwide) in reconstituting itself in ethnic terms" (Clapham 2002: 27). Citizens are today divided into different Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, which grants them access to resources while members of "indigenous" or "titular" groups in certain territories have particular rights (Alem 2004; Aalen 2006; Vaughan 2006; L. Smith 2013).[21] Administrative

[21] "The term 'titular' refers to those ethnic groups entitled to exercise self-administration in their home regions in the context of Soviet federalism" (Slezkine, 1996, referred to in Asnake, 2009, footnote 14: 22). It is today used in Ethiopia to refer to ethnic groups that are recognized as indigenous in certain administrative entities (cf. Abbink, 2011: 606).

boundaries which make some groups indigenous and others not, function as "creation[s] of the colonial state" (Mamdani 2012: 2). Minorities emerge as products from such processes of boundary-making controlled by groups in power (Williams 1989). As a necessity of ethnic federalism, a border was drawn across the Begi *Wäräda* in 1995 to separate the Regions Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz. This made the same local community end up with different social and political conditions on either side of a regional border that turned Mao into minorities and classified some of them as "indigenous", others not.

Granting self-determination to different nationalities is supposed to level out social inequalities between different ethnic groups. However, this system does not differentiate between previous political elites and less prestigious groups. Dereje Feyissa (2006: 225) argues that the design of decentralisation itself functions according to local "competition and confrontation", both between different ethnic communities and within these communities due to power struggles over the control over resources and the need to build alliances vis-à-vis the government. This competition is mainly carried out by "contending elites who are the moving spirit of ethnic nationalism" (Merera 2006: 128; cf. Data 2012). The role of elites in political and historical transformations is commonly acknowledged in research on the imperial period (Clapham 1975; Garretson 1986; Donham 1999; Haran 2002; Kasahun 2004) until federal times (Tronvoll and Vaughan 2003; Dereje 2006; Aregawi 2008).[22] Recent studies suggest that political processes in the Begi area were driven by old elites who were able to use the political opportunities to their advantage (Asnake 2009; Meckelburg 2019). Therefore, neither decentralisation nor rights of "ethnic groups" have necessarily led to democratisation and a more equitable society (Alem 2004; Bassi 2014; Gardachew, Kefale and Kumie 2019).

Citizenship is awarded to ethnically characterised groups rather than individuals. This may help us understand arguments from scholars like Marco Bassi and Gemetchu Megerssa (2008: 83), who hold that the historical "failure of modernization" has caused the exclusion of the Oromo, as a whole, from being Ethiopian. From the perspective of the Mao case, this argument is inadequate because citizenship rights may not only depend on an individual's official ethnic categorisation but on stratifications within these identities. They may even be exercised outside

[22] Haran Sereke-Brhan shows that the royal houses of Abyssinia consisted of elites with various backgrounds and from different areas of the country primarily to "forge a nation" (Haran 2002: 211). In a completely different context, the TPLF was, according to a former member, driven by a small group of elites and connected to elites elsewhere in Ethiopia and again, they "forged a nation" (Aregawi 2008).

of ethnic structures (cf. Di Nunzio 2019). Numerous publications and edited volumes have looked at local responses to national models of Ethiopian citizenship (James *et al.* 2002; Turton 2006; Asnake 2009; Tronvoll and Hagmann 2011). Several of them show that the political system based on ethnicity has not eliminated previous structures of hierarchy and stratification but has in many cases strengthened it (Data 2011; Donham 2011; Meckelburg 2018).

Not all contemporary research on Ethiopia acknowledges the tension between the use of rigid ethnic labels and ethnicity as a plastic concept; it takes for granted the principle of ethnic categorisation, as studies on Mao exemplify (Muktar, Lelisa and Temesgen 2017; Abebe, Atnafu and Shewa 2018).[23] The tendency to operate with ethnic groups as static, exclusive entities can be found in descriptions of "the Oromo personality" called *oromumma* (Gemetchu 1996: 92), "the Oromo culture" (Gemechu and Assefa 2006: 241), and "the Oromo ethnic identity" (Tesfaye 2019: 5). Scholars writing from an Oromo perspective commonly project the current understanding of a primordial ethnic identity on the past (Ezekiel 2002; Jeylan 2006; Begna 2008; Teferi Mekonnen 2021). However, it is unclear how they determine which groups were "Oromo" many centuries ago, and how they distinguish between different "Oromo communities" (Mohammed 1990; Asmarom 2000; Negaso 2000; Tesema 2006).[24] This use of present-day ethnic categories on historical events is effective to argue for political recognition of different nationalities (cf. Temesgen Thomas 2011; Melese 2017). However, it has been criticised by scholars of Ethiopia (Merera 2006; Jeylan 2016; Bassi 2011; Yates 2017) and beyond (Chapman, McDonald and Tonkin 1989/2016; Banks 1996). Jean-Loup Amselle calls this "projecting current ideological models into the past" as one way of essentialising identities (Amselle 1998: 3). This interpretation of history creates a picture of static and separate, inherently different cultures – the perfect soil for "nationalisms, ethnicisms, and culturalisms" (ibid: 4).

This thesis does not only criticise what Amselle calls "ethnological thinking" (categorising cultural elements to form fixed categories), but it also aims to provide an alternative understanding of the politics of identity and belonging which is more in tune with historical complexities in Western Ethiopia over the last half century. Instead of assuming that all "80

[23] Muktar, Lelisa and Temesgen (2017) aim at describing the "indigenous environmental ethics of Mao-Komo society" from the point of view that there is a "Mao-Komo society".
[24] A perspective on history contrary to Mohammed Hassen's argument that the Oromo were already in Shewa in the 14th century is that by Taddesse Tamrat (1972) which is written from the perspective of Christian Abyssinia.

ethnic groups" in Ethiopia are distinct, separate units (Belete 2018: 92), we should consider the possibility that ethnicity may not always be a helpful concept for understanding Ethiopian history and how identities have formed and transformed, merged and split (Bassi 2011; Yates 2017). Indeed, the division of society into ethnic groups is the product of political processes; such groups do not exist as permanent social entities (Berihun 2019).[25] The *zega* ("subjects" or "citizens") have been faced with various ways of organising society while opportunities and resources remain unequally distributed. This continues to matter in today's ethnic logic. To understand the development of specific hierarchies related to the Mao case, we will now look at the rise of ethnic consciousness in Western Ethiopia.

1.4. The Rise of Ethnicity and Identity Politics in Western Ethiopia

Starting from the 1980s, more and more research has discussed fluid ethnic boundaries and flexible identities. Today this has become an established perspective all over Africa in various disciplines such as anthropology, history, and archaeology (Haour and Rossi 2010; Marshall 2012; Apter 2013). There is a debate about the question of how and to what extent communities consist of groups or networks, and in how far you can define where one ends and another starts (Hannerz 1987: 549). This thesis builds on the work of Fredrik Barth and other researchers who have been inspired by Barth's concept of "boundaries" (Barth 1969; Verdery 1994; Brubaker 2004; Wimmer 2008; Eriksen 2010; Jenkins 2015).[26] It explores how individuals create and negotiate boundaries and affiliations to "the other". These boundaries between social categories express relations of power, while the categories are in and of themselves subject to political and social transformations. Ethnicity cannot be treated as "groups" as this would obscure the real question, which is to engage critically with the idea of groupness itself (Brubaker 2004: 8). My interpretation of Mao is based on the idea that identities (ethnic and otherwise), rather than being stable and neutral indications of specific attributes, are conditioned by shifting and competing systems of social ranking. With this, it goes beyond an exclusive focus on boundaries.

[25] Berihun Adugna (2019: 18) uses Benedict Anderson's (2006) concept of "imagined communities" to make sense of Ethiopia's Nations, Nationalities and Peoples.

[26] Rogers Brubaker argues that Barth's use of the term boundaries "carries with it connotations of boundedness, entitativity and groupness" (Brubaker 2004: 13, endnote). By contrast, Richard Jenkins (2008: 25) states that Barth has often been misunderstood for promoting a rigid understanding of groups when he discussed imaginary (and, hence, negotiable) boundaries between people. This is a point Barth underlines in the preface of the 1998 edition of his edited volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Barth 1998).

Bruno Latour's actor-network theory analyses how factors (both human and non-human) are "assembled" into mobile and changing webs of relations (Latour 2005). This complements Barth's perspectives on boundaries; both Barth and Latour focus on linkages instead of social/cultural "content"; "It is always by comparison with other competing ties that any tie is emphasized" (Latour 2005: 32). Identity is not at the forefront of Latour's analysis but approaching the social as "the tracing of associations" avoids essentialising social categories when using Barth's "boundaries" (Latour 2005: 5). Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker (2005) argue that if identity is used as a concept, it should signify how individuals position themselves in a given situation. In the context of Mao, this means seeing identities in light of both historical developments and changing regional and national conditions. This perspective helps us understand how individuals negotiate labels that either connect people or differentiate between them, and how categories are contingent on social relations in a specific period and location.

Concerning these questions, scholarship on Ethiopia can be divided into two broad categories. The first adopts the currently recognised political categories of nationalities as shown in the above example of Oromo scholarship. The second does not see ethnic groups as something that can be naturally "found or given" and does not treat "culture" as the driving force behind ethno-political movements (Donham 2003: 459). Researchers like Sarah Vaughan (2003) argue that current ethnic identities are constructed through historical and political struggles, whereby local communities, in response to the government, create their own understanding of groups and boundaries. From this perspective, both the Oromo and the Mao categories are the products of a certain political system conducive to the "invention of nations" (Gellner 1983: 48). Mao developed into an ethno-political category in an elite-driven process of identity politics which aimed at establishing a sense of groupness.

Over the decades, trends of what Eric Hobsbawm (2012) calls "inventing tradition" have increasingly taken place in Ethiopia (e.g., Jan Hultin 2003 on a meeting that exemplifies the revival of Oromo language and culture in 1976).[27] In 1998, John Markakis investigated the growth of a political Gurage identity which he traces from imperial times, when there was no "need" for a common ethnic identity until the introduction of ethnic federalism which

[27] For similar discussions, Gianni Dore (2003) on Kunama in Western Tigray and Dawit Yosef and Fekadu Adugna (2020) on Qemant in Northern Ethiopia (cf. Donham 2003).

demanded an exact "meaning" of ethnic labels (Markakis 1998). Christopher Clapham (2002: 28) calls the political strategy of territorial sub-division of ethnicities a "'museum of peoples' approach". Since then, numerous researchers have studied the creation or invention of nationalities in Ethiopia (Vaughan 2006; Admassu 2010; Aalen 2011a; Dereje 2011).[28] Günther Schlee's (1985) findings that different clans in southern Ethiopia operate with identities which cannot easily be classified as either Somali or Oromo and do not correspond to a segmentary lineage system have been substantiated in later research on ethnic federalism (Fekadu 2009; Asnake 2011; Schlee 2013). This research shows how individuals negotiate ethnic identification through various expressions available to them in their circumstances.

The label "Mao" is usually applied to the heterogeneous mass of non-Oromo and is negotiated in constant relation to the Oromo category (cf. James 1980). In subsequent chapters, we will investigate the creation of Oromo nationalism as one of the main driving forces behind ethnicization in the Begi area, which will help us appreciate Mao as a social and political identity (Zitelmann 1994; Merera 2006). The growth of Oromo nationalism, especially related to the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the most central political movement in the name of Oromo, is a well-researched topic in Ethiopian studies (cf. Baxter 1994; Baxter, Hultin and Triulzi 1996; Merera 2003; 2007). By contrast, the politicisation of non-Oromo ethnic categories in the West, like Mao, happened later and slower than that of Oromo and is less researched. An exception is Meckelburg's (2019) analysis of how the Mao and Komo ethnic movements became avenues to secure political power and territorial control. More research is needed to investigate the diverse political aims and goals of people identifying with the Mao ethnicity, and the effects that the political changes have had on ordinary people.

An early study of political power struggles in the Benishangul Gumuz Regional State is that of John Young (1999). He discusses power dynamics between the liberation movement of the Benishangul people (Berta) and the OLF in their struggle over territory. Young argues that political power towards the end of the Derg time finally reached the hands of "indigenous" or local leaders. Correspondingly, other researchers found that communities in the western borderland were drawn into politics in the late Derg time and had to position themselves vis-à-vis available ethnic categories (James 2002; Etana 2007; Meckelburg 2019). However, Young's

[28] For further research related to that of Admassu Kebede (2010) on Amhara, see Takkele Taddesse (1994) and Pausewang (2005).

perspective gives the impression that the local population, such as Mao, acts as a unified group with common political interests and that the leaders represent the masses. This is not necessarily the case (cf. Brubaker 2004).

Local elites may take advantage of a political situation; they may appropriate certain labels and establish themselves as the representatives of the respective ethnicities (Abbink 1991; 2002). How people instrumentalise identities in political struggles for power has been documented in other African cases: in Benin, the purposeful use of the label "Gando" became a vehicle for political power in the name of a "marginalised" community (Hahonou 2009; 2011; cf. Bierschenk 1992). In Kenya, the relatively newly-established ethnic category Kalenjin served as a means to fuel political populism but it also created a new sense of commonality, relations, and history (Lynch 2011). Looking at how ethnic representation functions in the two regional states relevant for this thesis – Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia – we will see how some labels have become instruments for political movements, depending on their functions in the respective regional context.

Benishangul Gumuz is a region that consists of minorities; no ethnic group can claim to represent a majority (BoFED 2017). Regional policies formulate an intricate system of political representation which gives priority to nationalities recognised as indigenous (Benishangul/Berta, Gumuz, Shinasha, Mao, and Komo). Operating within the parameters of ethnic federalism, scholars frequently suggest improvements to the system of political representation. They criticise practices according to which indigenous peoples get advantages over non-indigenous peoples, such as Amhara or Oromo who together make up 35% of the population (Mesfin 2011; Beza 2013; Gifayehu 2019; Ephrem 2020; Aweke 2020). Beza Dessalegn (2019) and Muluneh Kassa (2017) suggest that changing from a zonal (territorial) strategy to a so-called Non-Territorial Administration (NTA) would promote different nationalities more equally (cf. Beza 2018; Ephrem 2020). These recommendations presuppose the existence of ethnicities as fixed social entities, characterised by, e.g., "indigeneity" (Beza 2015) and do not shake the fundamental assumptions which underly the categorisation of people into "ethnic groups". The same applies to studies on land tenure (Mesfin 2011; Cheneke 2020) and so-called "ethnic conflicts" (Alene and Worku 2016; Wondim 2020; Aynalem 2009; Zelalem 2021). Neither do these studies address the potential "arbitrariness" of borders and regions (cf. Bourdieu 1991: 223). Other scholars call for a more differentiated analysis that looks at how individuals use certain characteristics to create a sense of groupness (Abbink 2006;

Siraw 2015; Zelalem 2017).[29] I argue that minorities do not act as homogenous groups; the way individuals negotiate ethnic identities is related to how these are ranked and experienced hierarchically.

In the neighbouring Oromia Regional State, only individuals identified as Oromo are represented in legislative and administrative councils although the region hosts communities with different ethnic affiliations, among them Mao. This is a policy criticised by numerous scholars (Beken 2007; Ephrem 2020; Sisay 2020).[30] Most of the non-Oromo in the region are identified as settlers – mainly Amhara (Yonatan and Beken 2013: 36). Non-Oromo non-settlers, such as Mao, are by Berihun Adugna (2019: 16) called "struggling Nations, Nationalities and Peoples". This refers to their struggles for recognition as separate (ethnic) groups. A few studies have started exploring how communities identified as Zay, Mao, and Dube are marginalised and excluded by Oromia regional politics and society (Dawit Getu 2011; González-Ruibal 2014; Kefyalew 2020; Yihunbelay 2020). From a perspective of material culture, González-Ruibal (2014) approaches some of the issues surrounding how Mao people in Oromia negotiate and perform their identities and how they deal with social and political constraints.

To get a deeper insight into questions regarding group-building processes and how the affected communities interact with Mao as a local political and social category, we need to explore the perspective of the people at the grassroots. This requires an element of *Alltagsgeschichte* ("history of everyday life") which focuses on the experiences of "ordinary people" (Lüdtke 1995).[31] Seemingly "ordinary" social interactions are what make up life as Veena Das expresses; "the voice in the everyday" addresses nothing less than questions on what it means "to inhabit a world" (Das 2007: 2-3). Michel De Certeau argues that without considering the "bricolage (the artisan-like inventiveness)" of human relations in day-to-day lives, we lose an important aspect of politics and society (De Certeau 2011: xviii). Without investigating everyday experiences, we may be able to analyse strategies as social (power) structures or norms but not what de De Certeau calls "tactics" – the way people use these in their own way. In the Mao area, the community's everyday experiences are coloured by social hierarchies and inequalities, particularly the collective memory of slavery, which we will now turn to.

[29] Zelalem Teferra (2017) in his research on Amhara settlers and the Oromo population in Western Ethiopia approaches ethnicity in a more differentiated way than the later work cited above (Zelalem 2021).
[30] See he MA thesis by Tokuma Daba (2010: 78-79) for the opposite argument.
[31] The concept of *Alltagsgeschichte* is usually ascribed to Alf Lüdtke who was particularly concerned with factory workers under the German Third *Reich*.

1.5. Social Inequalities and Slavery

Ethnic identification in the Begi area is connected to hierarchal relations between different social categories as social inequality makes up another layer of the multiple configurations of "Mao". This thesis explores how the transformation of hierarchies plays out in practice (Appadurai 1988; Feuchtwang 2016). Much of the current research on Western Ethiopia has inadequately investigated power relations within social and ethnic categories (Eide 2000: 41) – how the Oromo and Mao categories are both internally stratified and hierarchically interlinked and how they relate to memories of slavery. Not only among Mao but also within Oromo communities, there are marginalised groups; low-status Oromo (e.g., so-called "black Oromo") may experience being socially inferior to many Mao due to alleged slave descent (Küspert-Rakotondrainy forthcoming 2023). Where instrumentalists may portray ethnicity as a personal choice, this thesis argues with Christine Hardung (2009: 127) that especially individuals of low prestige do not have the privilege of selecting the label they may want to affiliate with or the particular interpretations of said label (cf. Fair 2001; Regnier 2019).

Slavery was at the core of the polities, kingdoms, and the empire of the Ethiopian highland from ancient and medieval times until the 20th century (R. Pankhurst 1977; Tekalign 1984; 1997; Miers 2003; Yonas 2022).[32] Research on slavery has explored how slavery existed in the western borderland, and has documented the extent of the slave trade and raids and how the affected groups were called (R. Pankhurst 1968; 1997).[33] Atieb Ahmed (1973) and later Abdussamad Ahmad (1999) provide a specific discussion of slavery in the Bela Shangul and Gumuz areas. Their studies discuss the role of *sheikh* Khojele al-Hassen in Asosa in the slave trade and present evidence that "the Mao/Mawo" were victims of *ləj gəbər* ("child tribute") – payment of children as tax (cf. chapter II). However, these studies operate on a meta or group-level, leading to the assumption that certain labels refer to enslaved groups. This does not tell us who these slaves were, how the communities interpreted and dealt with different forms of slavery, how the boundaries between bondage and freedom were negotiated, and what this means in today's interpretation of history (Bonacci and Meckelburg 2017: 7).[34] Slave raids

[32] Richard Pankhurst acknowledges that the sources give a "one-sided account" (Pankhurst, 1997: x), since the sources he uses (mainly King's chronicles and early travellers' reports) are not written from the perspective of the slaves or slave areas.
[33] Cf. Richard Pankhurst (1997: 356-357) on the label "Bareya".
[34] This thesis will not go into detail on abolition. On abolition in Ethiopia, see R. Pankhurst (1968); Miers (2003); Bonacci and Meckelburg (2017). How abolition is made sense of locally in the Begi area will be part of chapter II of the thesis.

created irreversible changes in the local communities, for instance in kinship relations and formation of identities and groupness (James 1986; Theis 1995).[35] The collective memory of slavery and its effects in the local communities remain essential components of present-day social interactions.

The subordination by the Macha Oromo is another prominent perspective of slavery and unfree labour. By the time the Macha expansion reached today's Western Welega, their society had already become both heterogenous and stratified through the assimilation and enslavement of "pre-Oromo peoples" in the conquered areas (Blackhurst 1996; Negaso 2000; Tesema 2006). "Mao" became a label denoting groups among the local population who were or could become enslaved; this distinction is not always entirely clear because historical sources often use Mao to denote both slaves/ servants and socially marginalised, yet free, people (Bartels 1970; 1983; cf. chapter IV). Yasin Mohammed (1982) reconstructs an unequal power relation between the *warra* Wanaga (the clan of king Jote Tullu) and the lowland people called Komo at the turn of the 20th century. He writes that the latter could be "subjugated to the status of slavery" (ibid: 17). This indicates the existence of systematic patterns of inequality. Yet, the exact meaning of "slavery", the consequences of this status in practice and how it changed the affected communities, remains vague not only in Yasin's research but in discussions of slavery in Western Ethiopia in general. An important question concerns intersectionality (Crenshaw 2003), i.e., how slave descent interacts with an individual's other characteristics in the way it influences an individual's experience of marginality.

Meckelburg (2018) argues that ethnic federalism did not end the marginalisation of certain groups such as Mao and Komo. Yet, he acknowledges that he is "unable to capture the finer points of the institution of slavery and subsequent emancipation" (Meckelburg 2015: 361). I believe that the reason for this limitation is that the link between slavery and today's Mao or Komo identities has remained insufficiently analysed, particularly concerning the blurred distinction between "slavery" (actual enslavement), "classificatory slavery" (alleged slave descent), and "metaphorical slavery" (a metaphor for exploitation) (Rossi 2009: 5); "slavery", in the local discourse, may have various connotations (cf. Smidt 2011 on "Tsellim Bét" in the

[35] Wendy James (1986) researched how the Gumuz community reacted to raiding by adapting their marriage strategies to adopt the system of sister-exchange marriage. Joachim Theis (1995; 2010) documented a contrasting reaction among the Komo on the Sudanese side of the border. Here, the community adapted to slavery by creating a flexible society without strong kinship ties or clear boundaries.

Tigray region). To understand the multidimensional nature of slavery, we need to discuss the concepts of bondage and freedom and different "conditions analogous to slavery" (Cooper, Holt and Scott 2000). This requires an investigation into the meanings people attach to categories that today denote at once ethnicity, race, and status. Maoness, per se, does not indicate either slave or free ancestry – an individual's kinship relations to alleged slave descendants or lived circumstances of servitude influence what Mao means and does for a particular individual. Similar considerations can be made concerning other Ethiopian ethnic categories, such as Amhara and Oromo.[36]

There is an established debate on marginalised status groups ("castes") such as occupational minorities (artisans/craftworkers and hunters) and slave descendants in Ethiopia, which provides perspectives on how to investigate hierarchies within and across social groupings.[37] Status groups often experience severe social disadvantages and exclusion from the mainstream society. Instead of the classical approach of analysing these minorities' positions within each ethnic category, Dena Freeman and Alula Pankhurst (2003) recommend that an analysis of marginality should consider the transformations of boundaries between social groups in the light of political, religious, economic and social conditions. This analysis should be done from the viewpoint of the marginalised people themselves, in a manner sensitive to change over time (cf. Epple 2018b). The aspect of change is important here as some studies have found that hierarchies may alter to the extent that they seem to be reversed, while they may also persist despite other transformations (Ellison 2006; Leikola 2014). Due to the heterogeneity of social categories such as Mao, both scenarios are possible simultaneously.

Despite the usefulness of the above-mentioned research, the situation of Mao is different from that of occupational groups because Mao is not associated with many of their characteristics such as a particular occupation or being "polluting". Instead, Mao is often understood to designate a separate "Ethiopian nationality" which entails different challenges, as discussed above. Yet again, marginalisation may be unrelated to both ethnicity and occupation and may not only affect the geographical periphery; it may happen at the heart of the centre (Di Nunzio 2019). Still, Freeman and Pankhurst's above-mentioned recommendations point at an important

[36] See Asafa Jalata's (1998) edited volume "Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse" (e.g., Leenco Lata, 1998, an Oromo activist and politician). Similarly, see Hassen Hussein and Mohammed Ademo (2016: 25) on the continued "colonisation" and oppression of the Oromo.

[37] Occupational minorities have been compared to "low castes", although the comparison between the Indian caste system and the Ethiopia situation has many flaws (A. Pankhurst 1999)

gap in extant research on the Mao area.[38] Approaching marginality from the perspective of the affected communities is crucial for understanding the changes that take place and how these are experienced. There is a strong connection between alleged slave descent and social marginality. The question is why certain groups are collectively classified as "slave descendants" even when evidence about their past status is not available, and how other groups and individuals can resist stigmatisation. The analysis of the category "Mao" will start providing answers to this question.

1.6. Methodology

I first encountered the Mao area and its complexities in connection with the research for my MA in 2012 and through my relation to one of the main linguists in this area, my father Klaus-Christian Küspert.[39] In 2014, I started working for the Norwegian Mission Society which cooperates with the local Protestant Mekane Yesus Church (EECMY) in Begi. Three years later, I did a three-week fieldwork in Kondala for a conference paper and realised the need for a more thorough investigation of this area (Küspert-Rakotondrainy 2018).

I began the fieldwork for my doctoral research in June 2020. From then until the middle of the following rainy season in July 2021, I went to the fieldwork site approximately every month and spent between two and six weeks there at a time. I decided to live with local families to study how people experience everyday life situations; private encounters allowed me to get ethnographic insight into the practical performances of Maoness in a variety of circumstances (Fetterman 2008). Having the possibility for everyday fellowship with my hosts and interlocutors was the main reason I did not rent my own place. Travelling back and forth to the Begi area gave me a break from the intense fieldwork, which was both physically and mentally demanding, allowed me to transcribe interviews (there was no electricity in the houses I lived in), and come back with fresh questions and ideas. It also enabled me to do archival research in Addis Ababa, Asosa, and Nekemte.

Selection of Sites and Participants

[38] Meckelburg (2019: 172-175) analyses the situation of Mao and Komo by using Freeman and Pankhurst's spatial, economic, political, social and cultural dimensions of marginality. Although highly relevant, this analysis leaves open some aspects of power hierarchies within Mao. It acts as a basis for a more careful analysis of the label Mao.
[39] The MA deals with the introduction of Gumuz and Shinasha languages in primary schools in Benishangul Gumuz Regional States (Küspert-Rakotondrainy 2016).

I purposefully selected three sites in each of the three districts (*wäräda*) which previously had belonged to Begi: Begi, Kondala, and Mao Komo (Appendix A, Figure 3). In each of these locations, I selected one family to live with. Due to political unrest, I was unable to stay long-term with the family in Kondala and instead had to relocate to Asosa (see below). Hence, I included both rural and urban settings, although the rural context was the focus of my fieldwork. Since Tongo was not affected by any unrest at that time, it functioned as my home base. Here, I lived with another local family I knew from before. With their help, I found my three main host families in the other areas.

The families I selected had different lifestyles and did not speak the same languages but they all self-identified as Mao. This diversity was one of my main aims. Some consisted of the nuclear family; others lived in an extended family setting. They had different levels of education, and although all were farmers, they had various sources of income. All families were Muslim but in Kondala, some family members had converted to Christianity. They all were well-informed about my research beforehand and had time to consider if they wanted to be involved.[40] To protect the identities of my host families, the stories that feature in this thesis are not only about them (see below on ethical considerations). Instead, I used their homes as centres from which to reach other people in the vicinity. The following is a brief introduction of the three families and areas.

The first family I started to do research with lives outside of Tongo in the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda*. I casually knew them through a former colleague who had previously worked in a development project in the area, so I asked them if I could stay with them. This family has ties to the Tongo elites but live in a community where the peasants do not self-identify with this prestigious group. Through them, I was able to observe a community that is ethnically diverse and hierarchically stratified. The residence of this family is in a district established specifically for "Mao and Komo peoples", yet this political arrangement does not mean that everyone identified as such has the same opportunities.

[40] I usually did a short, initial visit, or met a family member at the market or the home of one of my other hosts. Then, they were free to contact me again if they decided to host me. Although I contributed to the household finances, especially the food budget, it was important for me that the family had enough means to comfortably host me.

The second family that accepted to host me lives in the Begi *Wäräda*. I did not know them, but my host in Tongo put me in contact with them. This family may be materially wealthier than the family in the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* but since they are Mao who live in the Oromia Regional State, they self-identify as a marginalised minority. They feel socially excluded and cannot participate in politics as Mao. I included this place as historically it was the centre of the Mao area but today is outside of the politically designated Mao territory. In this family, I was able to spend ample time with the women and daughters doing daily tasks in the household.

Thirdly, I selected the area close to the Dabus River in the Kondala *Wäräda*. The Dabus valley and swamp area has a particular history in this region: during the Abyssinian Empire it had been under direct imperial control as opposed to under the administration of semi-independent Asosa (cf. chapter II). Including this area enabled me to analyse developments in a community outside of the direct influence of the "Arab" elites further west. This area is poorer than the other locations of my research, both for political reasons and due to poorer soil quality, especially in the river swamps. The immigration of Oromo-speakers happened later and more slowly here than elsewhere in the Begi area but after their settlement, the social disparities became larger. Unlike in Tongo, local people here often interpret Mao as purely stigmatising instead of also potentially prestigious. It is usual in Mao families that all generations use the language Hozo, likely because of low average formal education and little intermarriage with Oromo-speakers. I had met and kept in contact with the family I planned to stay with since my 2017 fieldwork. However, this time, they could not host me for an extended time due to unrest. Since my visits to Kondala were brief, I met members of the extended family in the homes of relatives outside of the area where they felt more comfortable talking. Furthermore, I lived with their relatives in Asosa in a quarter where the "Mao diaspora" from the Oromia Region resides.

From the locations of families that I stayed with, I went to neighbours and surrounding villages, often together with members of my host families. I found most of my interlocutors by snowball sampling and by talking with people who came to visit the homes of my hosts (convenience sampling) (Bryman 2012: 202). Most of my participants in the area self-identify as Mao. Some are identified as Mao by others but do not identify as such themselves, others identify as Mao but are not accepted as such by individuals with other Mao backgrounds. Several of my interlocutors self-identify as Mao but do not speak any Mao language, whereas a few of them speak a Mao language but self-identify as Oromo. Some of my interlocutors have a particularly interesting life history related to migration, political activity, or uncommon marriage choices. I

purposefully selected individuals with various levels of education, occupations, religions, genders, and ages (cf. Appendix B, Table 2).[41] I also interviewed individuals from outside of the communities of my hosts, such as politicians, government functionaries, and religious leaders (Muslims and Christians). Few of these were Mao. I interviewed "non-Mao" (usually Oromo) neighbours and engaged in informal conversations with diverse people at markets and on public transport.

I interviewed 185 individuals (cf. Appendix B, Table 1). Of these, twenty-seven individuals were interviewed twice and eleven three times or more.[42] Half of my interlocutors were farmers (including landless peasants). The other half were either individuals from the rural area such as pastors or teachers, or individuals from towns and cities, such as students or day labourers. I did not pay for interviews, but I compensated for coffee, food, transport, or any other inconveniences.[43] As the design of this study is qualitative, the aim is to understand in-depth rather than to generalise (Bryman, 2012: 406). However, I will present statistics on marriage and land use in the respective chapters, which are generalisable to the sample I selected. The conceptual understandings deriving from this case are transferable as they can function as comparisons for other cases.

Methods of Data Collection

My main methods of data collection in the field were interviews and participant observations. I had a general interview guide but adapted my questions to my interlocutors to capture their unique perspectives. I often inquired into life stories. Although these are concerned with past events, life stories are also "documents reflecting the story-tellers' current, situation-bound theories and constructions of selves" (Alasuutari 1995: 77). With older people, I often asked about oral history, i.e., events that exceed the span of one generation (Bryman 2012: 491).[44] Narrators of oral history recount a story of the past from the perspective of the present. Jan

[41] The number of female interlocutors is lower than that of men (40 out of 185, i.e., 22%. Although I spent much time with women doing daily tasks, I had fewer formal interviews with women than with men.
[42] On average, most interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. The longer conversations, which lasted for several hours, usually took place when I was sitting at home with my host family and there was nothing else to do than talk, especially on rainy days. Periods of silence would then also be part of the conversation (cf. Heyl 2001: 376).
[43] I usually brought coffee, sugar, and household items for my host families when I came and gave them monetary compensation for my stay when I left.
[44] I often asked my interlocutors to give me their genealogy as far as they could remember and then have them tell me what their ancestors did, whom they married, and where they lived. This gave me an idea of how far back their oral history could go and which things were important for them to remember and mention.

Vansina (1985: 6), therefore, argues that although using oral history may uncover historical developments, it mainly informs about current discourses. What remains from history are "its residues, its byproducts, its sediments," which are relevant for today (Jackson 2005: 14). To a large extent, I was interested in *Alltagsgeschichte* (Lüdtke 1995) – how individuals relate to each other in their daily lives, from which I, as a researcher, am not excluded. Together, my interlocutors, interpreters, and I navigated what Sherry Ortner (1995: 176) calls "pieces of reality" – not a picture of an "authentic culture" but experiences of a "historically evolved bricolage" (ibid).

In the households where I stayed, I tried to live like the other family members, and helped with chores, although it was unavoidable that I had a special position as an outsider. As a woman, I had access to spheres that have remained inaccessible for male researchers. Simultaneously, I was able to participate in typical "male" activities because restrictions that would apply to local women did not necessarily apply to me. For example, while I would get up early to prepare breakfast with the women, I would also stay up late with the men who were chewing khat and talking. Together with my hosts, I attended funerals, maternity visits, family gatherings, and a wedding, after having asked for consent. Throughout my fieldwork, I took detailed fieldnotes concerning both what I had encountered and how I had experienced this (Emerson *et al.*, 2001: 357). Sometimes, I did this alone and sometimes I reconstructed an event or encounter together with my hosts.

Since I am fluent in Amharic, I did not take an interpreter with me to the field. In the beginning, I relied on translation into Amharic from the lingua franca in the area, Oromo, by individuals whom my interlocutors trusted (usually a family member or another local travel companion).[45] I took lessons in the Oromo language in the year leading up to the fieldwork and during the fieldwork. After a while, I started to understand parts of the answers in Oromo and could make sure that the translation covered what had been said. Towards the end of the fieldwork, I could have informal conversations and shorter interviews in Oromo. I did more than one-third of my interviews without an interpreter (in Amharic or Oromo). If my interlocutors preferred to speak in their mother tongue (different Mao languages), we found someone to translate into Amharic. There are advantages and disadvantages to using local translators (Resch and Enzenhofer,

[45] Several of my interlocutors and I do not speak Amharic at a very advanced level. However, I never felt that there was a problem expressing what was on our minds or making ourselves understood. If a family member went with me somewhere to translate, I compensated them as I would have done with any other interpreter.

2018). The main disadvantage for me was that none of my companions had experience in translating. However, the advantages of using individuals familiar with the area, terms, and histories and who were trusted by the interviewees by far outweighed the disadvantages. Whenever I obtained consent, I audio-recorded the interviews so I could re-listen to the original speech and check the exact wording. I transcribed all interviews directly into English.

Challenges Concerning Health and Safety

My fieldwork came in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there were no domestic travel restrictions from Addis Ababa to the West. To protect my hosts and myself, I tested for the virus before each trip and, when possible, during my stay. I brought ample hand sanitiser since physical touch was usually unavoidable. In public places and when travelling, I would make sure I and those together with me wore face masks. No infections while I was in the field (neither myself nor others) are known to me.

The security situation in the area was volatile due to unrest and, at times, violent clashes between guerrilla and military happened. Asosa and the Tongo area stayed safe over the whole duration of my fieldwork and travelling to Begi and Kondala towns usually posed no risks. Sometimes, it was not possible to travel to my host family in the village in Begi *Wäräda* and the countryside of Kondala *Wäräda* largely remained inaccessible to me. I always listened to my hosts and travel companions related to where it was safe to travel. I obtained papers with permission to do fieldwork from all necessary governmental instances and I informed the local authorities and police about my presence. I experienced no threatening situation, neither for me nor my interlocutors, during the fieldwork.[46]

Archival Work

I conducted research in various archives for historical documents which gave me more insights into the area. I spent by far the most time at the archive of the Ethiopian National Archive and Library Authority (NALA) in Addis Ababa, which contains various official letters, statistics, and government reports in different public sectors (agriculture, security, revenue, etc.) from the

[46] Once, I had scheduled an interview with two elderly men in Kondala, but I had to leave, and we agreed to meet some days later in the home of my host in Tongo instead. However, when they were on their way to Tongo, the road was blocked due to unrest. They were delayed and had to spend the night in a guest room. I covered the costs for their travel and delay and made sure they did not leave Tongo until the road was safe again.

1940s to the 1980s. Materials on the specific area of Begi were scarce, but I could collect some evidence of the area and the people. These documents were usually handwritten in Amharic, so I worked with a research assistant. Together, we skimmed through the documents and, whenever we found something interesting, she read the text aloud to me. Later, we would work thoroughly through the most central documents. I also searched the newspapers in the archive.

The archive of the Institute for Ethiopian Studies (IES) at Addis Ababa University also contains relevant archival materials. Of particular interest are handwritten interview transcripts from Alessandro Triulzi's interviews in Western Welega in 1972–1973, most importantly those he conducted in Asosa, Begi and Kelem. Another important finding in the IES archives is a report for the Haile Selassie I University written by an imperial functionary named Bekuretsion Tilahun, who in the early 1970s was vice secretary of Asosa *awraja* (sub-province). The report contains, among others, Bekuretsion's reflections on the people, their social organisation and how they are linked to government structures.[47] I also found reports of the Derg's Institute for the Studies of Ethiopian Nationalities (ISEN) which document the process of institutionalising ethnicity in Ethiopia in the 1980s where "Mao" became one of Ethiopia's ethnic categories.

In the library of the House of People's Representatives (HPR) in Addis Ababa, I accessed government reports and surveys from the early 1990s. The minutes from meetings also contain evidence of the struggle over the border between Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia. Other archives I consulted were the Welega Museum in Nekemte which contains letters between the Emperor and the local ruler Kumsa Moroda, and the Asosa Museum, which contains letters between the Emperor and *sheikh* Khojele.[48] The University of Asosa gave me access to unpublished papers which allowed me to read research otherwise nowhere available. I used the digital archive of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) to acquire political documents and documentation on slavery. Furthermore, the Norwegian Mission Society, which has been active in Western Ethiopia since 1970, has in their Addis Ababa office archived letters, project proposals, and reports from Begi which gave additional insights.

[47] Bekuretsion was likely an Orthodox Christian from the central north of the Abyssinian Empire, like many other government functionaries (IES MS 362, *Bekuretsion Tilahun's life story and mystery*, 14.08.1971).
[48] Many of the most relevant letters from and to Nekemte have been copied and compiled in their original state by Alessandro Triulzi and Tesema Ta'a ("Welega Historical documents: from c 1888 to 1928"). Nevertheless, I still searched for more letters in the museum in Nekemte. These letters, alongside the minutes from the HPR, the ISEN reports and Bekuretsion's report are all written in Amharic.

I collected and purchased different leaflets in the Offices of Culture and Tourism in Gimbi, Asosa and Tongo, but no local government office disclosed any archival materials.[49] However, some of my interlocutors shared letters with me, which they kept in their private possession. One of my informants gave me audio recordings of interviews on the historical settlement of Begi conducted in 1994/95.[50] Together, this documentation enabled me to get a broad background overview of the area and its history, against which I could analyse the findings from my ethnographic fieldwork.

Making Sense of the Data

In coding the data, I used a mix of thematic and narrative analysis. I started the analysis by rereading all my notes, taking new notes, and putting opinions, perspectives, and interpretations into different categories. During and after the fieldwork, I coded the data manually, organised it descriptively and thematically, identified different topics and arguments or perspectives, and reflected on the patterns and meaning it conveys (cf. Richards 2009). I realised that, although most of what I collected are interpretations, some things are more interpreted than others (Spencer 2001). In this thesis, I seek to let the reader follow the logic of my analysis, switching between different perspectives and interpretations. I tried not to rip apart narratives while still interpreting stories in light of other findings (Alasuutari 1995: 74; Bryman 2012). Individual stories are not reducible to abstractions; the realities of my interlocutors are findings in their own right. At the same time, individual stories are part of bigger, social developments, and shape these (Ellison 2009; Cole 2010; Di Nunzio 2019).

During and after my fieldwork, my interlocutors (including some of them in the role of interpreters) and I together made sense of "a partly shared reality" between us as individuals and within society (Dresch and James 2000: 13). With this, I presuppose that we, as researcher and interlocutors, could understand each other's experiences. Part of trying to make sense of the data consisted of tracing various terms in the original languages. This meant that I frequently went back to my key informants/interpreters to discuss the original use of a word in Oromo or

[49] Etana Habte was in his research for his PhD thesis between 2010 and 2016 able to access local archives in Welega (Etana, 2018). He emphasises that such materials are hard to obtain even in peaceful times. For me, it remained impossible to get formal access to provincial archives except for the above-mentioned museums.
[50] The political tensions have made most people extremely careful. Documents with political content are therefore not always safe to share. I am grateful to those among my interlocutors who still decided to share their documents with me.

a Mao language. For me, the translator is not "invisible" but part of the interpretative process of constructing realities as we together discussed meanings, uses and explanations not only of words but of stories and events (Resch and Enzenhofer 2018: 14). The exchanges with them were also an important way for me to increase my understanding of the data and get a response to my preliminary analysis. Yet, the analyses in this thesis are mine and may not always correspond to the views of my collaborators.

Ethical Issues

This research deals with ethical issues in the practice of fieldwork, in the handling and storage of the data, and in the presentation of the data in the thesis. The University of Birmingham approved the ethics review for the project in April 2020.[51]

My employment with the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS), which cooperates with the Mekane Yesus Church in Begi, was problematic as my research participants could think that my research had a specific agenda. I informed the NMS and the church office about my research and whenever I came to Begi, I passed by the EECMY compound to inform the synod office. Several pastors agreed to participate in interviews. When interviewing individuals that had connections to NMS-supported projects (although I was not officially assigned to these projects), I made it clear that my research was not work-related and that their answers would have no impact on the work. Since I for many people still represented a donor, and realised that some of my interlocutors did not make a distinction between the two roles of researcher and employee of the Mission, I excluded several individuals with connections to the NMS from participation in the research.[52] Towards my Muslim interlocutors and hosts, I did not conceal my faith or affiliation with the church. I made it clear that my research was linked to neither expectations nor promises from the side of the church/NMS and that the data would be used for the thesis only.

I adhered to informed consent procedures strictly. I gave my participants clear information regarding the aims and purpose of the research, that it was voluntary to participate, that they could remain anonymous and that they had the right to withdraw and refuse to answer. The

[51] The approval was done under the code ERN_20-0006.
[52] I had initially planned to write one whole chapter about religion but decided to limit my discussion on the church to one sub-aspect in chapter IV.

information sheet and consent form were available in Amharic and Oromo (Appendices C-D). My companions read and explained the content for illiterate participants. Most participants opted for remaining anonymous and some withdrew their information after the interview.[53] One incident showed me that the sheets had been taken seriously. I had scheduled an interview with a man and had given him the consent and information sheets in advance. When I returned for the interview as agreed, I learned that he had initially invented a completely different biography than what was reality because he was afraid of what I would do with the information. After he had read the information sheet, he disclosed this and decided to tell me his real story.

To establish trust, I sought to practice "active and methodical listening" (Bourdieu 1996, cited in Heyl 2001: 378). Especially since some of the topics of my research are sensitive, such as slavery, race, and injustice, I focussed all my attention on the participants with the aim of understanding and identifying with them rather than extracting information (Bowman 1997: 47). I usually consulted with my trusted key informants before I had a potentially difficult interview. Most of my interlocutors gladly shared their personal and family histories. However, some expressed frustration over researchers they had met before, who came, collected information and were never to be heard of again. Therefore, I plan to return to the area to share a copy of my thesis with my key interlocutors and distribute copies to local institutions if the security situation permits it.[54] As stated in the information sheet, the raw data will be archived and stored securely, anonymised, and in a read-only version for ten years on a university server before being deleted permanently.

How could I write about my interlocutors in a way that reflects the realities of their lives and describes the details that corroborate the scientific argument without revealing their identities or betraying their trust? To protect my participants, I pseudonymised their names and clans and omitted the names of their villages or specific locations. I have refrained from mentioning certain details which I believe participants would prefer to be treated confidentially although they have been pseudonymised (Murphy and Dingwall 2001: 341). In the case of two of my interlocutors, I decided to assign three distinct pseudonyms to each of them and refer to their stories as if they pertained to six different persons. This was due to the sensitivity of the data

[53] A few participants said that they did not mind either way. However, the quotes and biographies that ended up being used in this thesis are all anonymised.

[54] Even though few of my participants read any English, they will appreciate knowing that the thesis has been published. I may distribute copies to government offices and educational institutions and libraries but may be more careful in areas where issues of ethnic minorities are sensitive.

and the possibility that if all their experiences were connected to a particular pseudonym they would become identifiable at the local level. Although this is a modification of the evidence, it was the safest way to protect their privacy and ensure that the information they shared with me confidentially could not be traced back to them.

Some of my main interlocutors are persons with whom I have kept a close connection even after the end of the fieldwork. I discussed dilemmas of anonymity and confidentiality with them, especially concerning their personal stories, and I read and translated relevant passages for them to get approval for the way I portrayed issues related to their biographies.[55] They all reconfirmed their willingness to feature in the thesis under pseudonyms. Some of them asked me for specific details concerning them to be changed or omitted, and I have done so. For example, one individual asked me to remove mentions of the ancestral status of a relative that they had shared with me in an interview. This thesis discusses sensitive issues about real people, but the information is presented in ways that I believe do not break the trust of my interlocutors and hosts.

1.7. Content of the Thesis

This thesis examines diverse configurations of Mao as an identity that refers to different languages, lifestyles, and social positions. Ambiguities and debates exist within local communities about the meaning of "being Mao". Depending on the context, circumstances, and individuals' backgrounds, Mao may imply different levels of status within regional hierarchies and differ across locations. Some of these hierarchies have historical roots in master-slave relationships and land control, whereas others are based on contemporary logics of ethnicity-based citizenship. The study traces the manifestations of this category from a term associated with low prestige to a political ethnonym that takes shape in a tension between the regional and the national. New centres and peripheries have emerged along regional borders and shape local power dynamics. However, local responses to the Ethiopian citizenship model indicate that ethnic federalism has not effectively challenged historical inequalities and, in some cases, has even reinforced them. The meanings and implications of Maoness have evolved over time through discourses on slavery, race (blackness), and honour. Nonetheless, extant research has

[55] I could not do that with all the participants in my study but the approval from my key informants helped me understand which way of presenting different details was seen as appropriate and how they understood and judged the descriptions of individuals that feature in the thesis. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to get some of the material re-approved by my informants in the writing-up stage.

not adequately explored the connection between “Mao” and local interpretations of bondage, dependency, and freedom.

Mao is a hereditary label assigned to individuals who are linked by “blood relations” to ancestors similarly identified as Mao, albeit with varying levels of prestige. Local discussions around the perceived “purity” of these genealogies influence the advantages or disadvantages experienced by individuals. While some Mao groups challenge traditional stereotypes that portray Mao as inferior, rural, and descending from enslavable people, it remains a category that contributes to marginalisation and exclusion for those unable to successfully challenge perspectives that linger-on from past ideas of social hierarchy and stratification. My investigation suggests that Maoness is both an ascribed identity and a consciously negotiated and reinvented one. Recent political and social changes in Ethiopia have made this social category diverse and adaptable. Its meanings have shifted from context to context and from actor to actor in recent decades. This thesis explores the dynamics of contesting ascribed identities, constructing new identities, and through this, pursuing multiple identity politics. It starts by introducing the reader to the historical background of the Begi district and continues with the political processes that created a regional border in the middle of the area in the mid-1990s. After this historical and political discussion, the thesis analyses contemporary social realities in light of this accumulated history – first social discourses and then practices.

Chapter two takes the reader on a historical journey to Begi. It analyses traces of the area and its inhabitants in sources from the 19th to the 21st century. This chapter is concerned with how political actors and their relations shaped social hierarchies in Begi under the imperial government and how the local society became increasingly ethnicised during the Derg time. It looks at the rise of Mao as a social and political category and why this became the chosen label for the local political elites until finally, the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* was established.

Chapter three continues the analysis from where the previous chapter ended – with a political struggle in the early 1990s between political actors in favour of incorporating the Begi area into the Benishangul Gumuz Region and those who were in favour of the Oromia Region. The chapter discusses how the political field was influenced by two different paradigms: one that had hierarchical stratifications of the past at its core and one that functioned according to the logic of ethnic federalism. This tension has continued to shape the lives of the people in the

Begi area and influences how individuals with various prestige navigate political and educational opportunities and restrictions today.

Chapter four explores social discourses shaped by the political-historical context of the preceding chapters. It discusses how individuals negotiate different meanings of Mao – both stigmatising and prestigious. Thereby, it focuses on the "honour" of "ancestral purity" and what this means for an individual's Maoness in discussions on autochthony, slavery, and religious conversion. Individuals who navigate within the category Mao are not uniform in their strategies, as they are categorised as Mao under varying circumstances and for different purposes. Old ideals of honour and power now meet newer political (ethnic) categories (such as Mao and Oromo) and form a hierarchically stratified society where these ideals are not attainable for all individuals.

The two last chapters discuss the practical side of these discourses: what the label Mao does to individuals who are its bearers and how they use their Maoness. Chapter five analyses how marriageability and affinity are negotiated and what this means for how Maoness is performed and understood. The chapter explores how marriage strategies have been influenced by racialisation and notions of "blood", as well as the recent regional border between Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia. At the centre of the analysis are two marriages between individuals from families who previously did not regard each other as marriageable. The chapter discusses how the concerned individuals make sense of the successes and failures of these marriages in the light of honour and purity and a more recent construction of a unified Maoness.

Chapter six continues studying interactions in practice. It examines different forms of rural labour carried out by individuals who own and do not own land and inquires into how some families may end up with reduced profit despite initially having had access to land. How unfavourable labour arrangements and dependency interact with an individual's Maoness, and how this again influences their economic dispossession and deepens their stigma is a central aspect. This chapter will consider the discussions from the preceding chapters on the political significance of "Mao", its implications for honour and power, and its role in kinship, and investigate how these conditions play out in individuals' struggles for survival. This will advance our understanding of how certain mechanisms contribute to maintaining hierarchies – how old and new logics contradict but also complement each other in shaping the lives of individuals.

CHAPTER II – MAO IN BEGI: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Introduction

The area of Begi has played a critical role in the history of Western Ethiopia. It began as a rural village in an impassable area that travellers avoided because this apparently was the home of the "universally feared" tribe of "Amam" (Marno 1874: 99, footnote).[56] Begi soon became a contested area and grew into the biggest *wäräda* (district) in the western part of the Welega Province in the late imperial time. It was claimed by various rulers, none of whom identified with those believed to descend from the people called Amam, who were often described as "subaltern people" (Meckelburg 2019: 37). While the term Amam disappears in the early 20th century, a range of other categories and labels take its place, Mao being one of them. In this chapter, I trace the history of the term Mao from its earliest occurrence for people in the Begi area in the late 19th century until it became a political category and reconstruct how and why it became a central local identity. Although the label Mao suggests a defined collective identity different from Oromo, the category is far from unified. It has acquired various meanings in different locations throughout a century of localised semantic reconfigurations as it became associated with groups of unequal status and power.

Social hierarchies that originated during previous political regimes influence current social relations and create the meanings and practical implications of the category "Mao". As we will see, elements of the imperial hierarchical relations, connecting taxpayers and tax collectors; slaves and slave owners; and the periphery and the centre of the Abyssinian Empire, survived the socialist period. These relations have continued to affect the identities of people in Begi and its surroundings and have shaped their lived experiences of hierarchy. Even though today's realities are obscured by the official classification of the population into Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, the "nationality" called Mao is internally diversified and stratified.

[56] Own translation. German original states: "allgemein gefürchtet".

This chapter will explore the history of Begi and its people and help us appreciate the historical dynamics that influence how and why Mao today has become a contested category that has different meanings for different people. The discussion alternates the long-term history of the region with a more thematic discussion on the category "Mao" as a commentary on that history. Subsequent chapters build on this broad overview concerning the population in the area, migration movements, slavery and the slave trade, and administrative structures during the various governments that succeeded one another from the time of imperial landlords up until the present day. We will here lay the analytical groundwork necessary to make sense of the internal hierarchies that characterise the category Mao to better understand how social inequalities shape contemporary everyday life.

2.2. Migration and Immigration (until 19th century)

By the 19th century, waves of settlers and immigrants had moved into the area that would become known as Begi. Linguistic and archaeological evidence establishes Sudanic as well as Omotic cultural presence for several millennia (Fleming 1984: 32; Fernández *et al.* 2007; González-Ruibal 2014: 298). South of Begi, in what would later become Kelem Welega, Kaffa-speaking people called Busase (part of the Omotic Gonga kingdom) immigrated from the Gibe area, probably around the 17th century or earlier (Grottanelli 1940: 104; Cerulli 1930; Girma 1973: 26; Lange 1982). They became local "overlords" and subjugated the original population of Anfillo in Kelem (James 1980: 54).

Meanwhile, immigrants from the Funj Sultanate (1504-1821) established several chiefdoms in the *sa'id* ("upper region") of Bela Shangul (Triulzi 1981). The descendants of these immigrants, locally classified as "Arabs", intermarried with Berta-speakers and were known as *waṭawiṭ* from the 19th century. The best-known was *sheikh* Khojele al-Hassen (1825-1938) whose rule profoundly influenced local relations of power (Atieb 1973). Some of the immigrants moved further south and established themselves as a Muslim political and social elite around Begi. Descendants of one of them, named Dawd, are today also known by the label Kirin/Kiring, which designates several prestigious clans (Meckelburg 2019: 100).[57]

[57] Kirin or Kiring is originally the name of a mountain towards the border of Sudan which acted as a capital for the rule of descendants of Dawd (Etana 2018: 87). Today, this term often operates as an extended clan name for highland people around Tongo who may be Gwama-speaking (Küspert 2015: 24; Meckelburg 2019: 100; Küspert-Rakotondrainy 2021: 44).

While the Sudanese immigration came from the west, the great expansion of Oromo-speakers began in today's southern Ethiopia and entered the area from the south and east. The Oromo-speaking branch called Macha started arriving in today's Western Ethiopia in the 17th and 18th centuries (Mohammed 1990: 81; Tesema 2006: 43). As they advanced westwards, local clans that were close to the Macha in language or culture, such as the above-mentioned "Busase overlords", were assimilated through marriage and adoption (Negaso 2000: 104; Girma 1973: 30). Those who were not "similar people of Cushitic or Omotic[58] origins who enjoyed fairly well developed socio-economic and political systems of their own" – typically with a dark complexion ("black") – were not assimilated (Tesema 2006: 45). Many of them "were forced to move to [an] inhospitable and unhealthy [lowland/swamp] zone after the occupation of the highland areas by the Oromo" (Negaso 2000: 31). However, as the population grew, the Macha would spread and again find themselves in the same area as the people they had driven away. Those who remained distinct from Oromo are today identified as Mao as a blanket term for all non-Macha of low prestige in the area (Negaso 2000: 100). The Macha created boundaries between social strata of different status which came to be interpreted as ethnic. Hence, certain hierarchies *preceded* the labels Oromo and Mao so that the labels came to match the already present strata (cf. Amselle 1998: 146).[59]

During the Oromo migration process, wealthier individuals among the Macha started taking slaves and established chiefdoms which contributed to a more stratified society (Mohammed 1990: 92; cf. Hultin 1979; Paulos 1984). The *borana* of "pure" descent were eligible to lead religious ceremonies in the traditional social and juridical *gadaa* system in contrast to the assimilated, yet equal stratum of *gabbaro*, which again was above occupational groups and slaves (Bartels 1983: 161). One of the most powerful rulers in the area – today Kelem Welega (Gidami) – was the *moti* (ruler/king) Jote Tullu (1855-1918) whose subjection of communities of lower status had profound impacts on people called Mao and Komo (Bahru 1970). By the 19th century, most of today's Western Welega was majorly Oromo-speaking, except for some swamp or lowland villages around the Dabus River and the Western lowlands towards the Sudanese border.[60] Although slaves according to Oromo customs could be freed through similar rituals as those performed for adoptions, they usually remained distinguishable in society

[58] For Tesema Ta'a, all Mao are Nilotic people (Tesema 2006: 31).
[59] See Jean-Loup Amselle (1998) for the case of the Ivory Coast and Southern Mali. Amselle argues that the Fulani and Minyanka were not as separate before colonisation as they were after and argues that "an explanation based on ethnicity could not be valid since it takes the result to be the cause" (Amselle 1998: 146).
[60] For example, the Busase adopted the Oromo language (Girma 1973).

(Hultin 1987: 2; Bartels 1983: 174). Their ancestry was locally known, and they also often had a darker skin complexion which differed from that of the descendants of Macha. Hence, the Oromo society became hierarchically stratified and consisted of different sub-identities.[61]

The Begi area and its people have been mentioned by travellers starting from the mid-19th century (Cailliaud 1826; Tremaux 1855).[62] Antoine Brun-Rollet (1855) mentions people living in today's Mao settlement area and he probably refers to the ancestors of the people who later came to be known as Mao. Brun-Rollet writes about the Amam who are characterised by "*sauvagerie*", but does not give any other details, probably because what he refers to is hearsay (Brun-Rollet 1855: 110). A description of the "savage Amam" is given by Ernst Marno (1874), the first European who visited Fadasi (Bambasi today). Romolo Gessi and his companion Pellegrino Matteucci wrote about the "fierce tribe of the Aman" who "live exclusively by rapine and plunder, practised on the caravans of the poor Gallas [Oromo][63] when returning from the salt market" (Gessi 1892: 166; Matteucci 1879). Marno and Gessi's views were likely influenced by their local "Arab" informants who portrayed the Oromo in a more positive light.

The first Westerner who crossed the "impassable" forest area around Begi (cf. Beke 1843: 255) was the Dutch traveller Juan Maria Schuver who journeyed southwards from Fadasi to Gidami in July of 1881. He describes how people he identified as Mao and Amam related to those he called "Galla" (Oromo) and Arab. Schuver estimates the number of Amam to be 8,000 people (James, Baumann and Johnson 1996: 40).[64] Despite their bad reputation, he found them to be peaceful communities that were more often victims of attacks than perpetrators. The biggest settlement of the Amam was Bégá (Begi), a larger village and central point between the realms of the *waṭawiṭ sheikhs* around Bela-Shangul and *moti* Jote Tullu in Kelem. Schuver used the term Mao about people who lived in Anfillo and were "governed by a Galla [Oromo] ruling

[61] For a discussion on further social stratifications in the Oromo society, see Jan Hultin (1987) who found that there were so-called *ilma garba* (Oro.: "sons of slaves") in the Sibu area. This term did not refer to literal slave descendants but denoted dropouts from the ritual age-based system of governance, *gadaa*.
[62] Frédéric Cailliaud who visited the upper Blue Nile in Eastern Sudan, writes that the "Galla" (Oromo) came to the market with "*des malhereux nègres de ces contrées*" ("the poor negroes of these countries") (Cailliaud, 1826: 6), but we cannot know exactly which groups he referred to.
[63] The term "Galla" is today seen as inappropriate and derogatory especially since it for many is associated with Oromo as uneducated or enslavable people and "pure negativity" (Leencho 1998: 129; cf. Zitelmann 1994: 108, Bahru 2002b: 132). In my text, I use the term exclusively in direct quotations from historical sources.
[64] Schuver's travels were documented in various reports and letters in different languages (German, Dutch, French). However, these are incomplete compared to the edited volume by Wendy James, Gerd Baumann and Douglas Johnson (1996) where all his writings have been collected, translated to English and commented on by the editors.

class" whereas the Amam, for him, were people who lived in today's Begi *Wäräda*, where non-Oromo people today are called Mao (James, Baumann and Johnson 1996: 94). Today, since both the minority in Anfillo and people in Begi are called Mao, one can easily be confused by their common name and assume that there are more relations than there may have been previously. It was not until the mid-20th century that authors of contemporary sources started giving the same name, Mao, to the different non-Oromo groups in the area.

2.3. The Category "Mao" Takes Shape

The first time the term Mao is used for people around the Dabus River (where there are communities who identify as such today), to my knowledge, is by the French explorer Antoine d'Abbadie who travelled to Ethiopia from 1837 to 1848. He quotes an old "Gamila"[65] slave who reported that "*nous nous battons aussi contre les Mao*" (d'Abbadie 1890: 162).[66] The linguist Lionel Bender argues that the word "Mao" may originate from the term for "man" or "human" (ma^w/ma:y) in the Hozo and Seze languages spoken around Kondala and on both sides of the Dabus River (Bender 1975: 128). However, as we have seen above, the term Mao is, apart from the one mention by d'Abbadie, exclusively used to refer to the subaltern people of Anfillo – hence, it is a term with derogatory connotations and not always a self-designation (autonym). The people of Anfillo are in sources from imperial times described as "servants" (Amh.: *ashkär*) and "tenants" (*çəsäña*), or "workers" (*säratäñña*), of the Busase.[67] By contrast, most sources from this time label the people in Begi "Amam" – a term that remains in use until the early to mid-20th century (Bahru 1976: 208).[68]

Therefore, the term Mao may have originated in the Anfillo area. In the Gonga societies (Kaffa-speaking, like the Busase), serfs were referred to as "mawo", a group "probably composed primarily of indigenous, landless clans" (Lange 1982: 242). Werner Lange also states that the standard greeting of a master by the serf was "I am your mawo; kill me" (ibid: 157). One

[65] Gamila is a dialect of Berta, according to Bender (1976), but according to Gonzáles-Ruibal (2014), Gamila are people with both Berta and Gwama lineage.
[66] Translation: "we are also fighting the Mao". The "also" here refers to an earlier sentence where he said that they have fights with the Sibu (Oromo).
[67] NALA 014, *Report to the Emperor from Nekemte, Welega*, 21.09.1942; NALA 015, *Report from Nekemte*, 21.09.1942
[68] James, Baumann and Johnson (1996: 1xiv) explain that the term Amam is probably of Arabic or Berta origin and was replaced by the term Mao when the Mahdist influence waned and that of the Oromo-speakers increased, although it is not of Oromo origin.

possibility is that the Gonga people brought slaves with them, who gradually started mixing with the local population and that the label used for them eventually came to refer also to the previous inhabitants in the area (Lange 1982; Meckelburg, 2019; González-Ruibal 2014).

Wendy James (1980) suggests that the Kaffa (Busase) could have introduced the term Mao although they may not have brought their slaves with them. She writes:

> it seems likely that the subject category Mao was introduced among the indigenous peoples of Wallega […] when they had not necessarily been Mao before. With the spread of Oromo influence in Wallega, it seems that the western Oromo have taken over the "Busase" element in the dyad, and today the term Mao as used by Oromo speakers applies in a very inclusive sense to all the "aboriginal" peoples of western Wallega who accept to any degree a measure of association with the Oromo. (James 1981: 29)

James argues that the term Mao has also come to include "Oromo-speakers whose families were formerly local slaves" (James, 1980: 62). However, what we do not know for certain is if individuals enslaved by Oromo families became slaves because they were Mao (cf. Bartels 1983), or if they were called Mao because they were enslaved. Ethiopian researchers in the 1970s used the terms "Mao" or "Mawo" to designate the local population of Begi who were of low status, had to pay their taxes in slaves and/or worked for the Oromo. Studies from this time describe people in terms of "races" and refer to Mao as "black" or "very dark-skinned people", as opposed to Oromo, who are often categorised as "red" (Bahru 1970; Atieb 1973; Girma 1973; Yirga 1973; Bender 1975).[69] Oftentimes, a darker complexion is associated with both autochthony and slavery – a relation we will explore further in the thesis.

The category *shanqəla* is in particular associated with both slavery and a darker complexion. Examining this category sheds light on the hierarchies that the Mao became a part of and how Mao differs from other local categories. *Shanqəla* at times included Mao people but had a wider meaning, frequently referring to different peripheral people such as Gumuz-speakers and "Abigar" (today Nuer) (cf. R. Pankhurst 1977).[70] As the explorer Oscar Neumann noted in 1902, *shanqəla* was used indiscriminately by the "Abyssinians" to describe communities from the Dabus Valley and westwards, including "all the Sudanese and black people" (Neumann 1902: 385). Wendy James (1980) makes a distinction between "Kwama"/ *shanqəla* as lowland people and "Mao" used in the highland – the former being the "People of the Wilderness" who could be raided and enslaved and the latter the "domesticated Mao" who lived close to the

[69] Oromo are often categorised as "red" (Oro.: *diima*; Amh,: *qäy*) in complexion and Mao as "black" (*gurracha*; *ṭəqur*).
[70] NALA 014, *Report to the Emperor from Nekemte, Welega*, 21.09.1942

Oromo in an unequal hierarchical relation to them (ibid: 29; 55, cf. chapter IV). Consequently, the category *shanqəla* comprises many more, and more remote, areas than "Mao" which acts as an Oromo category.

I could not confirm James' distinction between *shanqəla* and Mao in archival materials from the imperial time written in Amharic. A report written in Nekemte in 1952 categorises all rural people who "have no relations to the government" and "are the *agälgay* ['servant'] of the *balabbat* ['landlord']" as *shanqəla*.[71] Abdulrahim Khojele, governor of Begi, is in 1969 said to be the ruler of the *shanqəla*, which also includes areas inhabited by Mao.[72] A 96-year-old Oromo-speaker, interviewed by Alessandro Triulzi in Begi in 1972, uses the label *shanqəla* to refer to "Mawo" in addition to other "blacks".[73] A report from the *wäräda* administration in Nekemte recommends that the *shanqəla* should learn the Christian ways of life instead of living "like beasts" (*əndä awure*).[74] The Oromo *moti* Kumsa Moroda writes in 1925 that the *shanqəla* in the river valleys "live in union with the elephant".[75] In these imperial sources, the term *shanqəla* had a "strong 'secondary meaning' of slave" (Fernyhough 2007: 216; cf. R. Pankhurst 1977; 1997; Donham 1986). However, it did not necessarily refer to people in bondage but rather a rural population who could be enslaved. Hence, remoteness and enslavability seem to be the main defining characteristic of this group in addition to their supposedly violent behaviour.[76]

The Amharic term *zär* features in the writings of several Amharic imperial authors. In English, *zär* can be translated with "ethnicity", "ancestry" or "race".[77] Letters to and from Welega in imperial times mention *zär* occasionally, for example, concerning descent groups such as Busase, *shanqəla* or "Galla".[78] Several letters refer to the *shanqəla zär* in the Didessa Valley

[71] NALA 047, *Meetings from a meeting in Nekemte*, 23.11.1952. The term *balabbat* literally means "the one with a father" but is understood to denote a person who owns or controls land (cf. Donham 1986: 39).
[72] NALA 046, *Meetings from a meeting in Nekemte about Welega*, 24.11.–01.12.1969
[73] IES MS 1887, interview Triulzi A-BG-5, 25.02.1972
[74] NALA 004, *Report from Lekemt (Nekemte) wäräda*. n.d.
[75] In Amharic: "እነሱ ከዝሆኑ ጋር አንድነት ተቀላቅለው የኖሩ ናቸው።" This is found in a book with letters from the Nekemte rulers compiled by Alessandro Triulzi and Tesema Ta'a (Welega compilation, letter 7, code 2/9-11). These letters are also found in the museum in Nekemte.
[76] In a letter from *moti* Kumsa of Nekemte from 1925/26, he explains the savagery of some of the *shanqəla* ("they killed many people"), which he uses to justify hard measures on the population (Triulzi & Tesema, Welega compilation, letter 28, code 2/47-48).
[77] Triulzi translates *zär* with "tribe" (IES MS 1887, A-BG-5, 25.02.1972) and "descent" (IES MS 1888, LN-S-5, 31.07.1972). An outdated term would be "stock" (Bahrey, Almeida, Huntingford and Beckingham 1993). It also means "seed" in Amharic.
[78] NALA 014, 21.09.1942, *Report to the Emperor*, 21.09.1942; NALA 024, *Election candidates' presentation*, 25.02.1957–25.01.1961

where these people are said to live in the "bush" (*bärha*).[79] *Zär* remained the most widely used term to indicate different social and cultural groupings before "nationality" gained popularity during the Derg.[80] Until today, it is a common term in spoken language, referring to certain aspects of identity that are considered "primordial" (Dawit Yosef 2018: 162). A person's *zär* is based on their ancestral descent and is hereditary (cf. chapter IV). This also flavours today's interpretation of ethnicity and explains why the communities treat Maoness as an individual's permanent feature which has its origins long before this individual's birth.

Imperial government employee Bekuretsion Tilahun in a report on Benishangul in 1971 uses the terms *zär* and *həzb* (Amh.: "people") interchangeably when he writes about the various cultural, social and linguistic groups in the area. He also uses *zär* to refer to people with slave ancestry and calls them *yäbarya zär* ("*zär* of the slaves") (cf. Boylston 2018: 78).[81] It is clear from his report that Bekuretsion identifies the lowest social stratum as *shanqəla* within which he places the different Mao clans (*gosa*) such as "Mao Kukulu". For him, these *gosa* are together part of the Mao *zär* which belongs to the stratum of *ṭəqur həzb* ("black people"). He believes members of Mao clans speak the same language, practice the same religion, and live in the same territory. Hence, he uses the term *zär* similarly to ethnic groups ("nationalities") today but also uses it to refer to morally stratified identities (e.g., "slaves") that are characterised by a particular type of "impure" descent.

Language adds confusion to the Mao category.[82] Linguists have documented entirely different languages and classified people along linguistic lines while speakers of these languages may not acknowledge linguistic differences as an important social distinction; they may recognise each other as "the same" despite speaking different languages. Furthermore, linguistic research has not been able to determine one clear designation for each language and speakers seem to be

[79] NALA 046, *Minutes from a meeting in Nekemte*, 24.11.–01.12.1969. The reference to *shanqəla* in the Didessa Valley may most likely refer to Gumuz-speakers but may also mean speakers of the Bambasi Mao language (*Màwés Aas'è*). In the early 20th century, speakers of this language migrated either because of the newly introduced land tax (Ahland 2012: 21) or because of slave raids by *sheikh* Khojele (oral information from the historian Tesema Ta'a, 18.02.2020; cf. Siebert, Wedekind and Wedekind 1994). Apparently, the ruler of Nekemte, Kumsa Moroda allowed them to settle there (NALA 016, *Overview of Nationalities*, 21.08.1980).

[80] Emperor Haile Selassie rarely referred to "ethnicity" or "race" in his speeches (*Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I. 1918 – 1967*, 2011 [1967].

[81] IES MS 359, Bekuretsion Tilahun, *The history and culture of the people of Asosa Benishangul Awraja*, 19.09.1971

[82] As mentioned in the introduction, the main local non-Oromo languages in the area are the Omotic Hozo and Seze, spoken in the Oromia Region only, the Koman language Gwama (Koman Mao) spoken on both sides of the regional border, and Komo and the Omotic language Bambasi Mao (*Màwés Aas'è*), spoken in Benishangul Gumuz Region only (except one enclave of Bambasi Mao speakers in the Didessa Valley) (Küspert, 2015).

not always aware of who else speaks their language (Küspert 2015). This suggests that language communities in the area do not always share a sense of common identity or operate as groups. There is no established "Seze ethnicity" or "Gwama ethnicity", and the label "Hozo" is not recognised as a unifying linguistic term, let alone an ethnic term. "Hozo" is usually understood as a clan name whereas its speakers may use the general designation *Ak'mo Wandi* (lit.: "the mouth of Mao" in Hozo) which, confusingly, may also refer to any Mao language (Küspert-Rakotondrainy and Küspert 2022). There is a Bambasi-Mao-speaking clan called "Seze", a Seze-speaking clan called "Hozo", and a Komo clan called "Mankasha" which speaks Gwama. Language does, however, play a role when it becomes a criterion to match or differentiate individuals, families, and clans – for example, to object to or support a marriage (chapter V).

Individuals who speak the same language may have contrasting social positions while the different languages are also hierarchically stratified. Gwama, the Mao language of the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda*, is officially recognised and taught as a subject in selected schools and may, therefore, have a higher status than, for example, Seze and Hozo which are spoken in Oromia only, where they are not recognised as official languages. However, many individuals with political prestige, though identifying as Mao, prefer to speak Oromo instead of Gwama. As we will see throughout this thesis, who is and who is not Mao cannot be determined by a set of stable criteria such as language. Not all people who are identified as Mao by others also self-identify as Mao, and not all individuals who self-identify as Mao are accepted as such by other Mao.

Although Mao seems to convey no one specific meaning, local people have recently started using the term *maoumma* (or Amharic: *maoəñənät*) to refer to an idea of a unified Maoness.[83] This concept is constructed like the Oromo word *oromumma*, which is understood as the "Oromo identity" or "personality" (Gemetchu 1996: 92). Often, my interlocutors discussed how *maoumma* entails a specific behaviour, knowledge (e.g., of any Mao language), and personality traits common to all Mao. In the context of seeking to build a unified sense of groupness, some of my interlocutors argued that "all Mao are the same".[84] This claim indicates a "project" of "group-making" (Brubaker 2004: 13) – an endeavour to create cohesion rather than identifying

[83] Neither *maoumma* nor *maoəñənät* are real words in the respective languages, just like "Maoness" also is not an English word. However, they are used by a growing number of local people in the post-1991 generation who try to make sense of their identities.
[84] Interview 11

a concise definition of what *maoumma* entails (cf. "cultural stuff", Barth, 1969: 15). Since individuals use the label Mao for a range of different purposes, the meaning of *maoumma* varies. This chapter and the next discuss the political purposes of this label and how it developed from denoting submission, yet closeness to, Oromo, to becoming a political category which generated new opportunities for its bearers. We will now examine this process, starting with the early imperial times.

2.4. Imperial Hierarchies in Begi (1880s-1974)

In the late 1880s, only a few years after Schuver's travels, the imperial government under Emperor Menilik II (r. 1889-1913) expanded to the west through the campaigns of General Ras Gobana. Both *sheikh* Khojele al-Hassen and Jote Tullu eventually submitted to the imperial government and were installed as *däjazmač* of the imperial government (Terrefe 1968; Triulzi 1981; Raga 1983; Markakis 2011).[85] The imperial expansion into the south and west in the late 19th century incorporated different societies under the same administration. Conquered areas were often not Christian, and many, like the Begi area, were categorised as racially different from the Abyssinian centre (Aalen 2011a; L. Smith 2013; Østebø 2020). While several researchers interpret the hierarchies as primarily ethnic (Markakis 1989; Merera 2007; Alemseged 2010), others argue that ethnicity is not a helpful concept to understand the history of social stratification in Ethiopia (Clapham 1975; Levine 2000; Yates 2017; Pausewang 2005).

Particularly relevant to the case of Begi are hierarchies of the Abyssinian Empire, which linked peasants with the landlord to whom they paid tribute (Bahru 1976; Markakis 2011; Donham 1986; Gebru, 1996). Individuals with relations to persons higher up on the imperial ladder could usually establish themselves as superior. They based their prestige on their control over land as *balabbat* (landlords), their ability to collect tax, their command over others' labour and the fruit of their production (Donham 1986; Mohammed 1990; Fernyhough 2007; Hoben 1970 referred to in Mains 2011). Individuals and families who did not possess these capacities, especially if they were seen as enslavable (cf. *shanqəla*), could not assume such positions of power.

[85] *Däjazmač* is a high military rank in the Ethiopian imperial government, also used as a title of nobility. *Sheikh* Kjojali al-Hassen preferred to retain his title as *sheikh* (Bahru 2002a: 68). What is mentioned here is a simplified account of the events. *Sheikh* Khojele of Aqoldi was not the only ruler in the *sa'id* region (Bela Shangul/ Asosa area) but in the end, the one that remained victorious (Triulzi 1981; Meckelburg 2019).

The direct imperial influence reached only Guma Gara Arba, west of the Dabus River, today in Kondala *Wäräda* (Etana 2018: 68; Meckelburg 2019: 115). The Begi area was for most of the imperial period governed under *sheikh* Khojele who, as a semi-autonomous ruler, acted as a "middleman" between the imperial government and the "periphery" (Meckelburg, 2019: 125; cf. Donham, 1986: 38).[86] Nonetheless, the area was still part of the hierarchies put in place by the central government. As Alexander Meckelburg (2019: 13) has shown, the western borderland was, and remained, a periphery of the empire, yet was shaped by imperial notions of citizenship. In dominant imperial discourse, criteria for citizenship were linked to the Amharic language and Orthodox Christianity, and an appearance resembling that of the highland Abyssinians (Donham 1986; Markakis 1989). Ethiopian intellectuals at various times have portrayed the process of Abyssinian expansion as "modernisation" (*zämänawinnet*) (Bahru 2002b; Marzagora 2016; Yonas 2022). However, since none of the above-mentioned "Abyssinian" characteristics applied to the people of Begi, for the latter, "[m]odernization often meant further marginalization" (Meckelburg 2019: 137). As the state became more efficient, "the peripheral subjects went from slavery, to tribute enforcement, to modern taxes" (ibid; cf. Elizabeth 2010; Yonas 2022). Thus, imperial hierarchies shaped relationships between individuals and groups through which some people continuously lost out on opportunities and power.

Begi: Becoming a Contested Area

The history of Begi as a town of limited political importance starts at the turn of the 20th century. In 1899, Begi became an imperial garrison where 30 men were stationed (Bulatovich, 2020 [1899]). According to one of Triulzi's informants from 1972, "the number of Oromo who lived here in Beggi […] did not exceed more than ten houses". The area was instead inhabited by "Dina" (Mao).[87] A letter from *moti* Kumsa Moroda of Nekemte, ruler of Welega, to Emperor Menilik in June 1908, confirms that he has sent 100 male and 100 female slaves with their 32

[86] For more explanation on the imperial system of governance in the periphery, cf. Donald Donham (1986). Donham explains that "semi-independent rulers [such as *sheikh* Khojele] were recognized only in areas that were fairly commercialized, and large tributes were the price of their special and precarious status" (Donham 1986: 38).
[87] This interview is with a descendant of Jote (IES MS 1887, A-BG-1, 22.02.1972). Triulzi notes in brackets that Dina means "Mao as the gallas term them". From the way they are described, it seems like the term here refers mainly to highland Mao around Begi and Tongo. In interview A-BG.5 (25.02.1972), Triulzi describes "Dina" as "black". It is a common word that Oromo-speakers may associate with previous inhabitants in Western Welega although, in the contemporary Oromo language, *diina* means "enemy". Wendy James (1986: 141) explains in a note that "dina carries the implication of stranger from the wilderness" in Oromo.

children to "Bege" to work for the development (*ləmat*) of the town, "as ordered to me" by the monarch.[88] In the same year, the Begi area was divided between the Oromo *moti* Jote and *sheikh* Khojele. The larger part came under *sheikh* Khojele, who from 1909 had one of his headquarters there (Atieb 1973: 57).[89] According to one Oromo informant of Triulzi in 1972, the *sheikh* had argued: "I claim all the Šänqilla [*shanqəla*], the blacks, to my side. They all have belonged to me and all the [Oromo] belong to Däğğäč Jote".[90] Members of the Khojele family owned large tracts of land and enjoyed important positions in the local society (Rashed 1995). Hence, they gained much influence over this area which grew in importance and inhabitants throughout the century. In 1935, Begi *Wäräda* was established and governed as part of Welega Province, Nekemte (Schröder 2017).

The local society was highly stratified. In towns of governmental administration like Asosa, the Arab or *waṭawiṭ* "Islamized élite" (e.g., Khojele), together with other (Christian) highlanders, "mainly Tigre, Amhara and a few Oromo […] represent[ed] the dominant class" (Triulzi 1981: 9). In Begi, the "Oromo from Qellam [Kelem]" (an area south of Begi, ruled by Jote Tullu) belonged to this upper class and thereby were different from the local population (ibid). In Asosa, the locals were categorised as Berta whereas, in Begi, they were labelled Mao, but their social position is in many ways comparable. Hence, the main hierarchical division was between Arab and (partly) Oromo on the one hand, and Berta and Mao (*shanqəla*) on the other, although much of the Arab elite in Asosa spoke the Berta language and several Arab families around Begi/Tongo, spoke Gwama, a language associated with the Mao. This social stratification cut across linguistic boundaries and was contingent on ancestral prestige and position in the imperial political hierarchy.

Although there is a discourse about the "barbaric" and enslavable groups of this area, there were also local landlords in the territory between the two powers of *sheikh* Khojele in the north and Jote Tullu in the south, from Tongo in the west to Guma Gara Arba at the Dabus River in the east. They did not all enjoy the same levels of prestige at that time because some of them were categorised as "Arab", others as "Mao", and some as Leqa (Oromo). [91] Their elite status continues to matter for their descendants, although not uniformly. The local communities today

[88] Triulzi & Tesema, Welega compilation, letter 65, code 1/353. This letter does not say what kind of development the slaves were supposed to work on, where they came from or who received them in Begi.
[89] NALA 046, *Minutes from a meeting in Nekemte* 24.11.–01.12.1969
[90] IES MS 1887, interview Triulzi A-BG-5 with an informant who was 96 years old in 1972.
[91] Leqa is a "maxi clan" of the Oromo-speaking Macha branch (Paulos 1984: 27).

remember many of the "Arab" landlords as Mao which contributes to the internal diversity and complexity of this category.

The best-known of these landlords is Kutu Gulja (1840s–1910s) who in local memory is remembered as the great-grandson of Dawd, a prestigious Arab immigrant and preacher who until today is an important figure in oral history.[92] Kutu initially allied with Khojele but was conquered by Jote Tullu in the battle of Giten in 1903 (Atieb 1973: 43; Bahru 1976: 179). He was made imperial *fitawurari*[93] by Jote before Begi came under the rule of Asosa. Alexander Bulatovich (2020 [1899]) writes in his letters that Kutu was the "tribal chief" of the Mao although he was of "the same blood as the Sudanese" (i.e., "Arab") (cf. Grottanelli 1940: 78; Meckelburg 2019: 104).[94] Although not as prestigious as *sheikh* Khojele or Jote Tullu, Kutu and his descendants were, and remained for generations, the most prestigious landlords around Begi. For example, the grandson of Kutu Gulja, Harun Soso, was governor of the Begi sub-district Lalo Shashi before the revolution (Rashed 1995: 39).[95] As we will see, he was a key oppositional figure under the Derg and became a leading politician in the government transition in 1991.

Other "Mao *märi*" (Mao chiefs), i.e., local landlords in the area, are also reported by government employee Bekuretsion Tilahun in 1971.[96] One of them is mentioned by Vinigi Grottanelli as a "Male of senile age (Abdi Nibo fitaurari, chief of the Mao of Gofa [close to today's Kondala])" (Grottanelli 1940, table VI).[97] Grottanelli writes that *fitawurari* Abdi Nibo's mother tongue is Maramo, which is another designation for the Omotic Mao language Hozo (*Ak'mo Wandi*). Triulzi's interlocutors stated in 1972 that Abdi, just like Kutu, had been "a tributary to Hoğälé [Khojele]".[98] A third landlord, *fitawurari* Kanda, appeared frequently in my conversations with elders from Kondala but I have not found his name in written sources. All

[92] Kutu's grandson, Harun Soso, interviewed by Triulzi in 1972 confirms this ancestry (interview IES MS 1887, A-BG-4, 23.02.1972). He also mentions that Kutu died during the time of Lij Iyasu which was between 1913 and 1916. This enables us to estimate the time of his death.
[93] *Fitawurari* is an imperial administrative title under *däjazmač*.
[94] Kutu "ruled over all of the Mao tribes" related an interlocutor of Triulzi (IES MS 1887, A-BG-1, 22.02.1972). Corfield (1938) identifies Kutu as a Berta *mek* (chief); "Berta" is in this context understood as a synonym for "Arab".
[95] NALA 026-027, *Election list*, 25.06.1973: At the time of a woreda election in May 1973, Harun was a member of the local government committee.
[96] IES MS 359, Bekuretsion Tilahun, *The history and culture of the people of Asosa Benishangul Awraja*, 19.09.1971
[97] Original wording: "*Maschio di età senile (fitaurari Abdi Nibo, capo dei Mao di Gofa)*."
[98] IES MS 1887, Triulzi interview A-BG-2 (12.02.1972) with four men who were likely part of the political elite.

these three landlords cooperated with different *abba qorro* (lower landlords), who were "sub-agents" of the *balabbat* (McClellan 1984: 665; Etana 2007: 43).

At the time they were alive, Kutu and other descendants from Dawd were categorised as Arab, which in the local hierarchies linked them to the above-mentioned "Islamized élite" – the landowning Muslim nobility in Begi. Kutu was, therefore, part of a completely different community than the low-prestige Mao, who were the people he ruled. Less is known about Abdi and Kanda, who may have self-identified with a clan name. Contrary to Kutu, they were likely categorised as Mao by outsiders since they were members of local families who had been there for generations (cf. James 1980). Although they were formally Muslims, Abdi and Kanda are remembered to have participated in traditional worship like other local people in the early 20th century.[99] In this relation, Kutu's strong association with Islam was, and is still, seen as more prestigious. Today, the local society in the Begi area collectively remembers these landlords as "Mao" because all citizens today are classified into ethnic groups (Nations, Nationalities and Peoples). However, as this thesis argues, there are major differences in prestige between historical groupings, barely concealed by the current common label – a label that evolved to embrace increasingly more social strata of various statuses.

Social hierarchies were shaped not only by centre-periphery dynamics but also by struggles that Dawit Byazen (2011: 63) calls "horizontal conflicts" (in the post-1991 context). This refers to tensions between different parties within the periphery as the periphery is not one homogenous society. One of Triulzi's informants in 1972 said: "There were [only] a few of [the Mao] who sided with Kutu [against Jote]. Especially those of Gara Arba [today Kondala] sided with no one. They did not like Kutu".[100] From this mention, we can recognise the power struggles which a Mao man from Kondala later phrased as "enmity between the Tongo Mao [at that time in control of Begi] and the Begi [and Kondala] Mao" (Meckelburg 2019: 106). However, the struggle between Kutu and the eastern Mao (e.g., Abdi and Kanda) was not between equals. The "Arabs" around Kutu constituted the stronger and more prestigious group compared with the eastern Mao. This power imbalance has persisted until today and makes up parts of the confusion related to the label Mao which refers to different, and differently ranked, identities.

[99] Interviews no. 26 and 158 with descendants from Abdi (both on their mothers' side). Cf. Triulzi's interview A-BG-2 (12.02.1972) stating that the "Mawo" were practising the traditional religion. Cf. chapter IV on a more thorough discussion on Maoness and religion.
[100] IES MS 1887, Triulzi interview A-BG-3 (23.02.1972) with three men, one self-identifying as Mao, one as Oromo and one as Arab.

Imperial Land Use

In the feudal *gäbbar* system, the landlords had the right to collect tribute and demand rent from the peasants (which they used to pay their own land tax), although they did not control the farming (Crewett, Bogale and Korf 2008). Since Begi remained semi-autonomous under *sheikh* Khojele, people retained control over the land but had to pay heavy tribute (Eide 2000: 18).[101] As the tax increased in the late imperial time and poorer farmers struggled to pay it, it was not unusual that they went to dig for gold or started working as manual labourers.[102]

Contrary to Begi, the imperial land tenure system was introduced in Gidami before Jote Tullu died in 1918 (Yirga 1973; Bahru 1976). The area also formally became Orthodox Christian, like many other conquered areas, and king Jote Tullu was baptised in the 1880s (Arén 1999: 346). Central/northern Abyssinian soldier-settlers called *näfṭäña* became feudal lords to whom the local peasants had to pay tax and offer their labour (Raga 1983: 53).[103] Due to the pressure on the local peasants, throughout the first half of the 20th century, a significant number of farmers migrated north to Begi. The landlords here were locals and although they levied high taxes, there were no *näfṭäña* in Begi who exploited the peasants like in Gidami (Donham 1986: 38).[104] Further encouraging the emigration from Gidami, *sheikh* Khojele invited the farmers and offered them land to undermine Jote. Apparently, for taxation, he wanted his land cultivated by "people who had the better know-how of agricultural methods [than the Mao]" (Yirga 1973: 55). The Gidami farmers introduced ox-plough cultivation, which yields more harvest and makes it possible to farm two to four times the size of land as with hoe-cultivation (McCann 1995).

Over time, an increasingly large number of farmers in Begi were migrants who identified as Leqa (Oromo) and who gradually came to control more land, although some *qorro* (landlords) were still from the local community ("Mao"). Atieb Ahmed found that *sheikh* Khojele "confiscated land from the indigenous Mawo and distributed it to the Oromo […], chased out

[101] Cf. Nekemte Museum 005, *Letter to Emperor Menilik from Nekemte*. 08.10.1906
[102] NALA 011, *Census of Asosa and Benishangul*, n.d.; NALA 039, *Letter to the Honourable State Council in Addis Ababa from the People's Representative in Begi* Wäräda, 16.03.1974
[103] *Näfṭäña* (Amh. lit.: "rifle bearer") were the soldier settlers of the imperial government that settled and became landlords over land not previously theirs. Raga (1983: 53) writes: "Besides tribute and tax paying the people had many obligations. They had to serve the 'Sidama' [Amhara]. […] The gabbar [peasant] had to carry all the burdens of his local balabbat and naftañña ['soldier settlers']."
[104] IES MS 1887, Triulzi interviews A-BG-2 (12.02.1972) and A-BG-6 (25.02.1972) with several individuals of which some had political positions in the imperial administration.

the Mawo people from their land and enslaved them [source: Mao informant]" (Atieb, 1973: 53; Bahru, 1976: 179).[105] Later, in 1969, a report from Nekemte states that the rural people (*həzb*) in Begi, ruled by Abdulrahim Khojele, who could not pay their taxes faced imprisonment due to their debt.[106] The report further states that these farmers often ended up leaving the land to move into more remote areas and that the land was then given to people who could pay the tax, as land rights were usually granted to those who cultivated it. These events are all likely reasons why Yirga Tesemma states that in time, the Begi area came to resemble "Oromo settled regions of Kelem and Gimbi awrajas" more than the rest of Asosa *awraja* (sub-province), both in the composition of the population and in their economic activities (Yirga 1973: 6). These geographical arrangements defined who had access to resources. The same patterns are today reflected in power hierarchies between families and communities that are more and less privileged.

Religion has played a historical role for local hierarchies, especially concerning control of the land. Even in Muslim-dominated Begi, the Orthodox church gained enormous importance as a large land owner (Eide 2000; Aniel and Melkamu 2020). From the first decade of the 20th century, Protestant Christianity advanced rapidly, especially among Orthodox Christians and traditional believers in Gidami and in the highland east of Mendi (Nejo/Boji, cf. Appendix A, Figure 1). Begi remained predominantly Muslim with a small but powerful Orthodox upper class. A reform in 1941 severely restricted the rights of the feudal lords and made the taxpayers the owners of their land (Donham 1986: 27). However, this did not necessarily curb the influence of the church and other landowners over peasants or increase the income of the peasants (Eide 2000: 30; Bahru 2002a; Crewett, Bogale and Korf 2008; Dessalegn 2009).
The immigration of Oromo-speakers, starting from the Macha's arrival in Welega until they began inhabiting even the remotest areas of Begi *Wäräda*, is key to understanding local hierarchies in the area. The 20th-century settlers from Gidami advanced economically while most of the political power was held by the "Arab" Muslims and not the more rural traditional believers. Throughout these changes, some groups, who struggled to pay their taxes, remained at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The hierarchies between the Macha and the non-Macha; between landlords, tax collectors, or imperial nobility and peasants; and between Christian or

[105] Similarly, Triulzi (1977, referred to in Meckelburg, 2019: 116) writes that "the immigration of the Oromo brought enslavement and marginalization [to the Mao]. The Oromo, for their part, remember fearing the 'fierce Mao', who stole their cattle and killed their people".
[106] NALA 046, *Minutes from a meeting in Nekemte*, 24.11.–01.12.1969. The report does not state who these people are but describes them as "naked" and "nomads" (*zälan*).

Muslim elites and traditional believers continue to influence the present-day experiences of individuals in the area despite the change in labels. The starkest asymmetric power relation between these different strata can be found in the extreme exploitation of some of these less prestigious communities, or in their categorisation as enslavable, as we will now discuss.

Slavery and Slave Trade in Begi

Begi is located in a region that was well-known for the prevalence of slavery and slave trade even before the Abyssinian Empire gained control over the area. This history has shaped asymmetric power relations far beyond the time of legal slavery. The supply of slaves from this area and its exploitation made Western Ethiopia a "slaving zone" (Fynn-Paul 2009; cf. Meckelburg 2019: 55). After the fall of the Funj Sultanate in 1821, the raiding of particularly "the Bertha and the neighbouring Koma and Mao tribes" amplified under the Turkish-Egyptian army and the Mahdist conquest (Triulzi 1975: 57). According to Bahru Zewde, the Berta, Komo, Oromo, Amam and Burun were the main victims of slave raids which took place in the western border area, carried out "by the Waṭawiṭ, Oromo, and Anywaa" (Bahru 1976: 17, 208; cf. Abdussamad 1999). Pierre Tremaux (1855) commented that communities in the Blue Nile valley (most likely Gumuz-speakers) were seeking to defend themselves against "Oromo raids" (ibid: 65).[107] It is worth noting that "Oromo" applies to both victims and perpetrators of slavery.

The Dutch traveller, Juan Maria Schuver, noted in 1882 that local people he categorised as "black" (likely people he called Amam) were fearful of being captured and sold as slaves if they travelled on the road. He describes how merchants in the Arab "upper region" (Bela Shangul) exchanged salt with goods they had acquired from the Oromo such as gold, cattle, coffee, ivory and slaves (Schuver 1883: 4). When Schuver arrived in Gidami, he observed the great number of slaves in Jote's court. Several times he notes that Oromo families in this area had servants with a darker complexion ("*Negersklaven*") to do domestic chores such as collecting firewood, grinding, and shepherding (ibid). Schuver also witnessed that Jote prepared to go on a slave raid to the "Koma" lowland (cf. Yasin 1982: 12). Jote's head slave hunter was

[107] Original wording: "*des attaques et du pillage des Gallas*" (Tremaux 1855: 65).

an Amam, according to Schuver.[108] At the same time, the Amam people were particularly targeted by the raids.

The most prominent slave trader until the Italian occupation was *sheikh* Khojele al-Hassen (Bahru 1976; Rashed 1995; Abdussamad 1999; cf. Miers 2003).[109] As part of his position of power in the Empire, he supplied Emperor Menilik with slaves but he also sold them or used them in his court and mines.[110] However, the threat of slave trade in the area of my fieldwork also came from Nekemte in the east where *moti* Kumsa Moroda ruled. The territory of Oromo chiefs tended to be insecure since they did not effectively control all areas, and raids and banditry were frequent (Terrefe 1968; Binayew and Alemseged 2014). In a letter to the Emperor, *moti* Kumsa writes about a dispute with Abdulrahim Khojele about "my *shanqəla*" with which he refers to the communities along the Dabus River. Both rulers argued the people in this area were theirs to use "however [they] want".[111] They profited from the local population through the slave trade and income from taxation on the trade. Gold-washing based on slave labour was a common and lucrative business (Meckelburg, 2015: 351; 2019: 120).[112]

Slavery in Begi also consisted of governmentally enforced payment of children as tax. "Child tributes [*ləj gəbər*] were levied on lesser landlords of the region, and on the subordinate peasants unable to pay tax in another form" (James 1980: 11). According to Joachim Theis, the Mao were particularly affected by the exaction of child tributes, although they, in general, were not as badly affected by slave raids as the Berta and Komo (Theis 1995: 48). A likely reason for this is that people who lived in more central areas where taxes were levied were categorised as Mao, whereas the Berta and Komo (*shanqəla*) were too remote to be taxed. A passage from Atieb Ahmad's biography of *sheikh* Khojele describes the practice of child tribute (Atieb 1973: 54):

[108] Schuver writes: "a very tall Amam, the chief slave hunter of Bula [Jote] with five other Amams, armed for combat, determined and insolent" (James et al. 1996: 161). He does not write about this "chief slave hunter's" role in Jote's court.
[109] For more on the slave trade on the Sudanese side of the border among the Komo, see Joachim Theis (1995). Here, the Komo were as whole groups reduced to serfs ("*Leibeigene*") who could be bought and sold. One of *sheikh* Khojele's wives, the notorious slave trader, Sit Amna, was made *omda* (title of authority) over the Koma by the British Sudan government.
[110] Letter for *sheikh* Khojele al-Hassen from Emperor Menilik, 30.08.1898, Asosa Museum; NALA 010, *Letter from Welega* awraja *to the Emperor*, n.d.; cf. NALA, 003, *Report from Asosa*, n.d. where the writer complains that the *sheikh's* control over gold mining gives him too much power.
[111] Triulzi & Tesema, Welega compilation, letter 73, code 1/344-343
[112] For more on the slave trade and its taxation, see Meckelburg (2019). There is no evidence that there was commercialised slave-driven agriculture in Ethiopia, as it had been in Turkish Sudan (ibid: 128). Slaves were used extensively in private households in the whole area and especially among the nobility.

> The main victims of the *lij gibir* were the Mawo of this region. One of my informants, who in fact had been a "child-tribute" collector during the reign of Menilik, Iyassu and later on during Haile Selassie's, expressed his slaving experience in this way: "Young slaves were collected annually and sent to the government, for what was known as *milmil* (training). We bred young slaves in our own houses, and when the year commenced, we donated them to Khojele, who in turn passed them over to Addis Abeba. […] Every Mawo household was obliged to pay his tribute to Khojele in slaves."[113]

Among my own interlocutors, some could remember the payment of child tribute. An old man, at least 90 years old, known as *baba* Tufa in his village close to the Dabus River, recalls the taking of "small children" approximately every fifth year – both boys and girls.[114] Only Mao were affected by child tribute and raids, says *baba* Tufa, as he defines Mao as "those who have no force. How can we fight? We have no power to fight." Hence, whoever was targeted by the child tribute was seen as the weakest in society, and these are, by *baba* Tufa, categorised as Mao. One could interpret this as one of the definitions of Mao: they did not only have to pay child tribute because they were Mao, but they were Mao because they were those who paid tax in children.

Welega, including the Asosa area, hosted local slave markets into the 20th century even after the slave trade had been officially abolished and penalised. Locally, around Begi, the markets were Bambasi, Manasibu, and Kelem; the major market of Jimma was further away (cf. Tekalign 1984). Here, slaves were obtained for a small amount of grain (*daggujja* or similar) or salt bars (*amole*), mainly by Leqa buyers who purchased slaves for domestic labour.[115] While rural people were raided and exported out of the area, they were also bought into local families where they mixed with individuals who had "voluntarily" decided to subordinate themselves to wealthier families. The latter was not uncommon; poorer farmers offered their services or their children as labourers to landlords to protect themselves against slave raids (Yasin 1982; Tesema 2003; Meckelburg 2015; cf. Ferguson 2013). From the perspective of wealthier families, having servants in the house can be described as "helping the poor".[116] Although dependencies within a feudal system of patron/client relations are not the same as (chattel) slavery, the practices of

[113] Despite this evidence of "breeding" slaves, most individuals sold into slavery were free-born (Bahru 1976: 204).
[114] Interview no. 157. My interlocutor was himself a child when he witnessed the taking of children as tribute. Like all names in this thesis, *baba* Tufa is a pseudonym.
[115] This is confirmed by several of Triulzi's interviewees (IES MS 1887, A-BG-1; 2; 3).
[116] "There are poor people who cannot provide for themselves. Since no one is helping them, they are working in someone's house," said a man from a previously prestigious land-owning Mao family around Kondala (interview no. 158). Cf. similar argument in Raga Abdisa (1983: 22; Tesema 2003: 173).

slave raiding on the one hand, and domestic slavery (whether "voluntary" or forced) on the other, are today completely intertwined in local memories (cf. Yonas 2018 on the misleading binary between domestic and export slavery).

As discussed above, the categories Amam, Mao and *shanqəla* are often called "slaves" in older sources. Similarly, Triulzi's interlocutors who identified as Oromo or Arab often referred to Mao as slaves, regardless of whether they lived in bondage. When Triulzi asked which people were found in Begi, Harun Soso, grandson of Kutu Gulja, mentioned three categories: "Abbid [Arabic: 'slave'], Galla and Arabs".[117] Hence, all those identified as Mao, Amam, or Komo, in addition to enslaved people, were, for him, part of the category *abīd* while he at the time of this interview self-identified as Arab (cf. Yirga 1973: 22). Slavery was institutionalised as a racialised practice where some people, based on their cultural, religious or geographical background, were seen as more exploitable and enslavable than others although Yonas Ashine recommends avoiding a purely racial explanation (Yonas 2018: 265; 2022: 48). There were families from Mao clans who owned domestic servants/slaves, even in the Kondala area, where the local community usually considers Mao a low-status category. Therefore, there should be no reason to equate Mao with slave descendants or assume they had the status of slaves, which again shows the multidimensional nature of this category.

The process of abolishing the slave trade and slavery in Ethiopia was long and fraught with challenges. The cross-border control between Ethiopia and Sudan was not effective; runaway slaves could seek the protection of the British in Sudan, yet the British failed to report continued raiding within their territories (Abdussamad 1999: 442; Miers 2003: 176). The imperial government was the main beneficiary of the slave trade, but Emperor Menilik, for example, also commanded the Nekemte *moti* Kumsa to employ guards to catch slave traders in a letter from April 1909.[118] Furthermore, Emperor Haile Selassie wrote proclamations, passed laws and enrolled former slaves from Benishangul in military school (*The Autobiography of Emperor Haile Sellassie I* 1976: 36). Abolition has been discussed in detail elsewhere (R. Pankhurst 1968; 1998; Edwards 1982; McCann 1988; Markakis 2011; Bonacci and Meckelburg 2017).[119]

[117] IES MS 1887, Triulzi interview A-BG-4 with Harun Soso (23.02.1972)
[118] Nekemte Museum 032, *Letter to* däjazmač *Habte Mariam from the ministry in Addis Ababa*, 25.04.1909.
[119] For more on abolition in the West, see Tekalign Woldemariam (1984) who investigates slavery and the slave trade in Jimma in the 19th and early 20th centuries and argues that the economic system of imperial Jimma depended more on agriculture than slavery since it did not collapse post-abolition. Cf. Edwards (1982) who argues the government started getting more income from other trade and export items and that Ras Teferi (later Haile Selassie) therefore got an advantage over his opponents through abolitionism.

Here, it suffices to mention that Ethiopia was eventually invaded by Italy, a fellow member of the League of Nations, in May 1936, an attack justified largely by anti-slavery rhetoric (Miers 2003: 246).

The Italian colonial governance brought about certain changes in terms of reducing slavery and the slave trade, for example in Anfillo, although they also used forced labour in the mines of the Western borderland (Meckelburg 2019: 137). Raga Abdisa (1983) argues that the peasants in Gidami got better conditions at the expense of the *balabbat* because of the Italians. A government report from 1942 informs that the Italians had imprisoned Busase "nobles" in Gore prison to prevent them from using the Mao as their slaves. This, however, had negative consequences on coffee production since the Mao of Anfillo were labourers on the Busase's coffee plantations. The report states that "since [the Mao] do not have a leader and are not able to improve their lives, the abundance of coffee is less because of them".[120] Most of my interlocutors could not say anything about the Italian period but some believed the Italians had abolished slavery. In general, the effort of the Italians may have had an effect in certain areas but it is unlikely to have penetrated all regions.

In 1942, after the liberation, the Ethiopian government officially abolished slavery (Bonacci and Meckelburg 2017: 16). However, "the *shanqəla* and the blacks" were still sold as slaves on the local markets, and driven across the Didessa River according to a "secret document for the Ministry". [121] A letter from Welega in 1942 states that it will take a "very long time" to stop the slave trade unless the main traders are found and hanged immediately.[122] In fact, according to a semi-annual report of the Welega prison in 1943, several crime cases every month were concerned with slave trade.[123] The latest written evidence of slave trade in Welega that I have found in the National Archives is from April 1948, which states that a named, female slave trader was caught and imprisoned by the police.[124] Among my interlocutors, an old Mao man from Begi told me that he had witnessed his father purchasing a *garba Oromoo* (Oro.: "slave of Oromo") from Bambasi when he was 16 years old, which was likely around 1950.[125]

[120] NALA 015, *Report from Nekemte*, 21.09.1942. Original wording: "መሪና አትጊ ስለሌላቸው ኑሮአቸው አሻሽለው ለመኖር የሚችሉ ህዝቦች ስላልሆኑ በነሱ ምክንያት የቡናው ሀብት እንዳነሰ ነው ያለው"
[121] NALA 008, *Secret document for the ministry in Addis Ababa*, n.d.; NALA 015, *Report from Nekemte*, 21.09.1942
[122] NALA 001, *Letter to* däjazmač *Mekonnen from Abiy Abera in Welega*, 1942
[123] NALA 059, *Report from Welega prison, Nekemte*, 1941; cf. NALA 063, *Court documents*, 22.11.1945–04.04.1949
[124] NALA 005, *Letter for the Ministry in Addis Ababa*, 10.04.1948
[125] Interview no. 80; cf. Miers (2003: 4) on evidence of slave raiding in Jimma in 1953

The imperial political order was, at this point, on the verge of collapse while the hierarchies it had promoted lingered even after its overthrow. Practices which can be described as "exploitation akin to slavery" (Rossi 2009: 5) continued until the end of the Ethiopian Empire and beyond the 1974 revolution, which we will now turn to. As we have seen, the label Mao carries connotations of slavery while, paradoxically, in particular circumstances, it may also convey the opposite meaning. Mao people with varying social positions, therefore, relate to slavery and its social impacts in different ways. We will now discuss how vestiges of social stratification in the past continue to shape discourses and practices in the Begi area despite changes of official government rhetoric.

2.5. Revolution and Ethnicity in Begi (1974-1991)

Land, Villagisation, and Hierarchies

The years leading up to the Ethiopian socialist revolution were characterised by increased dissatisfaction among the population. When finally the revolution swept over the country in 1974, previous landlords lost their land in the subsequent campaign "*meret le arrashu*" (land to the tiller) (Markakis 1989; Pausewang 1990). One year after the revolution, the government introduced a land reform which made all land state property, gave all rural farmers usufruct rights to the same size of land (maximum ten hectares) and prohibited sale, mortgage, and lease of land (Public Ownership of Rural Land Proclamation cited in Crewett, Bogale and Korf 2008: 12). The government substituted the former structure of *qorro*/landlords by forming Peasant Associations and cooperatives to control the land, so also in Begi. In most areas of Welega Province, wealthy landowners opposed the land reform (Etana 2007: 26).

In Begi, the practical effects of the land reform and redistribution of assets were smaller than elsewhere because most farmers in the area were relatively poor (Etana 2007: 37). What seems to remain most vividly in the memory of my interlocutors are the various attempts of the government to villagise the population, an event that marks an irreversible shift in the settlement of Begi *Wäräda*. This practice is different from resettlement over wide distances; it involves bringing rural peasants together in one central area (e.g., the centre of a *qäbäle*, i.e., sub-district) to further control them and provide them with infrastructure (cf. Clapham 2002; Pankhurst and

Piguet 2009; Tadele and Assefa 2020). The government established such villages all over Begi *Wäräda* around 1987. This villagisation did not only change the use and management of land but also mixed the settlement of families of different origins while it did not necessarily transform social inequalities. In the hitherto rural and isolated areas around the Dabus River, Oromo and "Arabs" (Berta-speakers) settled next to Mao. Migration and changes in settlement patterns often benefitted newly immigrated individuals of Macha Oromo descent, as we will see in chapter VI. Especially poorer Mao peasants today interpret their loss of land from an ethnic perspective as part of the structural changes that enable discrimination against the Mao.

The Derg government attempted to implement measures to reverse status differences all over Ethiopia but was partly unsuccessful, as this thesis argues. These measures included engaging the population in campaigns on gender equality, and equality between ethnic groups and status groups (Clapham 1990: 241; Epple 2018b: 37; Freeman and Pankhurst 2003: 339). An example of a government effort to change power relations was to confiscate the land and annul the official status of *fitawurari* Kanda's son and nephew as *qorro* (landlords) in Boji Gara Arba close to the Dabus River.[126] Many elderly people today remember that, instead, individuals of alleged slave descent became *qäbäle* chairpersons for a brief period in the 1980s, as elsewhere in Ethiopia (Freeman and Pankhurst 2003).[127] One of my interlocutors who self-identifies as a slave descendant, claims the Derg removed "the old differences between *balabbat*, poor, slaves, *borana*…"[128] According to an elderly man from the Dabus area, "it was the Derg that ended the slave trade and made the people stop selling children from inferior groups (*t'eendi moo*)".[129] Former slaves are said to have started working more and more on their own little plot of land which they had received from the landowner (master) they used to work for, at least in areas with more freely available bushland (Bartels 1983: 173). A common estimation of the size of the land the freed slaves got is two day's ploughing with oxen (approx. 0.4 hectares).

However, when considering the prevailing landlessness in the area, it is doubtful that all former slaves received land, while, at the same time, we cannot know if those who are today landless

[126] Interview no. 15. Apparently, *fitawurari* Kanda's son was called Dukan Kanda. The only living descendant of Kanda I know of is his granddaughter (interviews no. 26 and 140). Also, *fitawurari* Abdi lost his formal position.
[127] Interview no. 15 and 137
[128] Interview no. 134
[129] Interview no. 15. When this interview was interpreted from Hozo (*Ak'mo Wandi*) to Amharic, the term *t'eendi moo* was translated as *anasa bəheräsäb*, which may mean "minority nationality" but also has derogatory connotations as a euphemism for inferior people. The Hozo term may mean "minor" both in number and in status. *Anasa* is today officially not used for "minorities" anymore.

necessarily descend from slaves. The dependency of slave descendants on landowners (possibly previous slave masters), especially if the former are landless, is widespread (cf. chapter VI). As we will see throughout the thesis, multiple aspects of present-day social hierarchies can be traced back to practices of slavery introduced during the time of Macha Oromo immigration and imperial Abyssinia. On the issue of forced labour, a report to the government in 1980 states that the illegal trade in coffee from Ethiopia to Sudan, which used to be transported on donkeys, was now being carried by "Komo" people, supposedly because this was cheaper.[130] This indicates the persistence of hierarchies that were shaped during previous generations.

For many people, the Derg time was challenging but did not necessarily represent an ideological shift. The Derg's new settlement patterns reinforced the dominance of socially superior individuals of Macha (Oromo) descent, especially in areas outside of the administration of the *mana* Dawd.[131] Former Mao *qorro* often remained with only informal prestige in their local society. Furthermore, the rule of the *qäbäle* chairmen of alleged slave descent was short-lived as they stepped down and were replaced by more prestigious individuals of Macha Oromo descent. Consequently, the changes under the Derg further cemented the inferiority of the social stratum categorised as Mao. As Bosha Bombe argues in the case of the Ganta in southern Ethiopia, measures by the government "could not sustainably change the status and identity of slave descendants" (Bosha 2018: 70; cf. Epple 2018a: 37). Although the Derg changed settlement patterns and wealth distribution to a certain extent, this did not shake the core of the hierarchical structures in the area which remain until today.

Ethnic Nationalist Movements in the West

Although the groups that overthrew the empire in the revolution mainly used arguments related to social class, ethnicity gained importance as a category of inequality. The use of the term *bəheräsäboč* (Amh.: "nationalities") for "ethnic groups" is in Ethiopia frequently attributed to Joseph Stalin's *Marxism and the National Question* (1947 [1913]) (Clapham 1990; 2002; Aalen 2011a; Abbink 2015). In the period around the revolution, it came to replace the term *zär* in official documents. The student activist Walelign Mekonnen (1969) propagated unity between

[130] NALA 088, *Report to the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia and the Minister of State*, 26.05.1980

[131] The term *mana* literally means "house" in Oromo and is used to describe descendants from the same remote ancestor who make up a "maxi clan" *mana* Sibu (cf. Paulos, 1984: 29).

different and autonomous Ethiopian "nationalities".[132] Likewise, students in Nekemte proclaimed in 1974 that they stand for "the Oromo and the oppressed nations" (*läoromona läčoqun bəheroč)*.[133] The result was an increasingly ethnicised political discourse (Zitelmann 1994; Hultin 2003; Alemseged 2010; Mekuria 1997). For example, although landowners in Welega were mainly Oromo/locals themselves, the revolution was interpreted as liberation from "Amhara supremacy" (Etana 2007: 78; cf. Aalen 2011a: 29).

The Derg government had no real interest in making "nationalities" the main centre of politics or organising political administration around ethnic categories despite its nominal focus on oppressed nationalities (Mulatu 2017). According to Lovise Aalen (2006: 246), the "Derg's policy towards ethnic groups was to allow, and even to stimulate, cultural articulation of ethnicity, but to suppress political expressions of it". Hence, the promotion of an idea of Ethiopian "unity" stood in contrast to a fragmented country, in which discontent based on ethnicity, class and distance from the power centre continued to play a major role (Clapham 1990). So, ironically the Derg represents a period where ethnicity became a central logic of social categorisation. As we will see, "Mao" became one of Ethiopia's ethnic categories although it lacked many of the typical characteristics of an "ethnic group" such as a common language and an idea of groupness in the local society.

The brutality of the Derg military regime was interpreted as particularly cruel to the Oromo people. Hence, nationalist movements and guerrilla formations grew in strength; the most prominent being the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Tigray and Eritrean People's Liberation Fronts (TPLF and EPLF) (Clapham 1990). The former is a movement that can be traced back to the Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association, founded in 1963, which built on decades of efforts to claim regional self-determination, such as that of the 1936 Western Oromo Confederation (Marcus 1994: 148; Ezekiel 2002; Etana 2018).[134] Under the Derg, the Oromo movement became increasingly nationalist and "contributed immensely to the creation of self-awareness among the Oromo youth" (Merera 2007: 89; cf. Mohammed 1996; Mekuria 1997;

[132] Walelign (1969) defines "nation" in similar terms as Stalin (1947 [1913]) and concludes that Ethiopia hosts the Oromo Nation, the Tigray Nation, the Gurage Nation, and others. What he calls "fake nationalism" is "Amhara-Tigre supremacy" where the Amharic language, style of dressing and Orthodox religion represents what is Ethiopian.
[133] NALA 051, *Declaration of students in Nekemte*, 27.11.1974
[134] This separatist movement was at that time called the "Western Galla Confederation" (Etana 2018: 196). The confederation wanted to appeal to the League of Nations to be allowed to establish their autonomous rule but remained unsuccessful.

Bahru 2014). This and other nationalist movements aimed at ending oppression and exploitation of the peasantry and demanded the introduction of democracy, which first and foremost should entail territorial self-determination for the Ethiopian nationalities.[135] The common Oromo language and an idea of descent from the same ancestors have been among the most important shared characteristics which were mobilised to create a sense of Oromo groupness (Mohammed 1990; Zitelmann 1994).

The OLF managed to rally much support among communities in Welega in the early 1980s (Zitelmann 1994). According to a senior member of the OLF, Begi became a central and strategic area for the OLF resistance against the Derg in Western Ethiopia because of its proximity to the main area of mobilisation in the borderland to Sudan.[136] Simultaneously, Begi *Wäräda* had become the biggest district west of Nekemte, which made it a central operation area – from 46,671 inhabitants in 1966 to more than double (95,789 people) in 1981.[137] A letter from Welega *kəflä hagär* (province) in March 1987 informs that there were around 1,000 - 1,500 OLF *wenbedewoč* (bandits) in Begi *Wäräda* who fought the Derg military.[138] Furthermore, the government's suppression of religion hit the Protestant churches hard; these were seen as "Oromo" in Western Ethiopia, as opposed to the Orthodox Church which was perceived as "Amhara" (Eide 2000; Etana 2007). Thus, religion, too, played a role in the resistance and ethnicisation of society.

Political actors in Western Ethiopia established other opposition movements in the 1980s apart from the OLF, such as the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement (BPLM).[139] The BPLM mainly consisted of individuals categorised as Benishangul (Berta) (Asnake 2009: 159).[140] At first, it sought to cooperate and gain support from the OLF, but this was unsuccessful mainly because both movements claimed the same territory – Asosa *Awraja* (sub-province") – and because the OLF expected their members to adopt "Oromoness", as we will discuss in chapter

[135] TPLF Manifesto, 1976; OLF Party Programme of 1976, PP MS 282207132, SOAS. On p. 15-16 in the OLF programme, the following is stated: "The fundamental objective of the struggle is the realization of national self-determination for the Oromo people and their liberation from oppression and exploitation in all their form by the establishment of the people's democratic republic of Oromia." Cf. Mekuria Bulcha 1997.

[136] Conversation with a senior member of the OLF, Addis Ababa, 26.02.2020

[137] NALA 033, *Census*, 22.06.1966; NALA 056, *Census*, 1981. Other areas also show population growth in this time, though not as tremendous as Begi. Several towns and larger villages in the *wäräda* had more than 2,000 inhabitants in 1983 (NALA 032, *Census*, 15.02.1983; NALA 055, *Census of towns with a low population*, 09.11.1982; NALA 071, *List of* wäräda *in the different* awraja, 04.07.1987).

[138] NALA 085, *Letter to the Ministry of Interior*, 17.03.1987

[139] NALA 088, *Report to the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia and the Minister of State*, 26.05.1980

[140] The term "Benishangul" is an old label for Berta-speakers. At the same time, Bela Shangul is a place in the *sa'id* ("upper region").

III. Instead of uniting with the OLF, the BPLM later received training and support from the leading resistance movement, the TPLF, and in 1991 went into direct conflict with the OLF (Young 1999: 326). The tensions between these different political groupings have continued to play a role in the political atmosphere in the area and provide a context for understanding the growth of Mao as a political category.

The Derg responded late to the growing polarisation by incorporating "equality, development and respectability of the languages of the nationalities" into the constitution ('The Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia' 1988, article 2.5). In 1983, it established the Institute for the Studies of Ethiopian Nationalities (ISEN) to accommodate the increased pressure on the government to tackle the demands of various Ethiopian nationalities. This institute reported directly to the Worker's Party of Ethiopia, the vanguard party (Abbink 1991). The goal of the institute was to study the political, economic, communal, historical, and cultural situation of Ethiopia's nationalities (*bəheräsäboč*) (Mulatu 2017: 119).[141] The ideology used to standardise the people into different ethnic groups is reminiscent of mid-century primordialist descriptions of "tribes" with their specific languages and "culture" (cf. Abbink 1991: 11; Banks 1996). The overview of Ethiopia's "89 nationalities" done by the ISEN, reflects a wish for a more systematic way of dealing with ethnicity in which each ethnic group should be acknowledged under a certain label and assigned a specific territory. This would create clear boundaries and make it easier to administer them.

The ISEN records "Mao" with seven *gosa* (clans) as number 58 on a list of Ethiopian nationalities.[142] The information for these studies was likely based on reports by government employees and official ethnographical investigations.[143] One of their studies categorises languages and where they are spoken. It discusses that there are different names for people speaking the same language but suggests one official designation.[144] It treats Mao as *one*

[141] Cf. IES MS 4478, ISEN, *Regional Study Group Report*, 1985
[142] IES MS 4485, ISEN, *List of Ethiopian Nationalities*, 1985.
[143] The ISEN reports do not specify where they collected the evidence and who were their informants. However, considering the speed with which their research was carried out (cf. Mulatu 2017), it is unlikely that researchers could go in-depth on each of the "89 Ethiopian nationalities" (cf. IES MS 4478). They likely consulted reports like that of Bekuretsion Tilahun (IES MS 359) and used the Derg's own ethnographic reports such as the *Overview of Nationalities, Nekemte* (NALA 016, 21.08.1980).
[144] IES MS 4484, ISEN, *National Standards Forms 3 and 4 in 002 Data Enhanced National Language Distribution Level*, 1985. Another study (IES MS 4481, *Nationalities Criteria Form 1 at 002 Compiled Nationalities Distribution at the wäräda level*) demands caution when deciding which designations to use for the nationalities, since some terms may be derogatory, such as *shanqəla* for Gumuz. No explanation is given for why it is derogatory.

language although already at that time, Bender (1975) had researched the linguistic situation. Simultaneously, official documents begin using the term "minority nationalities" (*anasa bəheräsäb*) about the people inhabiting the lowland areas of Welega.[145] The ISEN classifies different areas of Nekemte, Gimbi, Asosa and Qellem *Awraja* as the territory of Mao (implying firstcomer status).[146] In various government reports and letters from this time, we can observe the use of the term "indigenous" (*näbar*) and a new interest in the cultural "curiosities" of such groups.[147] The work of the ISEN on the one hand and local events on the other hand led to the slow growth of "Mao" as a political ethnic label.

Searching for the "Mao movement"

When setting out to find the beginnings of the two political parties called the Mao and the Komo People's Democratic Organisations (MPDO/ KPDO), I quickly came across the story of Harun Soso, grandson of *fitawurari* Kutu Gulja. Harun had been an imperial administrator in Begi and a local landlord. In the early years after the revolution, he fled to Sudan together with other landlords/ *qorro* where he started a resistance movement against the Derg. From there, Harun attacked the town of Begi in June 1977, overran the local police station and snatched weapons and supplies (Meckelburg 2019: 159).[148] This incident has made him a "hero" (*jägna*) according to the current local government (*Diga* 2018: 32).

Numerous families from around Begi and Tongo followed Harun to Sudan, and we may ask why they did so. In the light of the ethnic territorialisation today, a number of my interlocutors claim that Harun and his followers went to "fight for the Mao".[149] Yet, Harun (from an "Arab" family descending from Dawd) did not identify as Mao, at least not in the 1970s, as we can see from interviews that both Triulzi and Atieb Ahmed had with him (Atieb 1973: viii).[150] Harun

[145] NALA 038, 07.06.1983; cf. the above-mentioned connotations of "inferiority" related to the term *anasa*.
[146] IES MS 4481, ISEN, *Nationalities Criteria Form 1 at 002 Compiled Nationalities Distribution*, 1985
[147] NALA 016, 21.08.1980; NALA 069, 12.06.1981. The governmentally instructed ethnographic report *Overview of Nationalities, Nekemte* (NALA 016) was done on the nationalities of Welega in 1980. The report lists Mao as one of 10 ethnicities in Welega. It explains agriculture, hunting, food, clothes, house construction, religious rituals, and inheritance, and goes into detail concerning marriage customs. It does not mention geographical, cultural, or linguistic differences between various Mao groups.
[148] Alexander Meckelburg (2019) interviewed Harun personally several times between 2010 and 2014. I did not meet Harun as he has already passed away, but I interviewed several of his contemporaries and eyewitnesses of the attack on Begi. For more details, see Meckelburg (2019: 159-167).
[149] Interview no. 98
[150] Atieb Ahmed (1973) classifies his interviewee, Harun Soso, as "Arab", and Triulzi also categorises him as Arab in their interview in 1972 (IES MS 1887, A-BG-4, 23.02.1972). Thomas Zitelmann argues that Harun mobilised both his "Arabness" and "Oromoness" in the resistance to gain favours from civilians and armed groups in the

was a feudal lord who had lost most of his wealth to the confiscation and redistribution measures of the new regime and who was at odds with the Derg administration.[151] In the early years of the resistance, he was affiliated with the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), a movement loyal to the crown against the Derg (Meckelburg 2019: 30). In an official publication by the Culture and Tourism Office in Tongo called "Diga", it is stated that Harun's motivation for the fight against the Derg was "the miserable life of a few feudal lords [*fiwudaloč*], and the poor living conditions of the masses" (*Diga* 2018: 30).[152] This publication contains politically charged content that can be interpreted as an attempt to challenge what is perceived as Oromo hegemony in the current society of Western Ethiopia and it is, therefore, interested in portraying Harun as a champion of the oppressed and the Mao.[153]

The main reason why Harun went into opposition was likely the redistribution measures of the Derg, perceived as random and unfair. Some of my interlocutors who had been in Sudan with Harun spoke about how they had given up their land and positions out of loyalty to Harun and grievance to the brutal Derg forces that had confiscated their possessions. Harun did not engage much in guerrilla activities after the attack on Begi; he was already in his 70s when the warfare started. However, the primary motivation for those who had gone with him to Sudan had become to fight the regime. Since the movement with the most widespread support in the west was the OLF, many joined the Front (Meckelburg 2019: 161). It was not until later in the Derg time, when they started feeling excluded by Oromo nationalism, that ethnic differentiation became an important perspective for my interlocutors. At this point, ethnic nationalism provided them with a new opportunity to regain prestige and territorial authority. It was also at this time that political actors gradually began to use the label Mao.

So far, we have established that the so-called "Mao liberation" was not a driving factor behind the resistance against the Derg among Harun's followers. Similarly, in the area east of Begi, I could not find evidence of a "Mao liberation movement", although Mao, here, was the main non-Oromo label already before the Derg time (cf. James 1981). When asked, my interlocutors were more than happy to tell me about alleged "fights for the freedom of Mao", interpreted in

Sudanese borderland during the Derg, but he does not write that Harun should have been Mao (Zitelmann 1994: 137).

[151] Interviews no. 57, 99 and 101

[152] The passage reads: "የጥቂት ፊዉዳሎች ህይወት ያማረረ መሆኑና የብዙሃኑ ህይወት የተነሳቆለ ሆኖ መገኘት ያበሳጫቸዉ የነበረ በመሆኑ ይህንን ስርዓት ለመገርሰስ ሌሎችን በማስተባበርግንባር ቀደም በመሆን በግልፅና በስዉር ታግለዉ ያታግሉ ነበር".

[153] *Diga* is a common greeting in the Gwama language (Mao), but the booklet is written in Amharic. The Gwama title clearly shows a wish to create more focus on the Mao as an ethnic group.

the light of today's political environment, but in which no one seems to have participated at that time.[154] Most of my interlocutors were farmers, and a few were in the OLF since this was the only available resistance group in the area. An idea of a common Maoness, based on which it would have been worth resisting the Derg, had not developed due to the fragmented nature of the Mao category. Furthermore, as numerous Mao and other people of low status may have experienced positive changes through the socialist policies, they may not have been eager to oppose the regime. As ethnic categories became more and more exclusionary with time, there was no room for non-Oromo in the OLF. This process widened the gap between those who had the opportunity to pass as Oromo and those who remained Mao, with all the negative connotations this label conveys.

The rural communities around Begi were only remotely connected to national politics, the ethnicisation of the country, and the increased polarisation of society but in the late Derg time, they were drawn into the political field. Meckelburg (2019: 167) asserts that "the plans for a Mao-Komo administrative entity were already laid out by Harun in the late 1980s", which would correspond with the time of the ISEN studies. However, considering the slow build-up of ethnic consciousness in the area, Mao nationalism had not established itself as an identity with broad popularity at that time. Large parts of the local, rural, population may not have shared the politicised interpretation of Mao and continued to use other self-designations such as clan names. How, then, did Mao become a key political category, chosen by the local elites in Begi, when it had hitherto corresponded to the stigmatised identity of a subaltern group?

As we saw above, Mao officially indicated firstcomer status and was recognised as the main non-Oromo category in the Begi area alongside Komo in the lowland. In the late Derg time, elites realised the potential of using Mao as a strategic label for the local political movement. Kutu Gulja's descendants (e.g., Harun Soso) and other *mana* Dawd/ Kiring could not claim Arabness since this category did not officially exist as an Ethiopian nationality.[155] Political categories can only be used if they already exist, but once created, they can be instrumentalised (Hahonou 2011).[156] Hence, in a world where Mao is an official category, this is an identity that

[154] Interview no. 109
[155] The ISEN studies operate with labels that are not in use anymore today, such as the "*waṭawiṭ* nationality" (today subsumed under the label "Berta"). The category "Arab" does not appear.
[156] Pierre Bourdieu writes that, similarly, playing chess is only possible in a world where chess exists (Bourdieu 1991: 173). The strategic use of ethnic labels is a circumstance found in many areas of the world, for example, in identity politics in post-colonial Benin (cf. Bierschenk 1993).

can be utilised for specific purposes, such as claiming rights over land based on a recognition of Mao as indigenous. Establishing a separate Mao movement became the most effective way for political actors to claim the Begi territory, even though they ultimately did not succeed in securing the whole *wäräda* as we will discuss in the next chapter. In this process, Mao did not lose its derogatory connotations but only gained an additional meaning as a political category. Hence, the hierarchies largely persisted, although the use of labels changed (cf. Allain 2013).

2.6. Ethnic Federalism: Mao as a Political Category (1991-Present)

The OLF attacked Asosa from Sudan in January 1991 and the Derg fell in May (Cooper and Fontanellaz 2018: 26). In July, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition under the leadership of the TPLF, established the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE). The Transitional Conference was concerned in particular with the self-determination of Ethiopian nationalities and the relationship between the government/ political parties and the people (Vaughan 1994; Beken 2009). The transitional charter emphasised the rights of the "nationalities" and that "local and regional councils for local administrative purposes [should be] defined based on nationality" ('Transitional Period Charter,' 1991, article 13). Thereupon, the country was divided into administrative entities according to boundaries between nationalities. Begi became the site of territorial struggles between the Regional States of Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia, as both sides wanted to control this area. At this moment, old power struggles between different social strata flared up again. The importance of Begi, not only due to its size but also its strategic political position, is the main topic of chapter III.

The regional states that Ethiopia was divided into are not very different from what was proposed by the ISEN in 1985.[157] Region 6 (Benishangul Gumuz) was created from parts of the former provinces Gojjam and Welega, and Asosa became its capital (Schröder 2017; Meckelburg 2019).[158] Region 4 (Oromia) became the biggest region of the country and included most of the

[157] IES MS 4478, ISEN, *Regional Study Group Report*, 1985

[158] The name Benishangul Gumuz was decided late because of disputes in the naming. In 1991, the House of People's Representatives discussed that "Benishangul" is not the name of an ethnic group (*gosa*) but should be the name of the region (HPR, 18th regular meeting, 15&17.10.1991). However, since the term is also an old label for Berta-speakers, it was not acceptable as the name of the region for individuals identifying as Gumuz (the second-largest indigenous language group in the region) – hence the name "Benishangul Gumuz". The regions of Ethiopia all have numbers. The Ethiopian Herald reports in June 1995 that "Region 6 [is] renamed Benishangul and Gumuz" (Ethiopian Herald, *Region 6 renamed Benishangul Gumuz*, 30.06.1995). This was officially decided in the

former Welega Province with its capital, Nekemte. The Oromia Regional State was, as the name indicates, established for the *ummata Oromoo* ("Oromo people" or "Oromo Nation") (Revised Constitution of the Oromia Region 2001). In the Benishangul Gumuz Regional State, the nationalities Berta, Gumuz, Shinasha, Mao, and Komo are recognised as indigenous (Benishangul Gumuz Regional State Revised Constitution 2002). One year after the fall of the Derg, individuals who had previously been members of the OLF and the BPLM, including Harun Soso, came together and established the Mao People's Democratic Organisation (MPDO) and the Komo People's Democratic Organisation (KPDO) (cf. Asnake 2009: 160; Bashir 2014). Consequently, the Mao were among the twenty-two minority groups in Ethiopia that sent one member each to the House of People's Representatives (HPR), the lower house.[159] The next chapter will discuss the political controversies regarding labels, territory, and political supremacy in the Begi area between pro-Oromia and pro-Benishangul actors.

Over the last 30 years, public discourse and official documents describe Mao in rather uniform and consistent terms. Like other ethnic groups in Ethiopia, Mao is depicted as a nationality to which certain individuals belong, depending on their self-identification, genealogies, languages, customs, and appearance (Abosh 2014; Melese *et al.* 2018; Melkamu, Gemechu and Habtamu 2018). Those who are Mao cannot at the same time be members of other ethnic groups such as Oromo, Berta, or Komo, as ethnic membership is commonly assigned by descent through the male line only (patrilineally) (Tewodros 2022). Despite the relatively new ethnic discourse, most local individuals assume that Mao has "always" been a unified social and cultural entity, similar to all the other Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia (cf. Benishangul Gumuz Regional State Revised Constitution 2002).

The 2007 national census is disaggregated according to ethnicity. It reports that only 30% of the population of Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* is Mao although this district is named after this nationality (12,744 out of 42,050 people; *Summary and Statistical Report of the 2007 Population and Housing Census* 2008).[160] The Mao constitute only 1.96% and the Komo 0.99% of the residents in the Benishangul Gumuz Region (BoFED 2017: 3). People categorised as

founding conference of the region on 6th July 1995 (Teferi M. 2021: 25). Oromia is region number 4 but the OLF used the name "Oromia" already in the 1970s and this name was adopted immediately under the Transitional Government (OLF, 1976, PP MS 282207132; letter from the Transitional Government, 13.12.1994).

[159] HPR, 89th regular meeting, 27.01.1994

[160] According to a projection by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia in 2020, the total number of inhabitants of Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* is now 69,588 and in Begi and Kondala 162,656 and 128,998 respectively. The 2007 census reports 43,535 Mao in total in Ethiopia.

indigenous in the region as a whole (Berta, Gumuz, Shinahsa, Mao and Komo) together constitute only just above half of its citizens (56.96%) and predominantly inhabit rural areas (Tsegaye 2013: 15). In Oromia, the census reports 24,272 Mao. This would mean an average of 9% of the population in the districts Begi, Kondala and Babo Gambel. The total number of Mao is higher in Oromia than in Benishangul Gumuz, although it is a politically recognised category only in the latter region.

Through the example of Mao in Ethiopian ethnic federalism, we can see that the necessity to engage with political categories increases significantly when these categories have a practical impact on people's lives (cf. Fekadu 2009; Dereje 2011). Depending on the region, being labelled "Mao" has different consequences; the location influences the meaning and effects of the category Mao. The paradox that exists between the rigid way of categorising ethnic groups as fixed unities, and the flexible nature of ethnicity, remains to this day among the main challenges of ethnic federalism.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how the category "Mao" is internally stratified and has been so for generations, although both labels and hierarchies in Western Ethiopia have transformed over time. There is a continuity of hierarchies across different periods as power dynamics from imperial times affect today's social hierarchies. Some of the asymmetric relations that affect communities in the area are between the following social actors: the socially powerful "Arabs" of Asosa (*sheikh* Khojele) and the people of Begi; the Islamised elite in Begi (later Tongo) and the Mao in the eastern area; the Leqa Oromo settlers from Gidami and the local population in Begi; and between the land (and slave) owning families (e.g., Mao *qorro*) and those who subordinated themselves to these families. The revolution jumbled up the settlement patterns in Begi but, despite the socialist rhetoric of the government, many of the fundamental hierarchical structures remained, such as alleged slave descent, and a century-old centre-periphery dynamic. The Derg regime polarised the tension between Mao and Oromo, with the former implying alterity and opposition to Oromo. Through these political changes, some people who previously regarded themselves as different, such as "Arabs" and "Mao", have become united in the same group. Conversely, families who before were part of the same social category, such as feudal landlords, are now ethnically divided.

Shaped by a century of social and political processes inside and outside of the Begi area, Mao is a socially constructed category that conceals substantial internal diversity and power inequalities. While this thesis argues that Mao does not represent *one distinctive* group, this does not make this label less "real" in its impacts. From government documents and reports and Triulzi's interviews, we have gained insight into relations and designations before the Derg, and before Nations, Nationalities and Peoples became common concepts. What these sources show is that identities related to origin, ancestry, culture, and "race" did play a role in the late imperial times, although the labels and categories did not mean the same as today and may not have referred to the same people as those who now self-identify as Mao. From a historical perspective, the reason why Mao is so heterogenous is that groups with different social positions started associating with Mao or were categorised as such at different points over a period of one century. The cumulative new meanings and connotations of Mao do not erase previous uses of this label but only add to the multiple meanings associated with it. The following chapters will examine the present-day political consequences of this circumstance.

CHAPTER III – THE STRUGGLE FOR BEGI: POLITICS AND HIERARCHY POST-1991

3.1. Introduction

The Begi area has been part of the political system of central Abyssinia (later Ethiopia) for more than a century. As we saw in the previous chapter, imperial hierarchies influenced local power relations, forms of social stratification and identities. The subsequent socialist military government, the Derg, challenged these power structures but did not fundamentally transform them. In 1991, the Derg fell. The ethnic liberation movements that formed the transitional government introduced a new way of structuring Ethiopian society. Membership in one of Ethiopia's Nations, Nationalities and Peoples has practical consequences for an individual's social position and opportunities; access to certain political offices is often reserved for members of indigenous or "titular" nationalities (Fekadu 2009; Beken 2015). Yet, there is a continuity of hierarchies throughout the three governments; the current political organisation has not overcome all asymmetric power relations from the past. On the contrary, ethnic categorisation strengthens some of the old inequalities as more powerful social strata are better equipped to take advantage of the system, as we will see. I argue that the principle of self-determination of nationalities (collective rights for ethnic groups), which in Ethiopia means ethno-territorial rule, has not necessarily improved the circumstances of marginalised groups.

This chapter will look at contestations over the territory of the former Begi *Wäräda* in 1994/95 and examine the tensions between two contrasting paradigms of hierarchy and citizenship. I will refer to these two ways of framing identities as different "games". Pierre Bourdieu uses the metaphor "social life as a game" where (social) players engage in a "rule-bound activity" (Bourdieu 1990: 64; Jenkins 1992: 43). The only way of winning the game is to play it, and to play it well. In the struggle for Begi in the 1990s, political actors appeared to follow the rules of two different games while they competed for the same prize: political influence over Begi town and *wäräda*.[161] The first "game" functions according to logics that have lingered on since

[161] This area had been a contested area between Gidami and Asosa ever since the early 20th century as it represented a strategic area to secure (cf. plans to upgrade Begi, from *wäräda* to *awraja* in 1979 which were never realised; NALA 077-079, *Letters and reports to the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia*, 20.12.1980).

imperial times which give advantages to imperial administrators, nobility, or owners of land and put individuals associated with the imperial (social or geographical) "periphery" or slave descent at a disadvantage.[162] The second "game" corresponds to the dominant governmental policy of ethnic federalism where individuals are categorised as members of distinct nationalities, presumably internally equal in rank; these are recognised as "titular" in their respective territories which they are supposed to administer. The latter paradigm is a direct consequence of current political ideologies and is, therefore, more legitimate in the contemporary political field, yet both "games" continue to co-exist in contemporary political competitions.

There were two main positions in the struggle for territorial control over the Begi area between 1993 and 1995: a) incorporating Begi into Oromia Regional State; and b) Begi becoming part of Benishangul Gumuz Regional State. The main actors on each side were affiliated with opposing political parties and used arguments that were, at times, based on opposing logics (paradigms). The pro-Oromia side predominantly used ethnic arguments, which turned out to be highly effective. The pro-Benishangul side ("Mao") also mobilised ethnicity, but they experienced major setbacks because Oromo nationalism generated more popular support (i.e., the Oromo players had a better "feel for the game"; Bourdieu 1990: 61). Yet, even after the struggle over Begi was formally over, logics of ancestral prestige continue to influence the opportunities of individuals. Maoness carries practical consequences in terms of individuals' political, economic, and social opportunities depending on their personal and ancestral background. In other words, not all identities within and across ethnic categories enjoy the same status due to the persistence of hierarchies of the past.

The moment in which we can see the full extent of these complexities is the referendum in 1995 that decided the regional belonging of Begi town and surroundings. This is also a time when we can more clearly observe local resistance against power relations in society. While most individuals interpret the border dispute as "the Oromo" against "the people of Benishangul", not all individuals who identified with either of these categories had the same aims. The division into different nationalities (Mao and Oromo) has been just one of several ways to categorise people in the local society. Individuals from relatively privileged families in Begi and Tongo

[162] Slavery and the slave trade were not features unique to the Abyssinian Empire (cf. chapter II). However, imperial hierarchies built on and strengthened the power dynamics created through slavery and the slave trade.

(former nobility and landowners), who often had used to self-identify as Arab, now spearheaded the slowly emerging phenomenon of Mao nationalism as a response to Oromo nationalism. They could not win the trust of all rural Mao who previously had made out the exploited peasantry, but they secured the support of the population in geographic areas where the pro-Oromia side was weaker (i.e., today's Mao Komo Special *Wäräda*, Benishangul Gumuz Regional State).

As a result of the referendum, the former Begi *Wäräda* was divided between the two Regional States of Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz, with Oromia getting the larger share (cf. Appendix A, figure 4). Yet, the people who came to live on either side of this border had previously lived together as one society. Subsequently, each region implemented their own set of policies that served the interests of individuals in contrasting ways depending on their social status and position. Hierarchies from the past are significant even after the introduction of ethnic federalism but since the two regions officially recognise different ethnic identities as indigenous, individuals on either side of the border do not experience citizenship in the same manner. Individuals who manage to combine their privileges from the "ethnic game" with ancestral reputation may be relatively more successful in securing political positions of power and in pursuing education, whereas being Mao for already vulnerable people deepens their disadvantage.

A similar argument, according to which "power rests largely in the hands of former nobility that used the labels Mao and Komo for political bargaining", has already been put forward by Meckelburg (2019: 170). He approaches the referendum mainly considering national and regional politics and argues that the demand of "majority groups" such as Berta (Benishangul) and Oromo over specific territories represents a major challenge for minorities such as Mao in ethnic federalism. Hence, the "dispersed minorities […] have to negotiate their political agency across" regional and federal borders (Meckelburg 2019: 186). My analysis builds on Meckelburg's and zooms in on the way "ordinary people" experience these dynamics, and how they navigate spaces and categories laid out by the politically powerful and try to turn them to their advantage (cf. De Certeau 2011). I examine how local people use "Mao" for their own purposes and how the way they perform this identity influences their abilities to advance socially and gain access to resources.

The 1995 referendum represents a threshold in the history of the area and provides a concrete example of how hierarchies manifest themselves and enable certain people to achieve social mobility. I will investigate these dynamics, starting from the change of government in 1991 until a new status-quo was reached in the 2000s. The two sections following this introduction analyse the struggle for Begi and its winners and losers on several levels. The last two sections of the chapter discuss the effects of the border and what individuals with various backgrounds may gain or lose in the two Regional States respectively. I will look particularly at the possibilities of holding political positions, migration, and status mobility through education.

3.2. The Dream of Begi

For Mao or Against Oromo?

To understand the slow growth of Mao as a political category and the role it played in the struggle for the Begi *Wäräda*, we will go back to the time around the fall of the Derg (cf. timeline, Appendix B, table 3). At this time, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) had already gained importance and strength in the Western border area. The Oromo social category is both inclusive and assimilative; the OLF demanded that "the people of Benishangul declare themselves 'black Oromos'" (Young 1999: 327; Markakis 2011: 226).[163] Since the euphemism "black Oromo" is also used to designate slave descendants, it is not acceptable for individuals who identify as "pure".

At the prospect of being labelled "black Oromo", individuals who did not pass as "normal" Oromo started feeling uncomfortable in their relations with the OLF towards the end of the Derg time. This concerned, among others, individuals affiliated with the Benishangul People's Liberation Movement (BPLM) and families who had followed Harun Soso (a former landlord from Begi who opposed the Derg, cf. chapter II). In Gambela, the Komo faction in the OLF became increasingly vocal in its claims to be recognised as different from Oromo (Meckelburg

[163] The booklet called "Diga", recently published by the Benishangul Gumuz government to justify the existence of a separate Mao history and culture, states a similar argument: "Since the eve of the fall of the Derg regime, at various times, the OLF has persecuted those who say they are Mao, saying: 'There is no *zär* called Mao. You are black Oromo.'" (ከደርግ ሥርዓት ውድቀት ዋዜማ ጀምሮ በተለያዩ ጊዜያት ኦነግ የማኦ ዘር ነኝ ያለዉን እያሳደደ ማኦ የሚባል የለም፣ ጥቁር ኦሮሞ ናቸዉ በማለት ለማንነታቸዉና ለነፃነታቸዉ ዕዉቅና በመነፈጋቸዉ ደግሞ ከኦነግ ጋር ተፋልመዋል።) (*Diga*, 2018: 10). What needs to be remembered here is that this publication is not primarily concerned with low-status Mao, for example in Oromia, but with asserting the Mao political movement around Tongo against the Oromo nationalist movement.

2019: 166). Similarly, a former OLF member who went to Sudan with Harun, expressed that he did not want to conform to Oromoness: "The Mao refused the *Onäg* [OLF].[164] 'We are not one', we said."[165] Also previous OLF-members from the eastern Begi area, who were not with Harun, relate that they experienced exclusion in the OLF. A man from Kondala said: "There are only Oromo in *Onäg*. There is nothing called Mao in *Onäg*. They say *tokkuma* [Oro.: 'unity'], […] but we black people are not *keessatti* ['included']."[166] Another man from Kondala left the OLF because "a Mao in the *Onäg* […] will be called by the name of Oromo."[167] Yet, he feared that he would not be equal to those who saw themselves as *borana* ("pure Oromo").[168] Hence, my interlocutors interpret the demand to identify as Oromo as an act of submission without the guarantee of full integration.

Following the collapse of the Derg in 1991 and the victory of the EPRDF and its allies at the time, including the OLF, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia started a process of authorising different ethnic identities and their respective national movements. Several individuals involved in this process have told me that there was a scramble for being recognised as a nationality. One of my interlocutors recalls:

> [Harun Soso] was quick. The government wanted nationalities. "I am X nationality or Y nationality," if I say that… "Is that true?" the government asks. "Yes", I say, "come and give me a certificate", and they come running. No one came and said: "No, you are not Komo", or "no, you are not Mao". There was no one![169]

As my interlocutors put it, there was no verification process on what the various ethnic categories entailed and who should be considered a member of a certain ethnic group. Only a small part of the rural population around Begi had become politicised by ethnic movements under the Derg. During the transitions in the 1990s, these communities felt disconnected from politics and did not raise concerns regarding the use of ethnic labels or whether they felt represented by the politicians like Harun Soso. Furthermore, several of my interlocutors have told me that they did not have access to channels through which they could voice their opinions.

[164] Amharic acronym: *Oromo Näṣanät Gənbar*. The Oromo name *Adda Bilisummaa Oromoo* (ABO) is also used.
[165] Interview no. 17
[166] Interview no. 125
[167] Interview no. 137
[168] Cf. similar opinions in interviews no. 72 and 91: The brother of the latter informant was active in an Oromo nationalist guerrilla group but had to carry the luggage of the others: "If you are *barya* ('slave'), you will carry our equipment," his *borana* companions had apparently told him.
[169] Interview no. 99

Ethnic federalism created an incentive for being Mao which appealed especially to individuals who could instrumentalise this identity for political leverage. Controlling Begi promised access to government resource allocations and positions of power (employment). Like Harun, several founding members of the Mao People's Democratic Organisation (MPDO) could claim a lineage back to Dawd, the "Arab" preacher (c. 18th century), and already enjoyed some social prestige. Few had any connection to the rural "Mao" area (cf. Meckelburg 2019: 167). Since Harun spoke the Gwama language, he associated with the category Mao. (Many Gwama-speakers in the highland around Tongo self-identify as Mao alongside other designations such as Kwama or *sit shwala*.)[170] However, Harun is also frequently categorised as "Komo" in Tongo because he supported establishing the Komo People's Democratic Organisation (KPDO). All the MPDO and KPDO *cadres* were men and had more education than most rural farmers and women. Hence, they may be considered "ethnopolitical entrepreneurs" who "live 'off' as well as 'for' ethnicity" (Weber 1946:84, cited in Brubaker 2004: 19). They took advantage of the politically recognised label Mao which was available to them as part of their arsenal of identities (cf. James, 1971: 197-198).

In reality, the early leadership of the MPDO consisted of individuals with various ethnic affiliations. The lingua franca in the MPDO was Oromo, but its members also spoke Berta, Oromo, Gwama and later Seze.[171] Two brothers who were Berta-speakers became founding members of the MPDO and the KPDO respectively, the latter together with Harun Soso's son Kamal Harun.[172] However, according to a patrilinear logic, two brothers cannot belong to different ethnic groups, and sons must have the same ethnicity as their father. Other MPDO *cadres* had grown up outside of the area and had no ties to Begi/Tongo other than the belief that their fathers had been relatives of Harun Soso. The way these individuals used the label Mao may seem almost random had it not been for the fact that the Mao category served the central political motive in the struggle for Begi; it justified their identity as indigenous.

The category "Mao" was not established according to fixed criteria. Instead of functioning according to the "material" that was connected (e.g., similar characteristics), "the social"

[170] Interview no. 98. *Sit shwala* is a common self-designation for people in the highland around Begi and Tongo meaning "black people" in the Gwama language.
[171] For example, the political party programme of the KPDO was written in the Oromo language (KPDO party programme, no date [likely early 1990s]). The same is likely the case with the MPDO programme.
[172] Interviews no. 99, 113, and 134

consisted of an "assemblage" made by associations (Latour 2005).[173] Some individuals self-identified as Mao because they could trace their genealogies back to ancestors like the prestigious Dawd or his grandson Kutu. The community had previously not considered these ancestors as Mao (cf. chapter II) but now started remembering them as Mao because Harun and others among their descendants had adopted the label for themselves and their ancestors. Today, the founding members of the MPDO embrace Maoness while neither they nor their party members, nor all the people they represented, identified as such in 1991. The use of ethnicity in politics created the belief in its existence, meaning that "common ancestry is likely to be a *consequence* of collective political action rather than its *cause*" (Weber 1987, paraphrased by Jenkins 2008: 10).

Not everyone who identified as Mao supported the elites in the MPDO, however. Although the MPDO *cadres* sought to represent the Mao and Komo people and their "cultures" and "traditions", their lifestyle may not have been the same as other communities who self-identified with these labels.[174] The communities in the western area towards Sudan, speakers of Gwama, may even today not accept "Mao" as a self-designation and instead prefer Komo or Kwama (Küspert 2015: 8). By contrast, people living in the area where Mao is more common as a self-designation, around Kobor, Begi, Kondala and Babo Gambel (today in Oromia), did not have strong relations to Harun and his followers. For these Mao, it was the OLF that had ousted the Derg; Harun was categorised as "Arab" and belonged to a separate social stratum. Hence, one could say that the Mao party was established by non-Mao for non-Mao.

Seemingly, the main aim of establishing the parties MPDO and KPDO was to create a political standpoint from which to claim Begi *Wäräda* as a non-Oromo territory. The political actors had to adapt to the political field which has an "effect of censorship by limiting the universe of political discourse" (Bourdieu 1991: 172). In order words, they had limited possibilities to express themselves outside of categories developed by ethnic federalism. In this context, essentialising Maoness and establishing the idea of "Mao" as a unified group was necessary to curb Oromo nationalism and claim legitimacy as a nationality. One may argue that Oromo

[173] This shows parallels to how Benedict Anderson portrays the French aristocracy: "We may today think of the French aristocracy of the *ancien régime* as a class; but surely it was imagined this way only very late. To the question 'Who is the Comte de X?' the normal answer would have been, not 'a member of the aristocracy,' but 'the lord of X,' 'the uncle of the Baronne de Y,' or 'a client of the Duc de Z'" (Anderson 2006: 7).

[174] For a discussion on Surma in South-West Ethiopia, see Jon Abbink (2002). He discusses how the reliance on individuals with education and knowledge of Amharic undermined local structures of administration, paradoxically when the government started promoting "traditional values" and "culture".

nationalism propelled the development of Mao and Komo nationalism. Hence, it is not the case that the "Mao Nation" was there to be "awakened", but rather that a nation was "invented" (Gellner 1983: 48). This chapter supports and further consolidates Meckelburg's hypothesis that citizenship in Ethiopia "depends largely on the cultural neighbours and the historically built majority-minority relation" (Meckelburg 2019: 218).

The "People of Begi"

In the struggle for territorial control over Begi town and district, the people of Begi needed a distinctive label they could identify with as a separate group with a separate political agenda, but this was not necessarily Mao. "We called ourselves *Isbege* [Gwama: 'people of Begi']; we wanted to have Begi," said my interlocutor Faris Gudina from Tongo, who followed Harun to Sudan and whose brother became a Mao politician.[175] Faris explained: "When the Derg fell, we […] came to Begi [town] and had our administration there. But then we started fighting [with the OLF] about who should have Begi." This shift towards an increased territorialisation of ethnicised citizenship in Ethiopia stands in contrast to "the history of migration and movement" in the area (Meckelburg 2019: 196). Individuals involved in the struggle over Begi experienced hardened boundaries between different social groupings in what increasingly was understood as a conflict between Mao and Oromo. The two sides in the struggle for Begi appeared to play different "games" and developed different arguments. As we will see, the ethnic argument proved to be more effective than other arguments in the years leading to the referendum.

In October 1991, the issue of Begi was discussed in the House of People's Representatives (HPR) in Addis Ababa.[176] At that time, the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) had entered the political arena as an alternative to (and competitor of) the OLF (Vaughan 1994: 14; Aalen 2011a: 33). The OPDO had been established by the TPLF as a "satellite party" in 1990 when the cooperation between the TPLF and the OLF had become increasingly difficult (Alem 2004: 92; Abbink 2011: 599). In the HPR, the OPDO argued that 84% of the population in the Begi area were Oromo. According to the principle of "50+1" (majority), the area should be part of Oromia and the minorities be granted their own council (*shängo*, later: *məkər bet*). In

[175] Interview no. 45. The term *Isbege* or *Sitbege* is also often used to refer to Omotic-speaking Mao (Hozo and Seze) by the Gwama-speaking Mao. In this case, my interlocutor used it to refer to all non-Oromo (Mao) "people of Begi".
[176] HPR, 18th regular meeting, 15&17.10.1991

short, the pro-Oromia side argued that the territory belonged to the Oromo people because they had lived there for generations ("historical claims" – *tarikawi yäyəgäbañal ṭəyaqe*), an argument successfully used by the OPDO grassroots campaigners three years later.[177]

The BPLM, located in Asosa, stood for the pro-Benishangul side. They voiced the opposite argument in the HPR and thereby represented the interests of what later should become the MPDO. They insisted that the Mao and Komo people were getting fewer in number because the Oromo were *əyäwaṭu* ("assimilating" – lit: "swallowing"), displacing, and dominating them.[178] Therefore, from the perspective of the BPLM, the Begi area should not merge with Oromia. One challenge for the BPLM was the ethnic argument: the people of Benishangul (Mao, Komo, Berta) were not counted as more than 30% in any part of the contested area.[179] This would, in the end, lead to their defeat. The meetings in the HPR did not end in an agreement. Meanwhile, the tensions in the surroundings of Begi escalated until, in late 1991, the situation became so intense that John Young (1999: 327) characterises it as a "war".[180]

The discussions in the HPR in 1991 exemplify the dilemma of unclear ethnic identities in the Begi *Wäräda*. How should the government classify the "people of Begi"? Which region should they belong to? The minutes from one of the meetings question the common identity of the community (likely "Mao", though this is not stated) and mention the difficulties for the government to draw a border between Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia.[181] Despite these doubts, in November 1994, a presumably old study by the Institute for the Studies of Ethiopian Nationalities (ISEN), named *Brief Identification of Ethiopian Nationalities*, was presented to the HPR.[182] This study confirms the term "Mao" as the only recognised ethnonym and linguistic

[177] HPR 22nd regular meeting, 14&16.11.1991
[178] HPR 18th regular meeting, 15&17.10.1991
[179] Meckelburg mentions a letter in which the Benishangul Gumuz regional administration accuses Oromia of false claims that the nationalities of Benishangul "do not inhabit the aforementioned districts" of which Begi is one (Meckelburg 2019: 193). Their arguments are similar to what could be found in the archive of the HPR.
[180] 32nd HPR regular meeting, 23.01.1992: The allegations against the OLF include plundering, looting, and burning villages inhabited by non-Oromo. The OLF had to reduce the number of camps in the area, but the one in Begi remained (HPR 40th regular meeting, 21.04.1992).
[181] Cf. 16th regular meeting of the HPR, 03-05.10.1991: The HPR discussed that, in Begi, the "main considerations" for ethnic membership, such as "cognitive and psychological relatedness […] may not match" ("እነዚህ ዋና ዋና ታሳቢ ነጥሮች አብረው የመይጋዙበት ሁኔታ ሊኖር እንደሚችል"). The minutes do not elaborate on the meaning of "psychological relatedness". It likely refers to the criterion that people should acknowledge that they belong to the same ethnic category (cf. "common psychological make-up", Constitution of Ethiopia, Article 39.5).
[182] HPR-R258, *Brief Identification of Ethiopian Nationalities*, November 1994. The ISEN did not continue its work under the federal government but the data and the studies of the ISEN were used actively. In December 2018, the Administrative Boundary and Identity Issues Commission was established which is concerned with some of the same issues as the ISEN at that time (FDRE, 2019a)

designation of the "indigenous" people in the Begi area. It portrays Mao as one group of people who since "before the time of Ahmed Gragn" (16th century) have lived in the "bush" (*bärha*) in the area. The Mao belong to groups described as "peripheral" (*ṭäräfoč*), "remaining behind economically" (*bäikonomi ẖʷala qär yähonu*) and "minority nationalities" (*käṭəqitoč yalačäw bəheräsäboč*). The report paints a static picture of indigenous people who possess "backward cultures". This is a narrative that the MPDO would later use to lobby for recognition and support.

A major shift in national politics happened when the OLF exited the Transitional Government of Ethiopia in 1992 over disagreements with the TPLF/EPRDF. At that time, the OPDO already dominated the Oromia regional government. Members of the OLF, therefore, felt little loyalty toward the EPRDF and the Oromia government (Leenco 1999; Clapham 2002). When we now turn to the events that happened at the grassroots, we will see that not all individuals who self-identified as Oromo wanted Begi to be under the administration of the Oromia Regional State due to the rift between the OLF and the OPDO. Yet, the tensions in the area were "framed" – i.e., interpreted – as being between different "ethnic groups" (Brubaker 2004: 9). As the conflict between the OPDO and the OLF intensified, several OLF *cadres* from Begi conceived a plan to establish a "Begi Special Zone" under the administration of Asosa (Benishangul Gumuz) instead of under Oromia. One of my interlocutors started negotiating with the Oromia regional education authorities to allow them to introduce the Oromo language in some schools in Begi *Wäräda* without making the area part of Oromia. These Oromo *cadres* united with the Mao movement in the struggle for Begi and remained with them even after this specific plan had failed (Begi town became part of Oromia, as we will see).

One former OLF cadre told me that he was in favour of "the 'Begis' [Amh: *Begiwoč* – 'the people of Begi'] governing Begi".[183] Similarly, an Oromo man interviewed by the MPDO in 1994 said: "Begi belongs to the people that inhabit it", in other words, not administrators from Gimbi or Nekemte.[184] Note that neither of these men uses conventional ethnic designations, which could be understood as divisive. *Begiwoč* is similar to the above-mentioned Gwama term *Isbege*, although their use may have had different aims: *Begiwoč* was used to separate the "local

[183] Interview no. 99
[184] Audio file 003. I got three audio files from an individual who was directly involved in their production. The MPDO leadership had requested these interviews in 1994 to submit to the research committee that investigated the history of Begi (see below). All three interviews were done with individuals from the local community who self-identified as Arab, Komo, and Oromo respectively.

people" (Oromo and Mao) from administrators from outside, and *Isbege* to separate all local non-Oromo people from those who had settled later (Oromo). Political actors used both these terms to argue that Begi should not be administered by the Oromia Regional State. Neither *Begiwoč* nor *Isbege* are ethnic terms in the way the government today defines "nationalities", yet the border we will now discuss has today come to represent an ethnic division between "nationalities".

3.3. Birth of a Border

The border in the middle of the former Begi *Wäräda* that came to separate the people of Oromia from those of Benishangul is, in practice, arbitrary. It attempts to split communities that live intermixed and are not divided according to these exact lines.[185] Thomas Bierschenk argues in the case of Benin that "spatial structures" appear as if they were "'natural' and therefore inevitable, whereas they are nothing but the product of history and culture" (Bierschenk 1999, in Hahonou 2009: 156). In a comparable way, this regional border disregards the co-existence within an ethnically diverse community and ignores various other categories of difference that cut across both ethnic categories and the border. Yet, these differences continue to play a prominent role.

My interlocutors remember the administration of the Begi *Wäräda* as particularly chaotic in 1993 and 1994. In some of the *qäbäle* (sub-districts), both the OPDO and MPDO installed their representatives as chairmen, which caused inefficient administration, unclear responsibilities and a disorganised response to unrest. In August 1994, Prime Minister Tamrat Layne convened a meeting between the regional governments of Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz but this did not settle the dispute over the five contested districts Begi, Wenbera, Manasibu, Gidami, and Anfillo (Meckelburg 2019: 193).[186] The meeting decided that the federal government should establish a neutral research committee to inquire into the history of the area.[187] In December, this committee presented their findings in the presence of representatives from the two regions,

[185] Zelalem (2021: 82) argues that it was not necessarily the inter-ethnic conflict that created the border between Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz in the Kamashi area, but the border fuelled the conflict.
[186] In the meanwhile, Begi had been placed under the sector for regional affairs (*yäkələloč guday zärf*) with a temporary *wäräda* administration that consisted of individuals from other Ethiopian regions (interviews no. 46; 99; 112; 113; 115 – all with former OLF or MPDO *cadres*).
[187] Letter from the Transitional Government 13.12.1994. I obtained the letters of the transitional government from an individual who had been directly involved in the process in 1995. Later, I found some of the same documents in Muluneh Kassa's publication (Muluneh 2021).

among them Harun Soso.[188] Based on the recommendations of the research committee, the Prime Minister signed a letter stating that all the 88 *qäbäle* of Begi *Wäräda* should be included into Benishangul Gumuz Regional State ("Region 6") (Muluneh 2021: 163).[189] I have found no written evidence as to what happened between December 1994 and July 1995, but what seems clear is that the OPDO did not agree with the Prime Minister's verdict. Hence, the government revoked the decision and held a referendum on 2nd July 1995, an event which had substantial consequences for the whole area.[190]

Two Games, One Prize

In Begi, two contrasting paradigms clashed; one that to a greater extent observed the hierarchical divisions created in the time of the Abyssinian Empire, and the other adhering to the logic of ethnic federalism. While all the political actors were required to play the "ethnic game", they had opposing sources of legitimacy. As Donald Donham argues, in the context of the Maale area in southern Ethiopia around the 1974 revolution, power differences create "cleavages along which tensions sometimes build up" (Donham 1994: 157). Donham refers to hierarchies between "lords and their tenants" in labour and production processes. In 1994/95 Begi, my interlocutors experienced such cleavages between groups who played the "ethnic game" and those who mobilised their historical prestige. These tensions negatively affected individuals in the local community who were unable to play any of the "games" – i.e., to claim power through any of the paradigms. For reasons explained in chapter IV, this situation refers in particular to alleged slave descendants. Unable to bridge the "cleavage", they seemed to experience the worst of both worlds.

In the months leading up to the referendum, both the OPDO and the BPLM/MPDO tried to mobilise the community to vote for Oromia or Benishangul Gumuz respectively. Using ethnic rhetoric, the pro-Oromia side obtained an advantage in the contemporary political field. They had a clear argument which appealed to the "imagined community" of the Oromo nation (cf.

[188] Minutes from Regional Affairs Sector 15.12.1994
[189] Letter from the Transitional Government 13.12.1994. Additionally, 28 out of 116 *qäbäle* in Manasibu *Wäräda* and 4 of 41 *qäbäle* of Gidami *Wäräda* were also given to Region 6.
[190] Ethiopian Herald, *Referendum*, 25.06.1995, cf. Asnake, 2009: 225. Written materials from the time of the referendum (flyers, etc.) may have existed but I did not get access to an archive where they can have been stored. The publication of Muluneh Kassa (2021) focuses on policy issues and government structures rather than grassroots campaigns and local perspectives. Hence, I mainly rely on oral testimonies from individuals who were involved.

Anderson 2006). The symbol of the pro-Oromia side, the *oda* tree, is strongly associated with the Oromo people and became important in the "re-ethnicisation" of the Oromo ethnic identity, argues Mekuria Bulcha (1997: 40). The purpose of the *oda* was to remind the people that they "belong to Oromia," told me an OPDO *cadre* and campaigner.[191] The message of the OPDO was simple: "this is Oromo land" and "you are Oromo".[192] This is a relatively typical example of how a referendum may emphasise ethnic rhetoric while administrative structures become a second priority (Fekadu 2009: 212). However, factors other than nationalism were behind the motivation of many political actors as they calculated which practical arrangements would give them more chances to keep their political power.

The argument of the OPDO towards the Mao was that "the Mao and Komo have no difference to the Oromo. Whatever is about the Oromo, is about the Mao and whatever is about the Mao is about the Oromo."[193] This implies that since they had "always" lived together, now was not the time to split, yet it did not guarantee the overcoming of previous inequalities. For some of my Mao interlocutors, the campaign of the OPDO was just a repetition of the OLF's claim that the Mao should become "black Oromo". For others, however, this argument made more sense than the MPDO's attempt to create ethnic unity through the label Mao, as we will see. In any case, since most people in the Begi area self-identify as Oromo, the Oromo ethnic argument resonated with the majority. The small percentage of Mao in the population meant that their vote had a less significant overall effect on the outcome of the referendum, although it played a role in certain villages.

The attempts of the pro-Benishangul Gumuz side to play according to the "rules of the ethnic game" were not always successful. The *cadres* of the MPDO could not appeal to ethnic identification as Mao in the same way as the OPDO for Oromo. The Oromo had experienced a longer history of nationalism and, despite internal diversity, were unified by a common language. By contrast, in imperial times, there had been struggles between the eastern Mao around Kondala/ the Dabus, and the "Arab" elites around Begi and Tongo who also spoke different languages. Starting from the late Derg time, the latter rallied behind the label Mao, while the local communities continued identifying them as "Arab" and not Mao, which obstructed the campaigning for a common "Mao nationality". In the "game" of ethnic

[191] Interview no. 13
[192] Interview no. 98 – a man who campaigned for the MPDO
[193] Interview no. 8 with an individual from Kondala who campaigned for the OPDO

federalism, Mao and Oromo are distinct categories, but so were Mao and Arab. Several of my rural interlocutors told me that they did not understand how their vote for the "Arabs" would be beneficial for their situation. Today, thirty years of ethnic federalism obscured these internal differences between various Mao groups since Arab is not an official category anymore. Yet, as we will see in later chapters, this division still plays a role in practice, for example in marriage and labour relations.

The OPDO *cadres* knew how to exploit this generations-old division between the peasants and the historical rulers. An OPDO *cadre* declared in a rally: "[The MPDO] will bring back the rule of Khojele", who had been famous for his cruel slave raiding, to discredit those who campaigned for the MPDO.[194] It is, therefore, ironic that other OPDO *cadres* also publicly exposed alleged slave descendants who expressed sympathy with the MPDO and told the farmers: "How can you let the slaves [decide]? They were our servants".[195] Underneath the layer of ethnic categories, inequalities that had shaped the social realities in the area for generations did not permit all individuals to pass as "pure". The OPDO seemingly appealed to a wider sense of unity, albeit under the preconditions that players were "eligible" to play the ethnic game.

The MPDO *cadres* tried to leverage positive memories of local relations. They argued that the area from Tongo to Gara Arba (Dabus) had been under the rule of *fitawurari* Kutu Gulja, grandson of Dawd, and that it should remain under those who represented his descendants (Harun Soso and followers).[196] One of the men interviewed for the MPDO in 1994 said: "The Mao people were ruled by Kutu," but not that the area was an *ethnic territory* of Mao.[197] They also held that the area should remain under Asosa, as it had been for generations. Downplaying ethnicity and the tyranny of *sheikh* Khojele, they argued that Asosa was geographically closer and had a smaller (i.e., "easier") bureaucracy than Gimbi or Nekemte in Oromia.

Eventually, the argument of ethnicity and indigeneity did play a role as the *mana* Dawd (descendants of Dawd) were categorised as Mao, i.e., "indigenous" in Benishangul Gumuz.

[194] Interview no. 109
[195] Interview no. 134
[196] Two of the three interviews I got on audio tape conducted by the MPDO in 1994 emphasise that "it was Kutu who had ruled Begi in the first place" and later *al-mak* Soso, son of Kutu (audio files 001 and 003, 1994). Cf. similar arguments by Asnake Kefale (2009: 225).
[197] Audio file 001, 1994 with a descendant from Kutu Gulja. This man identified as Arab but later in the interview agrees that "we are Mao, too".

Some of the MPDO *cadres* tried to appeal to the Maoness of the population. One Oromo man who campaigned for the MPDO argued that Benishangul Gumuz "was established for the five ethnic groups [Berta, Gumuz, Shinasha, Mao, Komo]. Since one of the ethnic groups is found there [in Begi], we need to include it in our region."[198] However, since he identified as Oromo, and many of his fellow MPDO *cadres* as Arab, not all farmers accepted this argument as credible. (The MPDO relied heavily on OLF members who opposed the OPDO but still expressed a strong identification as Oromo.) The farmers did not recognise these *cadres* as representatives of their community and seem to have discovered the contradictory use of different logics. One farmer from Kondala told me how they had felt neglected by both sides in the referendum. "The Mao had nothing," he said as he referred to both material poverty and lack of participation in shaping the political field.[199] He did not trust that they would get any chances, neither by "the Oromo" (the OPDO) nor by "the Arab" (the MPDO).

An example of a failed MPDO campaign in Kondala is that of a *cadre* who had grown up in Nekemte and Asosa. He related:

> We told them [the local people] to choose this one [the ostrich – symbol for Benishangul Gumuz]. And the OPDO said the people should choose that one [the *oda* tree]. Then, when I went and met them there, in Segno Gebeya [Kondala] before the referendum – even the Mao, they had already been [members of] the OPDO. "We want this one [the *oda* tree] over that bird," they said. "This *oda* is better", they said.[200]

Similarly, a farmer from today's Kondala *Wäräda* told me: "It was the *oda* and the big bird. We voted for the *oda* at that time, not the bird."[201] Hence, the disadvantage of the pro-Benishangul side (Kutu's descendants and others) was that they were not as successful in playing the new, "ethnic game", as the pro-Oromia side.[202] They had a paradox to attend to – representing the "heirs" of the rulers of the territory and at the same time seeking to bond with the marginalised Mao communities. There was no common sense of groupness among those who in 1991 all had become Mao and, hence, no common agreement on how to vote.

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[198] Interview no. 99. What this interlocutor said is what he in retrospect remembers from the campaign and therefore also flavoured by present-day discourses.
[199] Interview no. 109
[200] Interview no. 113
[201] Interview no. 109. The symbol for Benishangul Gumuz in the referendum, the ostrich, was not well-known outside the lowland area and did not evoke emotions of belonging or patriotism like the *oda* tree. Muluneh Kassa (2021: 164) cites a government official in Asosa who said that "many of the Mao people who considered themselves as black Oromo voted for Oromia. By contrast, I argue that they may have self-identified as Mao but not seen the MPDO as "the same" as them and the ostrich as their symbol.
[202] For a contrasting argument, see Donham (2011) and Bierschenk (1993) who found that in the Maale area in southern Ethiopia as well as among so-called traditional chiefs in north Benin, tradition and modernity, customary values and party politics, can be part of the same paradigm although they may seem conflicting.

Lastly, the voting pattern in the referendum shows resistance against previous power structures; the Kondala farmers identified Kutu's descendants as former oppressors and, therefore, did not see the value of voting for Benishangul Gumuz.[203] The electorate may further have believed that they had no choice other than to vote for Oromia. "Even the Mao put their vote for Region 4 into the box. [The OPDO] told us how to vote," a farmer related.[204] An OPDO cadre had threatened another of my Mao interlocutors, saying: "The Arabs should not administer us. If you choose the Arabs, you should leave your belongings here and join them."[205] In fear of what may happen, this man ended up voting for Oromia. Additionally, several of my interlocutors from the MPDO/BPLM expressed their frustration on how ill-prepared the party had been and that they had lacked resources and backing from the Benishangul Gumuz regional government which was also internally divided.[206] Consequently, the referendum did not go as planned for the MPDO.

Along with other social stratifications, religious affiliation became important in the struggle for Begi. Although religion plays a different role today than in the Abyssinian Empire, and does not officially feature as a dividing factor, it is significant as a local category of difference. The influence of religion on the 1995-referendum goes beyond the scope of this chapter; religion will be one of the discourses analysed in the following chapter. What can be mentioned here is that the Christians in Begi (Orthodox and Protestant) – a small but rather well-educated and well-positioned elite – seem to have opposed Asosa, not only because of differences in ethnicity but because it was and is still associated with Islam.[207] To my knowledge, all individuals who self-identified as Oromo and cooperated with the MPDO were Muslims. For the Christians, coming under the rule of Asosa was a frightening scenario they did not want to experience.[208] Hence, different religious and ethnic rationales may sometimes support the same political strategy and sometimes split and support different political endgames. Lastly, ethnic rationales were those that exercised the greatest leverage in the current political climate.

[203] We may remember the evidence from Triulzi's interviewees in 1972 in the previous chapter, which states that the Mao of Gara Arba (today Kondala) did not join Kutu in his struggles against the Leqa king Jote Tullu.
[204] Interview no. 137
[205] Interview no. 125
[206] Ethiopian Herald, *Union transforms into party*, 20.03.1994 and *Political organizations in Benishangul-Gumuz reportedly unpopular*, 13.06.1996; Asnake, 2009).
[207] The highland from Mendi to Nekemte is historically a Christian stronghold (Arén, 1999). 80 to 99.5% of the population are Christians (*Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Results for Oromia Region*, 2007) as opposed to the predominantly Muslim Tongo and Asosa areas.
[208] Interview no. 4

The Border

As a result of the referendum on 2nd July 1995, the border between Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia was drawn between Begi and Tongo, and Begi town became part of Oromia. The pro-Benishangul side questions the fairness of the referendum (Asnake 2009: 225; Meckelburg 2019: 193; Muluneh 2021: 164).[209] Whether or not the result was rigged, around two-thirds of the 88 *qäbäle* that Prime Minister Tamrat Layne initially had decided should be part of Benishangul Gumuz became part of Oromia, and with them Begi town. After the referendum, some of the *qäbäle* had to be swapped because they would otherwise have become enclaves in the other region.[210] The swapping of these *qäbäle* appears to have happened in a peaceful agreement between the *wäräda* administrations in Tongo and Begi, outside of public attention. Suddenly, administrative concerns prevailed as villages with a population that was mainly Leqa (who had voted for Oromia) became part of Benishangul Gumuz and were "traded" for enclaves within Oromia Region.[211] Hence, in the final making of this arbitrary border, the arguments of ethnic belonging do not seem to have mattered as much anymore as the focus was on how to effectively administer the territory. Nevertheless, the border dispute between the two regions is not yet over as both regions contend that a territory south of Begi is theirs (Meckelburg 2019: 191; Teferi M. 2021: 23-24; Muluneh 2021: 164-165).[212]

Meanwhile, the Mao Komo *Ləyu Wäräda* ("special district") was established in 1996 as a separate administrative unit within the Benishangul Gumuz Regional State.[213] For the MPDO *cadres*, the dream of having their office in Begi town, the old centre, and administering the whole area as they envisioned Kutu Gulja had done, was shattered. Instead, they moved to the unimportant village of Tongo which was the biggest settlement in the new Mao Komo *Wäräda*. The only positive outcome was that the government upgraded Tongo to a "special" unit, which

[209] One of my interlocutors, a founding member of the MPDO, told me that the OPDO had allegedly made the workers in the polling stations in lowland areas close early and drink *araqe* (local alcohol), but I cannot verify this claim (interview no. 113). Asnake Kefale interviewed politicians and government administrators in Asosa who argue the territory that was given to Oromia "is well beyond the limits of the Beggi referendum" (Asnake 2009: 225).
[210] An example of this is Abshala Dinka *Qäbäle* which voted for Benishangul Gumuz and Wetse Wadesa *Qäbäle* which voted for Oromia but in the outcome of the referendum, the two *qäbäle* were swapped to make them easier to administer from Begi and Tongo, respectively.
[211] Shigogo/ Ishgogo *Qäbäle* was able to change from Oromia to Benishangul Gumuz (interviews no. 99 and 100).
[212] Muluneh (2021) discusses whether Oromia has/ should have a border with South Sudan between Mao Komo special *wäräda* and Gambela, especially concerning the contested *qäbäle* of Kusaye. Meckelburg (2019) discusses four disputed *qäbäle* in Gidami *Wäräda*.
[213] MKDA 002, *A Project Proposal towards the Publicity, Popularization of- and Fundraising & Donation for the Association* (2003)

means that it gets its budget directly from the region and is not administered under a zone. The *wäräda* also grants particular rights to people recognised as indigenous, which means that several government positions are reserved for individuals who are Mao and Komo who can also elect their representatives in the regional parliament (Meckelburg 2019: 195). The government is the main employer in the area and establishing administrative entities is an important part of the state's employment scheme (cf. Donham 2011: 263). On the *wäräda* payroll, there are today more than 1,500 employees.[214]

The MPDO moved their office to Tongo and left Begi for the OPDO. With it, several Oromo *cadres* (some of them former OLF members) joined the MPDO. They figured they would have better chances for continuous government employment under the Benishangul Gumuz government in Asosa (where they had already been engaged before and during the referendum) than with the OPDO government of Oromia. Many are today still working in the *wäräda* administration or in government sectors. Together with them, Mao *cadres* from villages that had not been included in Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* also moved to Tongo. Some were speakers of languages that were not spoken in the newly determined territory of Benishangul Gumuz (Hozo and Seze languages). Most of these *cadres*, who had low education, soon returned to their villages in Oromia. However, there were a few Mao from Oromia with higher education, who remained and became politicians under the label "Mao" in Benishangul Gumuz. Their local communities had not become part of Benishangul Gumuz Regional State, but the party still accepted them as representatives of Mao in this Region.

This means that individuals who already had "political capital" remained in the *wäräda* in Tongo, regardless of their ethnic identification, whereas in Begi, no individual categorised as Mao got any positions. Maoness became an important tool for political advancement for individuals who were able to take advantage of its opportunities depending on both their past and current circumstances. Not all Mao have the same possibilities in their area and, therefore, Maoness may both aid and restrict individuals in their respective regions, as we will now discuss.

[214] This includes teachers, health and agriculture extension workers, and *qäbäle* managers who, in contrast to *qäbäle* chairpersons, are paid by the *wäräda*. Begi has today almost 1,700 government workers (without Kondala which became a separate *wäräda* in 2005). I obtained this information orally from the respective offices in Tongo and Begi in May and December 2021 respectively.

3.4. The Making of Minorities

The 1995 referendum represents a turning point in the history of the Begi area because individuals who before had inhabited the same administrative entity (Begi *Wäräda*) now were divided between two Regional States that implemented contrasting policies. Consequently, the effects of the border are not the same on either side of it. Meckelburg argues that it has "produced a commonly accepted difference" between the regions where there had not been such a clear-cut contrast before (Meckelburg 2019: 204). Below, I will investigate each region and their diverging notions of citizenship separately and how power relations and constitutional practices within the respective regional state influence individuals' access to services and resources. I will then discuss education as an institution that interacts with local hierarchies and creates different opportunities for individuals relative to their social position. However, I will first give a brief general comparison of the regions and how the reasoning behind alleged slave descent conflicts with the logic of ethnic identities.

Most of my interlocutors who identify with the non-dominant nationality in their respective regions – Oromo in Benishangul Gumuz and Mao in Oromia – feel disadvantaged. The main complaint among Oromo in Benishangul Gumuz is that they cannot hold elected government positions due to the quota which favours indigenous peoples although this is not enshrined in the constitution (Benishangul Gumuz Regional State Revised Constitution 2002). However, as we saw above, many Oromo *cadres* from Begi who came to Tongo after the referendum still have governmental positions (though not elected offices). Individuals categorised as Oromo are strongly represented in commerce and salaried positions in government and private enterprises in the region (Beken 2007).[215] In comparison, my Mao interlocutors from Oromia describe exclusion and discrimination, not only based on lack of representation in elected offices, but also in other social interactions. Although both Oromo in Benishangul Gumuz and Mao in Oromia are considered allochthonous, we will below see how concerns other than ethnic categorisation or being "indigenous" play a role for an individual's success. Accessing employment, land, language development, and education is multi-layered; individuals' negotiations for resources exist in a tension between the national and the regional and involves

[215] Christophe van der Beken found that "more than 70% of regional public servants belong to non-endogenous groups" in Benishangul Gumuz Regional State (Beken 2007: 127).

not only considerations of ethnicity but also configurations of hierarchies, such as the legacies of slavery.

According to the logic of ethnic federalism, slave descent is in theory a non-existing social category, yet it matters in practice. What makes it difficult for slave descendants to fit into the system of ethnic federalism is that their alleged slave origin trumps ethnicity as the defining characteristic of their identification.[216] In order to successfully play the "ethnic game", individuals do not only need a certain formal ethnic group membership but also need to convincingly represent that ethnic label, or to be "the game incarnate" (Bourdieu 1990: 63). Several researchers argue that in different areas of Ethiopia, the exclusion of artisans and "classificatory slaves" worsened after 1991 because the focus on ideas of culture and tradition "revive[s] cultural values and local traditions" and, thereby, reinforces divisions between different strata (Epple 2018a: 27; Vaughan 2003; Aalen 2011a; Data 2011). Citizenship in Ethiopia is inseparably linked to membership within an officially recognized nationality; individuals unable to claim "true" or "pure" membership into any one ethnic group have fewer chances to succeed in the "ethnic game" (cf. Aalen 2006; L. Smith 2013). Paradoxically, the introduction of ethnic federalism has, as we will discuss below and in subsequent chapters, increased the influence of hierarchies rooted in alleged ancestral prestige because ethnicity itself is not neutral to historical power relations.

Citizenship and Mao in Oromia

Politics in the Oromia Region exemplifies the paradox of an assimilative system that produces the opposite of what it promises: instead of making everyone equal, it increases inequality (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Kymlicka and Norman 2000; Parekh 2000).[217] The concepts of "Oromia" and "the Oromo people" are seen as fully concurrent as the constitution caters only for the *ummanni Oromoo* ("Oromo people") and no room is left for other "owners of the land" (*abbaa biyyummaa*) (Revised Constitution of the Oromia Region 2001: article 39; Beken 2007: 123). However, only an estimated 88% of the 27 million people living in the region identify as

[216] Meckelburg (2015: 346) discusses how Mao and Komo, as groups previously affected by slavery, are now recognised. However, "[i]t is noteworthy though that it is their 'ethnic identity' and not necessarily a slave identity that is being recognized." However, the intricacies of "pure" and "impure" Mao or Oromo are not considered by either Meckeburg or official classifications within ethnic federalism.

[217] Cf. Mahmood Mamdani (1996) and his account of how early French colonial rule on the one hand promoted social mobility through assimilation while this did not mean the locals could become equal to the French colonisers.

Oromo; the majority of those remaining are categorised as Amhara (Beken 2015: 155).[218] Additionally, the Oromo society is internally stratified; social rank is influenced by alleged slave descent and land ownership, among others (Temesgen Oljira 2018). On the one hand, the ID cards of my Mao interlocutors state "Oromo" as nationality, which means that all citizens of Oromia are the same in principle. On the other hand, what Alfredo González-Ruibal (2014: 370) calls "political disenfranchisement" has to do with the lack of political participation of Mao in Oromia, i.e., that there are no Mao with a higher position in society or politics. Indeed, they may experience brutal discrimination. Hence, they are not "the same".[219]

In the making of Oromia, the idea of a shared "citizenship identity" in the sense of E.K. Hahonou (2011: 77) has not developed among all social groups. "Citizenship identity" refers to inclusion into a political community beyond the narrow legal meaning of citizenship (ibid). The concept of "graduated citizenship" takes into consideration unequal "degrees" of citizenship whereby "some groups of people [are incorporated] more than others" (Samson 2011: 588; cf. Migdal 2006). Meckelburg (2019: 221) characterises Mao in Oromia as "fragile minorities" which places them near the bottom of "graduated citizenship". Harald Eidheim characterises ethnic identities that are "not acted out in institutional inter-ethnic behaviour" as "illegitimate" (Eidheim 1969: 39). I argue that this illegitimacy represents a situation Jean-Loup Amselle warns may lead to a community's "territorial confinement if not its expulsion" (Amselle 1998: 21). Meckelburg substantiates the weakened political potency of Mao with their scattered settlement across three Regional States (Gambela, Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia). While building on this analysis, I instead focus more on how individuals with certain backgrounds (whether Mao or not) have been made more vulnerable ("fragile") in some areas and which role the label Mao plays in their "citizenship identity" negotiations.

The strong nationalist concepts behind the Oromia Region practically impact the opportunities of individuals. One of my interlocutors named Eba Selhadin was *qäbäle* vice-chairperson in a village outside of Kondala during the Derg time. He is now a community elder but only mediates in conflicts within his own Mao community as his prestige from previous times is restricted to the minority group. The *qäbäle* administration has told him that if he, as a Mao,

[218] Amhara people are regarded as "settlers" no matter how many generations they have lived in the region.
[219] Within this thesis, there are different examples of the exclusion and systematic disfavouring of Mao in Oromia: Chapter IV discusses discriminatory discourses and attitudes, among others related to race; chapter V deals with marriage; and chapter VI shows the case of labour.

wants positions like the Oromo, he should go to "his" region (i.e., Benishangul Gumuz) even though Eba has no relations to Mao in Benishangul and speaks a completely different language to the Mao there. One of my interlocutors, an Oromo government official from Kondala, said:

> When they drew the border between Ethiopia and Sudan, they agreed to keep the population settlement where they are, the Berta, Komo, Mao, Seze who had come from Sudan to Ethiopia, to Begi/Kondala, and not to return them to Sudan. […] The Mao, Komo and Berta live in Benishangul Gumuz.[220]

For this administrator, the Mao are immigrants from Sudan who are only tolerated in Oromia and should therefore not expect any special treatment (cf. discourse on autochthony, chapter IV). Hence, Eba is an Ethiopian national, yet feels "stateless" because of the tensions between regional and federal politics which makes him feel that the Ethiopian "rights of nationalities" do not apply to him. He is a member of the "black people of Oromia," as he characterises himself – neither an Oromo nor a citizen of Benishangul.[221]

For the Mao in the Oromia Region, today, requesting farmland or participating in language development becomes a political act, since this automatically is interpreted as demanding recognition in the name of an exogenous group (cf. Beken 2015; Bassi 2014). As so often observed, critics of positive discrimination in favour of minorities fear that any affirmative action will lead to a "politicization of ethnicity" (Kymlicka and Norman 2000: 10) – in the case of Oromia, a politicization of the Mao ethnicity. One of my interlocutors called Horo who identifies as Gadatso (a Mao clan) from around Kondala told me that he tried to argue with the *qäbäle* administration in his village not to write "Oromo" as nationality on his ID card. The answer he got from the government official was: "Oh, are you trying to create another political party [than the OPDO]?"[222] In fear of being accused of *politika* (a term here meaning something like "rebellion"), Horo now keeps silent.

My older interlocutors told me about efforts to develop the Mao language Seze as a written language for school use in the early 1990s, first initiated by the then-MPDO office in Begi and later continued from Tongo and Asosa. Speakers were invited to several workshops but faced obstruction by the government officials in Begi which at that time was already in the hands of the OPDO. An elderly man from a village outside of Kondala related that one time they returned from Tongo a government official had asked: "Where did you get this idea [of language

[220] Interview no. 8
[221] Interview no. 125
[222] Interview no. 185

development]?" After this, "they took us from here and put us in prison in Likiti", today in Kondala *Wäräda* in Oromia.[223] This man then showed me what was left of the booklet they had produced – a simple textbook for Seze.[224] After a few incidents like this, several of my Mao interlocutors have not dared to engage in any effort for language development. The Hozo and Seze languages are not spoken within the current territory of Benishangul Gumuz, and since also the Oromia government ignores these languages, no government takes responsibility.[225] Therefore, neither Hozo nor Seze has, until this day, an official orthography although the local Mekane Yesus Church has started Bible translations. Currently, a project for dictionary building by two NGOs works on the Hozo language (Küspert-Rakotondrainy and Küspert 2022).[226]

The idea of the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* as a territory for the Mao has led to migration from Oromia across the border. However, the more successful migrants may, paradoxically, be individuals who are also more prestigious in Oromia and fit into the societies in both regions. One of them is a young man called Bati who claims ancestry back to Dawd. Bati, like most other individuals from his clan, has a light complexion and is not physically distinguishable from individuals of Macha Oromo descent. He recently moved to Tongo from Begi *Wäräda* to work in the governmental education sector. When he speaks about "the Mao" of Oromia, he does not refer to himself. He identifies the Mao community as "those who are uneducated".[227] However, after Bati came to Tongo, he is recognised as a Mao by the community (and was introduced to me as such) which gives him the prestige of being indigenous. This is because of his descent from Dawd and not because he shares any other "Mao characteristics" such as appearance or language. Hence, Bati has the privilege of being at home in both Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz. The prestige of his descent reinforces the existing privileges of passing as Oromo and Mao in the respective region and it becomes the foundation for social advancement in the contemporary society. He and other members of his clan have, therefore, transitioned into the system of ethnic stratification more successfully than many others.

[223] Interview no. 187
[224] The book had been kept badly and many pages were missing, but it looked like a primer for the Seze language, written in the Amharic alphabet.
[225] In Oromia, *afaan Oromoo* is the language of instruction and English and Amharic are taught as second and third languages (MoE 2002: 39).
[226] The Norwegian Mission Society has worked on an unofficial orthography since 2019 and begun work on dictionary building for the Hozo language (*Ak'mo Wandi*) through SIL.
[227] Interview no. 104

Poor farmers may find it significantly harder to migrate to Benishangul Gumuz, but it happens.[228] There is today a small Mao diaspora community from Hofa Fargashi in Kondala *Wäräda*, Oromia, which lives in Mimi Yakobo *Qäbäle* in the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda*. Hussein Lelisa, a Seze-speaking man from Fargashi was among the thirteen Mao households that got land from the *qäbäle* in Yakobo in 2002.[229] Among the families that moved with Hussein, none were categorised as slave descendants. Those were, after all, "Oromo" and had no reason to claim special status in Benishangul Gumuz Region, relates Hussein. The families of Oromia Mao migrants in Yakobo today are multilingual and speak their languages Seze or Hozo in addition to Oromo and the local language Gwama. The community has grown to seventeen households, mainly through intermarriage with the local Mao population.

Hussein explains why he wants to live in Benishangul Gumuz instead of in Oromia:

> Our *zegənät* [Amh., "citizenship"] is *yätäshäfänä näw* ["covered" or "hidden"] there [in Oromia]. We have no *zegənät*. Here, when we go to school, we can register as Mao. Our *bəheräsäb* ["nationality"] is understood here.[230]

Hence, what matters for Hussein is that he is allowed to be Mao in Benishangul Gumuz. What he means by *zegənät* is the recognition that he is Mao and not Oromo. Hussein interprets being allowed to "be Mao" as a protection of his dignity or "recognition" (Honneth, 2004: 352). Hussein accepts that his children learn Gwama in school in Mimi Yakobo, besides Amharic and English, even though the language everyone knows best in the settlement is Oromo – a language not officially used in school. The "citizenship identity" connected to being members of a group called Mao and the ability to claim rights as Mao, such as land, is of utmost importance to Hussein and the other diaspora members. Citizenship has become increasingly contested over the last years, as conflicts that use ethnic arguments have become more violent.

Several of my interlocutors claimed that Oromo nationalism grew more aggressive in 2018, when the then-leader of the Oromo Democratic Party (former OPDO), Abiy Ahmed, became Prime Minister of Ethiopia. A young man from Tongo expressed: "Abiy came to power and the

[228] I have heard several stories of failed attempts to migrate from Oromia to Benishangul Gumuz. Most of them tell how the government in Begi refused to permit the Mao to migrate. My interlocutors interpret this as discrimination against Mao (interviews no. 109, 125, 137).
[229] The move was triggered by one of Hussein's neighbours who visited his mother's family in Mimi Yakobo and learned that there was spare land there (his Mao/Kwama mother had been given in marriage to Fargashi).
[230] Interview no. 21. The above quote was taken from my notes of the Amharic translation as I did not record the interview where Hussein spoke in Oromo, upon his request. Hence, the terms I use here are in Amharic. I visited the quarter Fargashi in Mimi Yakobo three times during my fieldwork and interviewed five individuals – two women and three men. I met Hussein all three times.

people said we [Mao] are baboons. '[The Mao] are under us' [the Oromo said]. Everything is under the Oromo since the Prime Minister is Oromo."[231] At the same time, thugs and guerrilla groups that sympathised with the Oromo Liberation Army/Front (OLA/OLF-Shane) made villages increasingly insecure, especially in the Oromia Region.[232] Most of my Mao interlocutors in Oromia expressed fear of being drawn into politics; they keep their heads low to not become targets of harassment. However, in Benishangul Gumuz too there have been increasingly frequent clashes between groups who identify with an indigenous ethnicity such as Gumuz and groups identifying as Oromo.[233] The latter believe that their rights are restrained because they are non-indigenous (exogenous) in the region, whereas the former are frustrated because of lack of opportunities and express anger against more dominant groups they call "Amhara" or "Oromo". Similarly, young people in the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* fear that radical Oromo nationalism will one day lead to the same discrimination that Mao people are experiencing in Oromia today, since the Mao and Komo are, officially, minorities in their "own" district. This has led to violent incidents, albeit smaller than in, for example, Metekel Zone in Benishangul Gumuz.[234]

Mao Komo Special Wäräda*: Everyone is a Minority*

The name "Mao Komo Special *Wäräda*" raises the expectations that the territory "belongs to the Mao and Komo ethnic groups" and is governed by them (Asnake 2009: 225). Government administrators operate according to the rule of thumb that 50% of the elected positions should be held by individuals who are Mao and 50% by Komo. However, the *wäräda* may decide to open some positions as *qäbäle* chairperson or *wäräda* sectoral office head to individuals who identify differently ethnically (e.g., Oromo or Berta). Furthermore, the community does not accept all Mao or Komo who hold government positions as "real" Mao or Komo. One insider in the *wäräda* told me that he does not regard six out of ten *wäräda* sectoral office heads who

[231] Interview no. 86
[232] The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), also called OLF-Shane or *Onäg-Shane*, officially split from the OLF in 2018 and represents the organisation's more violent and radical wing (www.borkena.com, *OLF condemns OLA "violence" in Oromia, Ethiopia*, 31.08.2021).
[233] Ethiopia Observer, *Ethnic killing in restive Benishangul-Gumuz region*, 24.11.2018; AP News, *More than 100 killed in latest ethnic massacre in Ethiopia*, 23.12.2020; Ethiopia Insight, *EIEP: Marginalization and persecution in Ethiopia's Benishangul-Gumuz*, 10.08.2021; cf. Bekalu Atnafu, 2017.
[234] Interview no. 107

hold their positions as Mao and Komo as "true".[235] These individuals have a light complexion and do not speak any language considered indigenous in the region (they speak Oromo). They all identify as Mao because their lineage goes back to Dawd. Discourses about authenticity will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Nasir Worku, a man born in the lowland of the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* and who self-identifies as black, feels underrepresented because only a few individuals he considers to be "his people" hold political offices. However, he has problems expressing this because "the Mao" (a term he has learned he needs to use about himself) are already recognised as a group, i.e., they have received rights. For Nasir, the system of ethnic federalism makes it difficult to address non-ethnic inequalities that have lingered since the *ancien régime*, such as the rural/urban divide, differences of complexion or slave descent since this system does not tackle inequalities based on features that are not typically "ethnic" (Ephrem 2020: 398). Yet, instead of arguing that the ethnic system is flawed, Nasir uses the same logic to "resist". He and others in the same situation argue that the leaders "are not 'pure' [Mao]". They say this to discredit the Maoness that these leaders claim so that they can hold offices as "indigenous".[236] Said differently, Nasir accuses them of cheating the game. What he wants to express is that there are individuals from clans and families who look and speak differently from him, who have been prestigious for generations and still have political power.

Individuals who represent political elites in Benishangul Gumuz are today frequently targeted by this kind of argumentation. Idris Zakariya, a former politician in the Special *Wäräda*, expresses a feeling of not having been welcomed as a Mao politician among Gwama-speaking communities because he is an Oromo-speaker who grew up in Begi. He felt that the fact that he received a scholarship earmarked for Mao was used against him, as he came from a well-off family. He relates:

> In the beginning, I didn't think about defining myself [ethnically]. Then I came into this "identity crisis". Today, they say that being a true Mao […] does not include me. I know that. They write that on social media. They say that we are not true Mao. […] They say we

[235] The *wäräda* cabinet in Tongo had several vacancies and thirteen occupied offices in October 2020. My informant identified two of the sectoral office heads as Berta and one as Oromo (07.10.2020). Obtaining information on this issue was difficult since it is considered politically sensitive.
[236] Interview no. 28. One of my other interlocutors also complained that the *wäräda* has been unable to recruit individuals from rural areas who speak Komo and so "all the black people are put into the office as Komo but we are Mao" (interview no. 105).

> just do [politics] for *ənjära*.[237] […] When I did my work, people didn't judge me according to what I did, but they said: "Oh, but you're not Mao!" They just talked like that. I didn't want to believe in that political game full of lies. I wanted to do something for the people.[238]

Idris left politics because he felt that it had become more important whether or not someone was a "true Mao or Komo" rather than their credentials and the result of their work. He can be counted among the individuals who have inherited political prestige from past regimes and who today feel they do not fit properly into the new "game" with rules based on ethnicity. Yet, most government offices in Tongo and Asosa are still headed by individuals with a similar background to Idris, from families of imperial landowners who became traders under the Derg and government clerks today. This exemplifies the continued prestige of their families.

This division of society is not reflected in government representations. For example, the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* presents certain rural traditions as the "culture" of its inhabitants although not all "Mao" have the same lifestyle. On the wall of the *wäräda* office in Tongo, photographs of women with bare breasts brewing local alcohol are displayed. However, the majority of the people in the *wäräda* neither go bare-breasted nor brew and drink local alcohol, and it is not certain that all their ancestors did so either. A booklet written by Abosh Mustefa (2014), a Mao politician from Tongo, uses images and examples of customs from the rural lowland towards Sudan, which are not practised around Tongo, to illustrate the "Mao/Kwama culture". Interestingly, the lowland people whose traditions are portrayed, do not use the designation "Mao" about themselves, yet, they have become the "museum case Mao" of Benishangul Gumuz Regional State. The Mao Komo Development Association describes the Mao lifestyle and agriculture as "backwards" and "primitive".[239] This portrayal supports processes of "group-making as a project" surrounding the idea of a common cultural heritage (Brubaker 2004: 13). Simultaneously, it rallies support for these "marginalised" communities (regardless of whether the main beneficiaries are the neediest).

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[237] *Ənjera* (alternative spellings: injera/enjera) is the Ethiopian flatbread that is eaten for most meals and is seen as the standard staple food across the country. The expression "doing something for *ənjära*" can be used for any action done to get positions or material gains, usually with negative connotations.

[238] Interview no. 111. The interviews and conversations with Idris were in Amharic, but he used words like "identity crisis" in English.

[239] MKDA 002, *A Project Proposal…* (2003): 4; 9. By far not all members of this association, or inhabitants of the *wäräda* in general, represent the description of a "low stage of development". On the contrary, most individuals active in the Association are not from the rural and impoverished lowlands and may have a lifestyle much closer to what is considered "typically Oromo" (interview no. 177 with an individual who has a high position in the association in Asosa).

The ethnic game tends to merge individuals and communities into the same ethnically defined categories, even though historically they occupied different ranks in local hierarchies of prestige. Affirmative action designed to support historically underprivileged ethnic groups in Benishangul Gumuz may, therefore, partly, or principally, benefit the "ethnopolitical entrepreneurs" who profit from the creation of "Mao" as an ethnic category with certain privileges such as scholarships and subsequent employment without necessarily being those who have historically been the most disadvantaged. However, not only "ethnopolitical entrepreneurs" have profited from the protection of the Mao and Komo identities, but also others who have been able to transition into ethnic federalism by keeping or gaining prestige, an issue which we will continue to discuss in the next section on education.

Several rural Mao have managed to enter government positions, such as my interlocutor, Kareem Otman, who became chairperson in a *qäbäle* close to Tongo. Kareem is not among the wealthiest in the area, but his father was a landowner (*qorro*) and Kareem enjoys a good reputation in his local community. Hence, his position is conducive to upward social mobility through the political system, and he can be counted among the winners of ethnic federalism. Those who have benefitted the least are Kareem's neighbours whom the community believes descend from slaves of a local family. Their standard of life and working conditions as day labourers have not improved over the last generation because they cannot successfully play either "game". They remain landless, without education or chances for upward marriage. In the example of Mao Komo Special *Wäräda*, we can see that the "ethnic game" neither benefits only the elites, nor is it exclusively a means for upward social mobility for disadvantaged strata.

Despite their currently privileged situation, politically active individuals in Asosa fear that they as representatives of smaller ethnic groups will lose influence in the new Prosperity Party, established in December 2019. They are no longer guaranteed seats through their ethnic group membership; participation in the Prosperity Party is not primarily based on ethnicity.[240] However, Mao from Oromia and rural people from Benishangul Gumuz who are not politically prestigious and who have not equally profited from the protection of their ethnic identities have less to lose. In general, the opinion among my interlocutors is that the philosophy of Abiy Ahmed (2019) called *Mädämär* ("synergy") is favourable for individuals and groups who do

[240] Interview no. 123 and several informal conversations.

not benefit much from ethnic federalism as it is today.[241] As we have seen, some individuals and communities have remained the main losers in both the old and the new "game" and find themselves disadvantaged in society, politics and also in education, which we will now turn to.

3.5. Education and Persisting Inequalities

The education sector in Ethiopia is decentralised, making regions, zones, and districts responsible for certain decisions, for example, regarding the language of instruction (Workneh 2012; Portela and Abrehet 2020). Corresponding with the constitution, the federal education policy recognises the rights of all of Ethiopia's nationalities to learn in their chosen language (Constitution of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1994, §39:1-2; MoE 1994; MoE 2002). In Oromia, *afaan Oromoo* is the only language of instruction in schools. In Benishangul Gumuz, the six languages of the (five) indigenous nationalities are used in selected schools (Appendix B, table 4). While the more prominent languages are developed as languages of instruction (Gumuz; Benishangul; Shinasha), in the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda*, the languages Gwama and Komo have only recently been introduced as subjects in grades 1 and 2 in ten rural, primary pilot schools because of a shortage of trained teachers and materials.[242] In schools that do not instruct in the mother tongue, Amharic and English are used. In general, the Benishangul Gumuz Regional State makes an effort to include marginalised communities and accommodate for different language groups. Overall, this has provided more opportunities for children from vulnerable backgrounds than the Oromia education policy has, although the practical execution faces substantial obstacles.[243]

Education is a battleground for political power struggles. The decision that children should learn in their mother tongue in Ethiopia is not only motivated by pedagogical priorities but is also a politically charged decision based on the demand of groups that represent various Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (Teshome 1999; Daniel and Abebayehu 2006; Küspert-Rakotondrainy 2016). According to Tekeste Negash (1996), education in Ethiopia is not the

[241] The Amharic word *mädämär* means "synergy" and refers to the idea of creating inclusion and transcending narrow ethnic categories.
[242] Speakers of Berta, Gumuz, and Shinasha together account for 50% of the population in Benishangul Gumuz (BoFED 2017). These are used as the language of instruction up to grade 4 in selected schools. In this chapter, I only refer to government schools. These are mixed boys' and girls' schools and usually the only school available in the surrounding. Only in bigger towns or cities are there private schools.
[243] Interview no. 123 and other oral information from the Regional Education Bureau in Asosa, 09-10.02.2021.

meritocratic institution often promoted in government policies, a position also acknowledged world-wide. However, the Begi area also shows a special circumstance: The regional border has led to diverging education policies on either side, while the hierarchies that were in place before the border continue to influence opportunities of children. Hence, the possibility for a child to make use of opportunities depends not only on the policy itself but also on how the policy favours and disfavours certain identities in the two regions. For example, different measures have been established to promote children from indigenous groups in Benishangul Gumuz with the argument that they have been systematically neglected for generations.[244] Nevertheless, the opportunities created for them, such as quotas, are not necessarily utilised by the most disadvantaged and have been taken advantage of by individuals from both regions.

To illustrate how the education policies in the two regions differ, and yet may not significantly improve the chances of individuals with an inferior starting point, we will look at the case of two girls, Sude and Tamima.[245] They are cousins and live on either side of the regional border; Sude in Begi *Wäräda* and Tamima in Mao Komo Special *Wäräda*, three hours apart on foot. Sude, who is in seventh grade in her school in Oromia, is one of only two Mao students left in the school – all others having dropped out for various reasons.[246] Sude does not consider her future chances to be promising as a Mao girl in Oromia and talks about how she and other Mao students are excluded and treated discriminatorily by both students and teachers (all Oromo).[247] Sude told me she wished she had some role models to look up to – especially girls or women with a similar background who had been successful, but she does not know any.

Sude's and Tamima's expectations for their future are quite similar even though Tamima goes to school in a region where Mao is a recognised nationality. Tamima's parents are illiterate. Her school has now introduced Gwama, her mother tongue, as a subject in the lower grades, and her younger brothers are learning to write it. However, since their mother tongue teacher

[244] MKDA 002, *A Project Proposal* (2003); interviews no. 123 and 152 with education authorities in Asosa.
[245] The girls claimed they were already eighteen years old and participated with full consent in the research. Their parents were also consulted and gave their consent.
[246] For more on child labour, see Tilahun and Abebe (2019). Reasons for drop-out are many, such as helping at home, economic difficulties, and marriage, but also, especially for children from families with a low education level, expectations from society and the teachers that these children will not succeed anyway.
[247] One of her classmates had allegedly said to Sude: "Why don't you just drop out of school like the other Mao?" (interview no. 32). Many of my interlocutors told stories of how the teachers had given them materials of less quality or unfair grades because, as they interpret it, they are Mao, and the teachers are all Oromo. This resonates with a story recorded by Meckelburg about a Mao girl in Oromia who was not promoted to college, allegedly because she was Mao (Meckelburg 2019: 208).

does not have a formal teacher's training and is often absent, their learning achievements are quite meagre. Tamima knows that her parents cannot afford to pay for her continued education in the town after grade eight. There are few jobs available for a poor girl from the countryside with some secondary schooling. As the most realistic choice for Tamima is to get married to a relatively successful farmer; whether or not she can write Gwama is irrelevant to her. In the end, neither Sude nor Tamima see how they may achieve upward social mobility through education. Tamima may enjoy school slightly more since she is not the only Mao girl, but she is painfully aware that her family does not have the same prestige as her Oromo or Kiring ("Tongo Mao") teachers. In imperial times, these groups and the rural Mao like Tamima had completely different social positions, and the Derg did not eradicate these inequalities, thus making them still relevant today.

A contrasting example to that of Sude and Tamima is the case of the above-mentioned former politician, Idris Zakariya, who grew up around Begi town. His mother tongue is Oromo, but his father is related to the clan of Harun Soso (i.e., Mao). In the early 2000s, two boarding schools opened in Benishangul Gumuz Region (in Kamashi and Pawe) along with a more prestigious one in Addis Ababa.[248] The "higher adult boarding school" (*ədgät yägulmasoč adari təməhərt bet*) in Addis Ababa was administered by the federal government and reserved for students from the four so-called *tadagi kələloč* (developing regions), Benishangul Gumuz, Gambela, Afar and Somali. It was generally understood that the students attending any of these three schools from Benishangul Gumuz should be indigenous, i.e., Berta, Gumuz, Shinasha, Mao or Komo.[249] Idris got a scholarship for Addis Ababa together with students from the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* (although he was from Begi in Oromia) who were, like him, mainly from prestigious families (mostly Kiring/ *mana* Dawd). He finished tenth grade, got a government scholarship for further education and became a government functionary in Tongo and later Asosa.

Meanwhile, the *wäräda* office in Tongo started campaigns to select lowland youth to be educated on the quota the *wäräda* had received from the Region. It was up to the respective

[248] The boarding school in Kamashi was for boys and the one in Pawe was for girls. These were under the authority of the Regional Education Bureau in Asosa (interview no. 120 with an official at the Regional Education Bureau in Asosa).

[249] When examining the documentation at the Regional Education Bureau (REB) on students sent to Kamashi and Pawe, the majority is categorised as indigenous but also a significant number of "others" (*leloč*) have been chosen from families with economic difficulties or orphans (REB 001, *Letter from Pawe school to REB Asosa*, 11.11.2020, with an attachment that shows the number of students sent to Pawe between 2016 and 2020). These "others" are identified as mainly Oromo or Amhara by the REB staff.

local offices to choose these students in cooperation with their teachers. My interlocutor, Nasir, from a lowland village, was one of the selected students. He also received the instruction to recruit other clever lowland students. However, Nasir is not the only one who complains that "the majority [of the recruited students] were [still] those who do not speak [the Gwama and Komo languages] and are 'red' [have a light skin complexion]".[250] What Nasir means is that most of the students who got scholarships were not connected to rural "Mao/Kwama" lifestyle and traditions, but from families who were removed from his definition of Maoness as they had grown up in the towns Begi and Tongo or outside of the area and were, in general, better off, such as Idris.

The effects of schooling in Western Ethiopia differ depending on the social position of the students. Those who belong to the rural, often disadvantaged, population, regardless of whether they use a minority language in school, do not experience education the same way as do students from more privileged communities, who thrive no matter the education policy. In Benishangul Gumuz, the two principles – one that grants the use of minority languages and another that promotes "indigenous peoples", for example for scholarships – serve different groups. Urban elites have rarely taken advantage of the introduction of minority languages, which are mainly used in rural areas. They may not speak Gwama and deem other skills and languages more important. Furthermore, the coverage of mother tongue education and the quality of teaching and materials is not sufficient.[251] Many speakers of Gwama feel underrepresented today because government scholarships were given to individuals who were sons (and to a lesser extent, daughters) of previous elites who in turn got government positions. It is therefore not only the education policy that matters but also the ability to make use of the possibilities provided and access benefits that make a difference for future chances (Bourdieu 2006).

In Oromia, the use of the Oromo language in school often aggravates the already present gap between prestigious and less prestigious groups. Children from Mao-speaking homes may feel particularly vulnerable because they do not possess the right "cultural capital" which is appropriate and valued in the context of education in Oromia (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990;

[250] Interview no. 28

[251] Cf. school observation at schools in Mimi Yakobo (20.02.2021) and Bambasi (22.05.2021); interviews with teachers (interviews no. 16, 53, and 175) and with *wäräda* and regional education staff (interviews no.89 and 123). The Regional Education Bureau is engaged in increasing the quality and coverage of mother tongue education by producing teaching materials and providing teacher training.

Bourdieu 2006).[252] However, Oromo-speaking children, from families of alleged slave descent, for example, also feel disadvantaged in school. They may experience bullying based on their complexion and/ or descent or because their parents are poor and have no formal education, despite formally being Oromo and hence, "titular" in the region.[253] All of my interlocutors from Mao-speaking families (Seze, Hozo, or Gwama) in Oromia expressed a strong wish for language development. It is not necessarily the pedagogical advantage of learning the mother tongue that matters the most but the recognition of Mao people as indigenous and, hence, recognition of regional citizenship. Distancing themselves from alleged slave descendants, who usually speak Oromo, is another important underlying reason (cf. Küspert-Rakotondrainy and Küspert 2022).

While the social position of already privileged families largely survived the changes in education policies in the 1990s, those in the community who had previously been disadvantaged remain so today. Education policy and measures for minority language development differ greatly on either side of the regional border. Nonetheless, the same inequalities can be witnessed on both sides since the stratification, to which society adheres, is older than the regional border. This is why Mao girls like Sude and Tamima do not have significantly different experiences in education even though they go to school in two different regions. Today, Mao/Kwama communities in Benishangul Gumuz start to demand that education should pay attention to inequalities within the Mao category, e.g., between urban and rural or between those with prestigious ancestry and those without (cf. Nasir's "resistance"). Part of this may entail language development, but more importantly, government employment for Mao that are not "Kiring" or similar. These individuals may achieve what most Mao in Oromia have not and cannot achieve – upward social mobility through the structures of ethnic federalism.

[252] Bourdieu argues that school systems are designed to reproduce hierarchies in society which enables elites to benefit from it and hence keep their socially superior position. I will here not go into detail on the discrimination and exclusion reported on the basis of speaking Mao languages in Oromia (cf. González-Ruibal 2014; Küspert-Rakotondrainy and Küspert 2022).
[253] Interview no. 72, 76, 91, and 108 with students from Oromia

3.6. Conclusion

Historical power relations and hierarchies between social groupings and families with different ancestries continue to play a role in social and political interactions in the area of the former Begi *Wäräda*. Ethiopia's constitution builds on the assumption that the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia operate as unified entities or groups. When one nationality is recognised as indigenous or titular in a territory, this should give positions or benefits to those who are members of that nationality. This presupposes that inequality in Ethiopia was and is based on the "oppression" (*č̣əqun*) of certain ethnic groups by other ethnic groups under previous regimes and that equality can now be achieved by recognising their rights.[254] However, labels like Mao function as flexible categories and not necessarily as unified ethnic groups; Maoness supports individuals from families with social prestige to succeed in politics and education whereas individuals with low-status backgrounds experience negative effects of Maoness. Consequently, group rights for Mao have not benefitted everyone who identifies as Mao. With that said, the refusal to recognise any identity other than Oromo in the Oromia Regional State, coupled with a territorial understanding of citizenship, has created a hostile environment for individuals identified as Mao or not "pure Oromo" in this region.

This chapter has examined how some individuals have more successfully than others used the political paradigm shift to their advantage. It has investigated political transformations in the struggle over the Begi *Wäräda* to discuss how social and political elites have prevailed in different ways at different times. After the fall of the Derg and the growth of Oromo nationalism that laid claim to both territory and positions, political actors with various ethnic affiliations engaged in a countermovement. These so-called "ethnopolitical entrepreneurs" mobilised the label Mao to demand control over Begi; the new political system had created an incentive to become Mao. The subsequent struggle over this *wäräda* in the early 1990s, which local communities portray and remember as that of two "ethnic groups" disputing rightful ownership of the land, was a struggle for control over a central administrative entity in which individuals on either side would be able to appoint and elect leaders they considered their own. The conflict ended with dividing the district into two after a referendum in 1995. Elites on either side filled the respective political positions whereas the situation for much of the rural population did not change considerably to start with. The example of education illustrates how the policies in the

[254] TPLF Manifesto, 1976; OLF Party Programme of 1976, PP MS 282207132, SOAS.

two Regional States are contrasting yet continue to favour prestigious social strata across ethnic categories.

Different logics of prestige and citizenship, various systems of social categorisation, and contradicting interpretations of history influenced local political processes in the struggle for Begi. The prestigious political functions of Maoness only co-exist with stigmatising connotations of the same category. Hence, as much as old and new logics of social stratification favour the already prestigious, they have a restricting effect on upward social mobility for individuals whose ancestry is considered inferior or "impure", especially if they are not "titular" in a certain territory. For individuals who end up as losers of both the paradigm ("game") of ancestral prestige and ethnic ranking are at a double disadvantage; they can gain opportunities neither through ancestry nor ethnicity (cf. Crenshaw 2003). Individuals who occupy different positions in the social hierarchy do not all have the same ability to choose which connotations of Mao apply to them since Maoness means to an individual what their social position represents. These various meanings of Mao are part of discourses that shape relations of prestige and immaterial power in society. In the next chapter, we will explore the puzzle of the Mao category by examining social discourses and how they apply to individuals with diverse backgrounds in the two Regional States and, thereby, transcending the ethnic and political dimension of Maoness.

CHAPTER IV – THE IMMATERIALITY OF POWER: MAONESS, STIGMA, AND PRESTIGE

4.1. Introduction

The label Mao refers to a broad diversity of statuses, positions, and identities. This chapter is about the multi-layered discourses of Mao positionality in relation to the politics of autochthony, the long-term legacy of slavery and religious conversion. In the previous chapter, we saw how individuals with significantly diverse backgrounds began affiliating with the category "Mao" while this identity kept its multiple meanings. Maoness may be associated with a rural, poor, and despised people – descendants of a population considered enslavable (cf. Meckelburg 2019: 126). However, as we will discuss in more depth, local communities also regard Mao as an honourable category, related to positive characteristics such as indigeneity, purity of ancestry, and religious piety.

Individuals may be subjects of honour or targets of stigma depending on how they negotiate notions of immaterial power. While the previous chapters discussed how Maoness interacts with politics and access to services, this chapter moves beyond ethnicity to take a wider perspective on social stratification in the former Begi *Wäräda* and how being a "true Mao" or a "real firstcomer" affects individuals' entitlement to honour and power. It goes deeper into the socio-cultural logics mobilised when high or low status is attributed on grounds of heredity, racialisation, and faith and argues that Maoness has become a manifestation of a sense of self, expressed through judgements of descent and ancestral status. In Foucauldian terms (Foucault 1982), we could say that whoever is categorised as Mao is attached to specific discourses that define how Maoness should be exercised in particular circumstances; individuals take part in shaping this power within which they manoeuvre their own subjectivities.

Discourses of descent function as the overall frame within which categorisations happen; individuals are not mainly categorised as Mao because of their specific language, appearance, customs, or personality (although often articulated this way), but because they believe they descend from Mao ancestors. Yet, who is a "Mao ancestor" is negotiable since Maoness itself is a flexible and ambiguous concept. Therefore, the label Mao does not do the same for everyone

who is classified as such, except insofar as it excludes Oromo ancestry. The wish among individuals who self-identify as Mao to distinguish themselves from the Oromo is not necessarily due to any inherent honour within Mao but rather based on the value of having a "true" ancestry, be it Mao or Oromo. Owned, borrowed, or invented – descent is mobilised, contested, and renegotiated in the discourses this chapter covers, namely autochthony, slavery, and religion.[255] The three discourses are interlinked and provide different rationales that contribute to "making status". I will approach this discussion from the perspective of networks and boundaries, meaning that Maoness creates different patterns or connections depending on the "assemblage" rather than the nature of what is assembled (Latour 2005: 43).

The first discourse investigates autochthony and how individuals seek to increase their social prestige by emphasising their authenticity as firstcomers. Being "truly indigenous" enables individuals associated with the rural world, who are at a social and economic disadvantage, to consider themselves morally superior compared with so-called "ethnopolitical entrepreneurs" (cf. chapter III). Furthermore, autochthony creates distance to associations of slave descent. By default, slaves cannot be autochthones since "no one knows their *zär*" (ethnicity/ancestry), as the second discourse on slavery argues.[256] Individuals may consider successfully claimed Maoness more honourable than being an Oromo whose ancestry is in doubt (i.e., alleged slave descendants, often called "black Oromo"). Many Mao believe that slave descendants are more likely to be Christians because they or their ancestors converted when they worked for Christian Oromo families. They consider being a pious Muslim a sign of honour since the local rulers in the area were Muslims. Within the third discourse on religion, we will examine how individuals who have converted to Protestant Christianity may use the church as a platform to engage with their Mao identity. They may emphasise their "non-Oromoness" and, thereby, demonstrate that they are honourable Mao instead of "black Oromo". Together, these three discourses explore how individuals who self-identify as Mao use similar logics of heredity and non-Oromoness yet are not uniform in their strategies and performances of this label vis-à-vis social values of honour and power.

There is both prestige and stigma associated with Maoness as not all connotations of Mao are applicable or attainable to all bearers of the label. "Stigma" is here understood as a difference

[255] There are important dimensions or discourses, other than these three, relevant to the category Mao. One of them is education, which was addressed from a political angle in the preceding chapter.
[256] Interview no. 31

in a certain context, related to an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" (Goffman 1963: 3). For example, an implied discrediting attribute may be an association with enslavability or servantry, suggested through an individual's geographical origin, skin complexion or lack of "biologically credible" clan (i.e., lack of ancestry). Mao does not represent one stratum in a neatly organised hierarchy where the various social categories have fixed positions like researchers may portray the situation of occupational groups in Ethiopia (Data 2007: 15; Bosha 2018: 65). Hence, the situation of Mao is contrasting to Luis Dumont's (1970) structuralist logic in which hierarchies are portrayed as "holistic" or "totalizing" (Feuchtwang 2016: 81; Appadurai 1988: 41). Instead, this chapter demonstrates that it is more constructive to regard hierarchies as contextual and dynamic (Flanagan 1989; Peacock 2015). Several characteristics may simultaneously contribute to an individual's oppression and exclusion (Crenshaw 2003). Furthermore, certain hierarchies are more visibly present in specific instances but are not necessarily prevalent in all ordinary interactions. Therefore, this chapter will not only focus on Mao as a label and the hierarchies within which Mao is one of the categories but how its meanings shift in discourses relative to its bearer's social position.

Some Mao may fulfil the ideals required to obtain honour and prestige; others will not have the possibility to aspire to such status. "Honour" (Amh.: *kəbər*), as a concept explored in this chapter, can be described as a voluntary admiration ascribed to individuals who have either accomplished something extraordinary or who are particularly respectable, for example, because of their reputable genealogy. Maoness may be used to pursue honour because it reinforces an individual's sense of dignity and integrity as opposed to alleged slave descendants. A concept that complements hereditary "honour" is "authority" or (political) power (Amh.; *səlṭan*) which is attributed to individuals in higher positions, for example in politics. Compared with "honour", "authority" is understood as a more temporary, competitive quality used as a currency for social mobility. Yet both have practical implications for what individuals can achieve or become and both relate to how individuals' status as "indigenous" is judged. Mao people of low and high status utilise their identities in contrasting ways in the pursuit of honour and/ or power depending on what their situation permits. This chapter does not discuss gendered differences regarding honour and power although there are aspects of social life where women and men are held to different standards. The aim is to focus on issues

that affect the category "Mao" in general while the next chapter discusses the practical implications of honour for women and men in matters of kinship.[257]

Analysing discourses and counter-discourses allows us to interpret the meanings behind terms and expressions, and how they are shaped by power relations (Clifford 1986; Jackson 1989; Wodak 2001). Norman Fairclough argues that language is social in the sense that it is both structured by society as well as structuring it (Fairclough 2010). Understanding discourses is one step towards understanding social hierarchies; language is never external to society – indeed, language is part of what comprises "the social" (Fairclough 2001: 18; Latour 2005: 83). While exploring and interpreting at times conflicting discourses related to hierarchies in the former Begi *Wäräda*, I seek to use the voices of my interlocutors to grasp the debates that are taking place (cf. Tsing 1993). The discussion will acknowledge the "polyvocality" or "competing voices" within the three discourses (autochthony, slavery, and religion) and will make room for multiple points of view (Clifford 1986: 15; A. Smith 2004: 251). The narratives this chapter examines are ambiguous, contradictory, and incoherent because they are unconscious ideas shared by many people rather than explicit arguments. They are furthermore inseparable from their practical implications discussed in the two following chapters on marriage and labour.

4.2. Discourses on Autochthony and Honour

The category Mao has been shaped through different encounters. I see it not as an encounter *between* Mao and outsiders but as an encounter that *created* Mao. Mao seems to function almost exclusively through its boundaries to other categories, such as Oromo, rather than its "cultural content". In the western part of the settlement (Tongo area), the community also marks a distinction between those they believe to descend from the "original" population ("Mao") as opposed to "Arab" immigrants who adopted the label Mao only at a later stage. Yet, individuals associating with any of the categories Mao, Oromo, or Arab may claim autochthony based on different criteria.

[257] Ideals of being "authentic" or "pure" Mao apply to both women and men. Yet, a more gender-sensitive analysis remains to be conducted in future research.

Autochthony and Mao Firstness

For most bearers of the label Mao, Maoness means that their ancestors were in the area before those of the Oromo. Researchers, too, identify Mao families as descendants of the first persons in the Begi area (cf. chapter II). In his report from 1971, the imperial functionary in Asosa, Bekuretsion Tilahun, refers to "Mao" as "ancient inhabitants" (*yäṭənt näwari həzb*), which implies autochthony.[258] An interviewee of Alessandro Triulzi in 1972 said: "As for the Mawos, they were living here from the start. […] They don't have an origin outside of Begi."[259] Autochthony conveys a "primordial" sense of belonging (Geschiere and Jackson 2006: 6). Although it is largely a matter of interpretation, autochthony often gives individuals and groups an expectation of rights or privileges, for example over land (Geschiere 2009: 28; Etana 2018). However, the families that identify as Mao today are not necessarily the direct descendants of the Mao from the time of Bekuretsion and Triulzi and they may not be the ones who control the land (cf. chapter VI).

I have heard different versions of the following story – told here in the words of a Mao man from Begi:

> The person called Bega [allegedly a Mao name] went there [to the town now called Begi] and crossed the river and built a *gotera* [harvest house].[260] He stayed there and grew old. The person called Bega was there. He was Mao. There were no other people there at that time. […] Then, [the Oromo] arrived in Begi and settled there. This day next year, they went back to where they came from [to bring more people]. Like that, the Oromo started dominating Begi.[261]

This is a typical story told to claim firstness. Simultaneously, it shows how more powerful latecomers started claiming the land as theirs. This story has many similarities to Kopytoff's frontier theory where people little by little conquered a territory that was, for them, new (Kopytoff 1987).[262] The frontier theory shows us that what had been a frontier for the

[258] Bekuretsion Tilahun, *The history and culture of the people of Asosa Benishangul awraja* (IES MS 359), cf. chapter II.
[259] IES MS 1887, Triulzi interview, A-BG-3 (23.02.1972). This interview was with three people, and it is unclear who made this statement. One of the three is identified as "Mao Kukulu" (Mao clan), one as Oromo and one as Arab. This statement resembles a statement given to Wendy James in the 1970s: "We grew right here, like mushrooms from the ground" (James 1980: 61).
[260] That "Begi" had been the name of a "Mao ruler" was a story also told to Alessandro Triulzi in an interview conducted in Begi (IES MS 1887, A-BG-3, 23.02.1972).
[261] Interview no. 46
[262] This account also corresponds with the oral history recorded by others, discussed in the previous chapter (Mohammed 1990; Negaso 2000; Tesema 2006). The system called *qabiyyee* ("first holder rights") in Oromo regulated the settlement on the conquered land by giving rights to special groups according to generational hierarchies (Tesema 2002).

"frontiersmen", could now become their new centre. As discussed in chapter II, Begi did eventually become a new centre. The subordinate communities that lived on the "fringes" of the settlements of the more superior immigrants were called Mao (James 1980: 62).

Although this narrative is told and retold in various ways, the essence is the same: "The Mao" lived in peace and then "the Oromo" came and took the land from them. This is a common dispute between newcomers and firstcomers in Ethiopia and Africa in general, which is aggravated if the two groups have linguistic or cultural differences (Lentz 2013: 17). Those who can claim Maoness do not only see themselves as the "true owners" of the land but as a *group* that has been wronged. Political movements may use such an interpretation as a justification to govern a certain territory (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000). However, as the previous chapters have argued, rectifying this "harm" to the Mao as a group has not necessarily benefitted individuals at the bottom of the social hierarchy, such as the landless and less prestigious. Ethno-national political movements have largely served previous elites.

Many of my interlocutors feel that their ancestors' loss of control over their land is the underlying reason for their current subordination. *Baba* Tufa, the old man from the Dabus area east of Kondala, who has experienced the immigration of Oromo-speakers into his village said the following:

> During Jano [Haile Selassie], there were no Leqa [Oromo] here. […] There were only Mao here. All this land belonged to Mao. But we used to pay tax to [Khojele], to the Arabs. […] After the Oromo came, all the administration was taken by them. Those who are writing the letters are Oromo. Because of this, they dominated the Mao people. […] When the Mao cleared the bush and started farming, they followed us. […] When we lose all our land, still we are going to be slaves like before.[263]

In this short quote, we can see several common themes in the collective memory of Mao history. The Mao are believed to have been left relatively "in peace" (or "free") before the immigration of Oromo (cf. González-Ruibal 2012). "Everything was under the authority (*taayitaa*) of the Mao", said an elderly man from the Dabus area.[264] My interlocutors may express bitterness when mentioning the taxation by *sheikh* Khojele, the payment of children as tribute, and his slave raids. However, this memory is overshadowed by the narrative of the immigrating Oromo. Since the newcomers had better know-how, be it in writing or plough-cultivation, they became socially more powerful.

[263] Interview no. 157
[264] Interview no. 15

The meaning of the subordination, phrased by *baba* Tufa as "being slaves", is worth examining in more detail. *Baba* Tufa does not mean that all Mao were enslaved before, but rather that they started living in an unequal power relation to the newcomers. The Oromo-speaking Macha took slaves from those locals who were too different in culture and appearance to be adopted (Tesema 2006; Bartels 1970; 1983; cf. chapter II). They collectively categorised them as "Mao", demarcating them from Oromo while at the same time linking them to the Oromo category, without which "Mao" would not exist (James, 1980). Hence, part of what defines Maoness in this area, is that it acts as a subordinated counter-identity to Oromo. The narrative of Mao firstness emphasises the paradox between the quality of Mao as the "honourable indigenous" and their alleged lack of sophistication and intelligence which made them "remain behind" the settlers.[265]

The picture of Mao being "born of the land"[266] yet being "backward" conveys the idea of an "original" population whose "primitive" yet "authentic" lifestyle remains (or should remain) unchanged, starting from "back then" (whenever that is determined) until now (Appadurai 1988: 37; Kuper 2003: 390).[267] Arjun Appadurai argues that anthropologists create the idea of "natives" by portraying cultures as sealed off and separate. People belonging to one "culture" are in this perspective spatially and mentally bound to a specific territory (Appadurai 1988: 37). I argue, similarly to Geschiere and Jackson (2006), that anthropologists are not alone in such interpretations; the same elements can be seen in local narratives of autochthony. Although "all this land belonged to Mao"[268] and individuals who claim to be hereditary Mao take pride in this interpretation, it also binds them to the narrative of having been the losers in the history of this land. "In our culture, we dig the holes with our hands and close them with our feet," a neighbour of *baba* Tufa's told me.[269] Thereby, he expresses that this is how the Mao cultivated their land and still ought to farm.

[265] Local stories discuss how brutal "the Oromo" dealt with "the Mao", but also how easy the latter made it for the former to subdue them (interviews no. 10; 76; 176).
[266] *Dhalattuu biyyaa* ("born of the land") is Oromo for "autochthonous". There are also different terms such as *angafa* ("older sibling") and *abbaa biyyaa* ("father of the land") in Oromo and *täwälaj*, Amharic for "native" and *bagär yadägä* ("raised in the country"). Officially, it is called *näbar bəheräsäb* ("the existing nationality") in Amharic.
[267] Meckelburg notes that the "theme of 'backwardness' of the Mao and Komo [is] usually explained via the lack of oxen for ploughing, the distance to schools, and the lack of political participation" (Meckelburg, 2019: 182). Here, he compares lowland Benishangul Gumuz with the more advanced highland Mao.
[268] Interviews no. 33 and 157 (same wording)
[269] Interview no. 140

Since rural communities believed to descend from the "original population" have lost access to resources and political power, combined with the idea that they stay "unchanged", the inference is that the Mao remain a subordinate group. This idea is supported by the circumstance that there is, indeed, a group of disadvantaged Mao citizens in Oromia who may or may not be hereditary descendants from the original population in the area. The reason for the Mao subordination in Oromia is not only the regional policies but the prestige these communities, clans, and families have retained since pre-federal times. There are also similarly marginalised communities in Benishangul Gumuz. We may therefore argue that although indigeneity has different meanings in the two regions, similar people tend to be vulnerable – individuals and families the community believes descend from enslaved ancestors or the "original" rural population, especially if they are simultaneously landless.

Reversed Firstness

On the flipside of the narrative of Mao inferiority is the superiority of the immigrating groups, which shape present-day social realities. In the Oromia Region, the authorities and the public discourse "systematically negate even the existence of […] cultural minorities", argues Alfredo González-Ruibal (2014: 84; cf. Markakis 2011: 244). The regional government only recognises the Oromo identity as indigenous. The constitution acknowledges the existence of non-Oromo in the region only in terms of "peoples who made a choice to live in the Region" (i.e., settlers or migrants), and not communities that already resided there (Revised Constitution of the Oromia Region 2001, §2.1). Again, this mode of reasoning resembles the logic of the "frontier theory" whereby a community remembers history from the perspective of the "frontiersmen" who conquered the "bush" and expelled, dominated, adopted, or in other ways incorporated the already present population (Kopytoff 1987: 11, 49). Not surprisingly, this version of the frontier thesis is an indispensable part of the current political discourse in the country.

The narrative of domesticating the bush (including its inhabitants) is fuelled by the interest of Oromia politicians to claim land ownership in the name of Oromo in national politics.[270] As Pierre Bourdieu (1992: 171) notes, "relations of power and authority govern the collective representation of the past", giving "dominant agents the right to profess the memory of the past

[270] Researchers have observed similar situations in other areas of Ethiopia, such as Benishangul and Maale (Triulzi, 1982; Donham, 2000; Zelalem 2021).

most likely to legitimate their present interests." An official publication of the Oromia Bureau of Culture and Tourism acts as an example of how the dominant voices in society imagine the past to justify the establishment of an Oromo titular region (*History of the Oromo to the Sixteenth Century* 2004). This book states that there was an original population in the territory conquered by the Macha Oromo, sometimes referred to as "Mao", sometimes as "Busase". However, the text concludes that these people were so "unorganised" that the area, in essence, was a "no-man's-land" (ibid: 217). The author dismisses the "natives" (Mao or similar) as too unimportant to take into consideration. Consequently, when overlooking the "firstcomers", the seconds become the first (Donham 2000).

An internal report from the Bureau of Culture and Tourism of the Western Welega Zone (Gimbi) gives interesting insights into this discourse on Oromo autochthony.[271] The report discusses place names in Kondala *Wäräda* that are understood as not being of Oromo origin and the author suggests changing these names to better reflect the "identity" of the population (understood as being Oromo and Oromo-speaking). The report points out the historical and current ill-treatment of the Oromo in Ethiopia and argues that the "*nafxanyaa* government" (*näfṭäña* or "soldier-settlers", i.e., highland Ethiopians or "Amhara") did not allow the Oromo to even name their settlements, mountains, or rivers.[272] Statements like "it is named wrongly" (*kana dogoggoraan akka moggaase*) recur in the report and refer to the idea that the Amhara named the area without consulting the Oromo. However, my interlocutors who speak Hozo and Seze languages recognise most of these "wrong" names as words in their languages or as the name of a historical person believed to have been Mao. It appears that the author did not interview anyone who represented a Mao perspective or speaks any Mao language. Hence, the voice presented in the report is the "official" (mainstream) voice in Oromia, and the Mao version becomes the "contrasting" (minority) voice (A. Smith 2004: 254). For individuals identifying with the Mao "voice", the claim that Oromo are discriminated against in Ethiopia sounds almost absurd; Oromo dominance, reaching far into the Benishangul Gumuz Regional State, is, for them, all-present.

[271] Gimbi Culture and Tourism Office *Assessment of Naming of Children and Villages in Kondala District*, 2019, an unpublished report stored in Gimbi

[272] *Assessment of Naming of Children and Villages*: 11. The practice of soldier settlers, *näfṭäña* (Oromo spelling: *nafxanyaa*) was abolished when the Derg came, but *näfṭäña* is still used as an abusive word denoting people accused of invading other people's lands or taking power in territories that are not rightfully theirs. Usually, these invaders are also categorised as Amhara.

The following statement is an example of how the report claims Kondala as "Oromo territory" and dismisses the presence of other people:

> It is clear that [Kondala] district is a district surrounded by black people. However, it is also known that the Oromo living in the district are people who respect their own values and culture. The Oromo have lived peacefully for a long time with these people who *live around their territory*.[273]

The "black people" referred to here, are likely the same as those appearing later in the report as "black people called Mao".[274] These people, writes the author, came from Sudan, migrated into the area and, apparently, were "one with the *nafxanyaa* government". These statements weaken the claim of Mao autochthony and their rights over "native" (Oromo) land. Two government officials from Kondala whom I interviewed, expressed the opinion that Mao are Nilotic people from Sudan and, therefore, cannot be owners of "Oromo land".[275] The idea of Mao indigeneity is extremely sensitive in the context of political tensions surrounding "Oromo rights" in Ethiopian politics.

Surprisingly, I found similarities in the narratives on the other side of the regional border, in the Benishangul Gumuz Region although Mao is recognised as an indigenous nationality here. These narratives concern communities that Triulzi's informants in 1972 categorised as "Arabs" and characterised as "more civilized than the Mâwōs".[276] Local stories on the settlement of the Begi/Tongo area focus on the network surrounding the prestigious historical figure of the preacher Dawd, his sons, and descendants, while they neglect other communities (Mao) (Meckelburg 2017: 176; 2019: 100-101). A man who claims descent from Dawd expressed that "there was *bärha* ("bush"[277]) here – there were no people" when Dawd came.[278] A lady I interviewed, who self-identifies as Oromo, told me her ancestors had come from Gidami and found the Kiring in Tongo, but "the other Mao" were in the bush, "the slaves – the black

[273] *Assessment of Naming of Children and Villages*: 5, own emphasis
[274] *Assessment of Naming of Children and Villages*: 11
[275] Interview no. 8
[276] IES MS 1887, A-BG-3 (23.02.1972), interview by Triulzi with a man categorised as Oromo. Other interviewees (also Oromo) mentioned that the Mao had been "*wälalla* [ignorant]" (A-BG-1, 22.02.1972). When Triulzi asked "Who were the first settlers of Béggi?", the answer from his interlocutors from Shagga (Begi) was: "The Mâwō; they came before the Ărăbâ. The Lēqqâ [Oromo] came lately. But the first were Ărăbâ and Mâwō" (IES MS 1887, A-BG-2, 12.02.1972).
[277] The word *bärha* literally means "desert" in Amharic and is often used to describe remote and inaccessible areas. Triulzi uses the word "forest" instead of "bush": "This region was full of forest. So later, people who knew about this came and occupied this area." (IES MS 1888: LN-S-6, Nejo, 31.07.1972)
[278] Interview no. 59

ones."[279] The reference to the "bush" illustrates that the original population is not considered "advanced" or "civilised" (Lentz 2013: 15).

According to the oral testimonies I collected (corresponding with those of Triulzi), Dawd took Mao wives. Hence, "as time went by, [his lineage] became Mao".[280] Today, these alleged latecomers (Kiring/ *mana* Dawd) utilise the firstcomer label Mao for themselves (cf. chapters II-III). Faris Gudina, one of my interlocutors of Dawd descent, answered the following to my question concerning what is special about the *mana* Dawd clans: "A long time ago, our people liked heroism. People liked going to war. But they also love other people and are hospitable. They do not discriminate between people of different origins."[281] This interpretation of Dawd as both powerful, honourable, and united with the local population exemplifies the basis of the *mana* Dawd's political authority. The narrative of Dawd plays on the idea of two concepts: the outsider with particular skills and abilities, and the "fictive kinship" with the locals, particularly through marriage. This legitimises their elite position and simultaneously makes them members of the local community (cf. Schack 1979: 9; Helms 1988: 12; Sahlins 2008: 196).[282]

Nowadays the society around Tongo has become so mixed that it is impossible to distinguish families that with certainty descend from Dawd from those who do not. Yet, individuals with an association to Dawd have more practical choices in kinship, education, and movement. As we discussed in the previous chapter, narratives are constructed and reproduced in contemporary political discourses, further nurturing power differences. For example, the area around Ishgogo in the north of the district is geographically and socially distant from Tongo. A farmer from Ishgogo does not have the same chances to access business opportunities or marriage partners as a Kiring farmer from Tongo although they are both "indigenous" in the region. This is not only because Ishgogo is more rural but because not all possibilities and prestigious meanings of Mao are attainable for communities that have a lower ancestral reputation. Tracing one's genealogy back to Dawd combines notions of "honour" as well as "power". Both are linked to autochthony, albeit in different ways, as we will now discuss.

[279] Interview no. 145 with a woman of Oromo descent whose family had come to the Tongo area two generations ago.
[280] Interview no. 57 with a woman of a Dawd lineage
[281] Interview no. 45
[282] Cf. Haour (2013) on the narrative of the stranger entering African societies

Politics of Honour and Power

Kəbər (Oro.: *kabajaa*) conveys "honour", "prestige" or "respect" offered to elders, religious leaders, and hereditary land- and slaveowners (cf. McMahon 2013: 20).[283] This kind of honour acts as an ascribed innate value – an "inborn" personal characteristic that represents a "notion of the good" (Haynes and Hickel 2016: 11; cf. "dignity").[284] Honour is part of the "moral mediation of local hierarchical relationships" which is how Tom Boylston refers to social stratifications among Orthodox Christian Amhara (Boylston 2018: 83). The parallel to the Mao situation lies in an idea of "destiny" created through having a "pure" *zär* (ancestry), yet not necessarily a supernaturally endowed superiority as it may be in the Amhara area. *Səlṭan* (Oro.: *taayitaa*), by contrast, means "authority" or "profane power" (*səgawi səlṭan*) and expresses the result of a structural and economic "process of valuing" (Haynes and Hickel 2016: 10).[285] Through gaining political positions of power which entail control over something or someone, an individual becomes a *baläsəlṭan* ("holder of authority").[286] This enables them to achieve a (temporary) "right to respect" (Stewart, 1994: 21). An honourable individual is not necessarily someone with power, and an individual with power may, in some circumstances, not be considered worthy of receiving honour.

The way individuals employ their Maoness to achieve opportunities and social mobility is not uniform because the two values of honour and authority require different approaches and are obtainable to various degrees. Whereas honour enables an individual to act as a respected elder in society and a family to refuse intermarriage with alleged slave descendants, authority is more connected to the ability to claim positions in politics and business and demand control over land. Individuals who consider themselves "pure Mao" and, therefore, honourable owners of the land as indigenous people, may, in practice, not be able to control such land, as we will discuss in chapter VI. Mao people in the Oromia Region argue that they are honourable despite

[283] In cases where *kəbər* is used about God, it may be translated as "glory". There are also terms with the same connotations as *kəbər* in the various local Mao languages.
[284]Frank Henderson Stewart (1994: 55) describes "dignity" in the context of ancient Rome as the opposite of "infamy", a term which "covered many types of disgrace." Dignity here refers to a noble character or "inner honour" which has many similarities to *kəbər*, as opposed to "outer honour", although Stewart opposes this simple dichotomy.
[285] Yonas (2022: 87) juxtaposes "profane power" with "divine power" (*mänfäsawi səlṭan*), the latter which comes closer to the way my interlocutors used "honour".
[286] See Sarah Howard (2019) for a discussion on civil servants in North Shewa of Amhara Regional State and her argument that not all the lower government functionaries embody the power and authority of the central government over the rural population.

their marginalised social position. They are limited to an "immaterial" version of Mao honour whereas, in the neighbouring region, Maoness is also negotiated as a political currency – a more "practical" version based on political power (*səlṭan*).

In the Mao area today, both honour and authority are connected to the idea of autochthony. One important aspect of *kəbər* (honour) is having hereditary ties to "original" inhabitants because this entitles an individual to occupy a certain space and ensures that they are not descendants of slaves who were relocated there and have no entitlement to land. Furthermore, as a political concept, indigeneity is often a prerequisite for assuming positions of authority (*səlṭan*) in a particular area (Gifayehu 2019: 203). Since the Benishangul Gumuz government today recognises Mao as an indigenous nationality, Maoness represents (in theory) an opportunity for upward social mobility in this specific region. However, numerous individuals who self-identify as Mao (or Kwama) are not able to obtain leading positions. In turn, they question the "true *maoumma*" (Maoness) of leaders who do not speak any Mao language and accuse them of being Mao "for *ənjära*" (for material benefits).[287] To "falsely" claim an ethnic identity makes an individual seem without honour, no matter their formal position; the very foundation on which their power is built is perceived as corrupted. A starker example is that of the Oromia Region where alleged slave descendants, though Oromo ("black Oromo"), are in theory entitled to hold any office but are excluded from such roles in practice.

For my Mao interlocutors, any "pure" Mao, in principle, has more honour as indigenous than the Oromo whom they do not accept as "firstcomers". However, for the Oromo population, the Oromo leaders have full legitimacy to hold positions of power in a region where Oromo is the only identity recognised as indigenous. Hence, several of my Mao interlocutors feel that the "Mao honour" has been "damaged" (Oro.: *balleesse*). One example of this "damage" is the lack of political "authority" for Mao (cf. "illegitimate identity"; Eidheim 1969), based on the Constitution of the Oromia Region (2001) which does not mention Mao. Another is the humiliation of Mao individuals who should, in the eyes of their community, be "honourable". A story of such humiliation is that of a man called Mohammed who went on a pilgrimage and came home as a *haji*. Normally, he would be called "*haji* Mohammed" to show him respect (*kəbər*). However, the Oromo neighbours consistently called him "*haji* Mao". My interlocutor

[287] In the previous chapter, we discussed the story of Idris, who was accused of claiming positions as Mao "for *ənjära*" and Bati who can be Oromo in Oromia and Mao in Benishangul Gumuz.

Yasin Ahmed, who told me this story, sees this mocking terminology as an act of stigmatisation, or in Yasin's words: "that [Mohammed] is seen as a slave".[288]

Frantz Fanon analyses how, in a society dominated by white people, a black person is never just a person, but always a *black* person (Fanon 1986: 25), just like *haji* Mohammed will always be (*haji*) *Mao*.[289] An effect of such a phenomenon is, according to Judith Butler, "normalisation" and acceptance that a person is "that, and only that" (Butler 1997: 93). The stigma arises in using the label "Mao" instead of his name because it indicates an "abnormality" compared to other *hajis*. Yasin questions this normalisation and seeks to resist the stigma by pointing out that Mao is not in itself a stigmatising identity ("he is a Mao, not a slave!" in Yasin's words). Mao is not "abnormal" on the other side of the regional border, in Benishangul Gumuz where it is a politically recognised category. Although not all "Mao" (Gwama/Kwama or similar) are necessarily prestigious in the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda*, and although political authority may often be in the hands of people the community does not identify as Mao, it is a recognised identity in this region. Hence, through the possibility of Mao *səlṭannät*, Maoness does not represent a similarly stigmatised or "spoiled identity" here as it does in the Oromia Region.

This exclusion of the Mao identity in Oromia is most harmful to individuals who already have lower prestige (honour) within the Mao stratum. Yasin, as a relatively well-off man, may question the marginalisation of the Mao in Oromia and seek to resist this by accumulating wealth or marrying women from more prestigious families. Since ethnic federalism uses culture and language as criteria for ethnic group membership, Yasin emphasises his family's *maoumma* (Mao characteristics), such as language skills, which has become a symbol of descent from the original population (Küspert-Rakotondrainy and Küspert 2022). Although Mao is not politically prestigious in Oromia, Yasin feels encouraged to underline his "purity" to prove that he is a "true" Mao and hopes to gain in prestige by associating with Mao at the other side of the border. By contrast, *baba* Tufa and his family in the rural Dabus area cannot escape the stigmatising effects of Maoness. Stigma generates material dispossession, but material dispossession also aggravates stigma, as we will discuss in chapter VI. Their economic vulnerability contributes to these Mao being seen as ignorant, impure, and unhonourable. The

[288] Interview no. 31
[289] Fanon observed that black people are never just teachers or doctors, but "the Negro teacher, the Negro doctor" (Fanon, 1986: 117). If they would make a mistake, it would be blamed on that characteristic.

following discussion on slavery will show how the marginalisation of *baba* Tufa's community differs from that of Yasin's, although they are both Mao in Oromia. One main difference lies in the perceived closeness to alleged slave descent.

4.3. Discourses on Slavery

The identity "slave" has been transformed from the time when slavery was a legal institution, but it has not disappeared as a social category. Today, slavery is often associated with not being "real" members of a certain cultural or language group (cf. slaves as "the kin that stammers", Lempereur 2022: 401). In this interpretation, the concept of slavery is removed from the idea of captivity and lack of personal autonomy and is instead applied metaphorically. In the words of Philip Burnham, "local concepts of slavery […] have merged into concepts of ethnic identity and difference and remain available for mobilisation in ethnic political discourses today" (Burnham 2009: 212; cf. Yonas 2022: 36). For example, local people who feel they have not gained anything from the protection of the Mao identity in Benishangul Gumuz Regional State may use the term "slave" about the above-mentioned officials who, in their opinion, do not display "Mao characteristics" and pretend to be Mao "for *ənjära*". A young mother-tongue user of Gwama expressed the following: "If I don't know my language, I am *diqala* [Amharic: derogatory for 'hybrid']. The 'red' [political elites in Tongo] are slaves. There is no other term for them."[290]

Without dwelling on the interpretation of "slave" for political elites, this chapter will continue to discuss the relation between slavery and being denied full membership in one's clan. We will explore how local people in the Begi area construct Maoness in the tension between "pure" and "slave" and then look at how they negotiate slavery and practically define it in relation to other concepts such as servantry and blackness. Slave descent limits individuals' opportunities for social mobility (cf. chapters V and VI). Although slave descendants legally have the same rights as everyone else, they are at a disadvantage due to cultural ideas that portray them as inferior. Although being categorised as Mao may deepen the marginal position of individuals, many Mao do not seek to become too "Oromo-like" (cf. González-Ruibal 2014: 301). They would risk becoming "impure" Oromo instead of "pure Mao".

[290] Interview no. 86

Mao, "Purity", and "Slavery"

Classificatory slavery persists and is perceived as legitimate even though those classified as "slaves" lead autonomous lives (Rossi 2009). In the local terminology, there is no distinction between "descendants of slaves" and "slaves" (cf. Smidt 2011; Zelalem 2017; Kiya 2018).[291] Both are equally "slaves" – *barya* in Amharic and *garba* in Oromo. It is a concept that denotes hereditary characteristics which are inter-generationally transmitted, for example, expressed through interpretations of skin complexion. Since "honour" (*kəbər*) is grounded in ancestry, "purity of ancestry", first and foremost, means non-slave descent. In the context of West Africa, Ibrahima Thioub (2012: 12) argues that discriminating between hereditary qualities of "blood purity" is "effective in constructing the otherness of slaves and tying their status to a natural trait", as this outlives efforts of abolition. In a society where biological descent is arguably the main basis for honour, assimilated (non-biological) clan members are naturally seen as "impure".

The local terminology enables a wider discussion on hierarchies, not as structures that restrict freedom but as a manifestation of social values (Haynes and Hickel, 2016). The opposite of "slave", in the local discourse in the Begi area, is "pure", and not "free"; freedom is "a social construct" of lived hierarchies and not a "natural state" (Cooper, Holt and Scott 2000: 9).[292] This means that freedom is a negotiable concept that may mean different things in different situations. In the imperial Ethiopian context, every individual was a *barya* (slave) of the king and even the king was a "slave of God" (Yonas 2022: 53). Besides, an individual can still be exploited despite being legally free (Rossi 2009). Few of my interlocutors remembered if the ancestors of individuals they characterised as "slaves" had indeed been manumitted. This seemed a less important query since the difference between slaves and non-slaves lies in the *honour* of an individual's ancestry rather than their actual subordination to a master. Even if they had been manumitted, they would still be seen as "slaves" because their ancestry is not "free from slavery", i.e., "pure". In other words, they are not eligible to receive honour (*kəbər*).

[291] For further discussion, see the cases of Western Tigray (Smidt 2011) and Wollo (Kiya 2018) which show similar use of terminology. Zelalem Teferra (2017: 615) writes in the context of Easter Welega: "Today, despite the absence of slavery, the term gerba [sic] (Oromo: 'slave') is frequently used to refer to ex-slaves, especially if they are Gumuz, the term having pejorative and racist connotation."

[292] The Oromo word for "pure", *qulqullu* (and corresponding words in the different Mao languages), can also be translated as "clean" and "holy". Tom Boylston translates the term with "clean" (vs. "unclean") in the context of the Amhara Region as opposed to *barya* or *buda* (stigmatised groups of people believed to be harmful, associated with "evil eye") (Boylston, 2018: 92). Also in the Mao area, we can find the belief in *buda*, for example concerning so-called "hyena-people" (*k'wara* in Hozo).

A young man from the Dabus area called Demeksa Kamal, who regards speaking his language Seze as one of the signs that he is not of slave descent, tried to explain what being born a "slave" (slave descendant) means:

> They only have the name "Oromo", but they are slaves. They are not Oromo. […] [Their ancestors] were slaves and slavery is within their bodies. Their feelings and thinking are affected by slavery.[293]

What he means is that if a person is of slave descent, they know that this is their heritage ("their feelings and thinking") and that they cannot change their biological descent ("it is within their bodies") (cf. "hereditary impurity"; Boylston 2018: 78). One could interpret this statement in the sense that these individuals are legally free since slavery is officially abolished but still are slaves to their former master who has not manumitted them (cf. Maugham 1961: 164). However, Demeksa's statement is more likely intended to mean that "slavery" refers to a lingering stigma inherited from their ancestors which makes their identities "spoiled" because of an irreparable lack of honour, rather than lack of manumission (Goffman 1963: 19).

We cannot know if all people who are called "slaves" really do descend from slaves, but the community nevertheless believes they are "born slaves" (cf. Smidt 2011: 120).[294] They are usually alleged to have inherited negative characteristics – both physical and temperamental. For example, one of my interlocutors told me that "slaves" usually have "deep rifts in their heels" and another that "their hair doesn't grow out fully".[295] An old Mao man explained to me that the female slave his father had bought "was a thief and stole many things, [so they] sold her."[296] His neighbour told the story of his uncle who married a slave girl; "all their children became thieves".[297] In this interpretation, "bodily substances" (i.e., physical characteristics) as the basis for heredity exist in the intersection between the "made" (social) and the "given" (biological) sphere (Carsten 2004: 29). "Slaves" are associated with dishonesty and bodily blemish which explains why any person who wants to keep a sense of dignity feels a need to distance themselves from allegations of "slave ancestry".

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[293] Interview no. 5. Original wording: *Garbumma qaama isaani kessa jira* (Oromo: "slavery is inside their bodies").
[294] The community argues to "know" that they descend from slaves. This is a mystery that can be witnessed in other contexts as well; e.g., *tsellim bét* ("black people") in Tigray (Smidt 2011) and communities in Cameroon (Burnham 2009).
[295] Interviews no. 64 and 88
[296] Interview no. 80
[297] Interview no. 78. (Cf. Kiya, 2018: 163 on similar evidence from Wollo; Burnham, 2009: 214 on Cameroon).

There is an imagined link between Mao and "slaves" from the perspective of Oromo history. Both categories were on the same level, below the assimilated *gabbaro* and the "pure" *borana* (cf. chapter II). Until today, individuals may interpret Mao as a term that originated as a designation for slaves. "I still don't know the meaning of Mao. It may have its own meaning… maybe like 'slave'", said one of my interlocutors.[298] One of my interlocutors, who is 105 years old, relates how around 1915 his father came to Tongo from Gidami with eight slaves. The slaves escaped once they reached Tongo. According to my interlocutor, they hoped to get freedom by mixing with the local population (Mao/Kwama).[299] We cannot know if these slaves managed to blend into the "Mao" society and what became of them, but there has likely been contact between families with different backgrounds who all belonged to less prestigious social strata, especially if they had a similar appearance (i.e., black). Alexander Meckelburg (2015: 361) argues that "[t]he history of slavery has become an underlying factor in the relations between people" in the Western borderland. This connotation creates a linkage between Mao and slaves based on "associations" (Latour 2005).

Non-Mao people, who have little interest in interpreting Mao as "pure", may use "Mao" interchangeably with "slave" or *shanqəla*, although most avoid the latter term today. One of my Oromo interlocutors said "Mao, Komo, *garba*, whatever" to refer to his colleague who allegedly is from a family of slave descendants but whose father's ancestry is supposedly of Mao descent.[300] It is not the state of bondage that matters for the status of this man but his descent from enslaved or enslavable groups. Such interpretations give the impression as if all Mao are descendants of slaves or closely related. However, I would here like to offer a contrasting interpretation of the same historical facts.

To most of my Mao interlocutors, there is a significant difference between Maoness and slave descent. They argue that if their ancestors had been raised in the homes of slave owners from another culture and language group (Oromo), they would today not be Mao anymore; they would have lost their Mao characteristics and become "black Oromo". As recounted by Lambert Bartels (1983: 173), freed slaves became "attached to his master's clan" (*garbichichi*

[298] Interview no. 24. This resonates with the theory that "Mao" comes from the Kafa-word for slave, "mawo" (cf. chapter II; Lange 1982: 157). We may remember Wendy James' (1980) distinction between Mao and *shanqəla* from chapter II; the Mao were those who lived with the Oromo and served them, while the *shanqəla* were the communities who refused relations with Oromo.
[299] Interview no. 132
[300] Interview no. 13

qomo goftasatirra lakaamaka) in the ritual of *lubabasu* (manumission) – in other words, they became Oromo. Therefore, my Mao interlocutors used the label Mao as the exact opposite of "subalterns or slaves" (González-Ruibal 2014: 299) or people who have a "slave identity" (Meckelburg 2015: 346). Consequently, Mao who are blood-related to fellow Mao in the same clan regard themselves as more honourable than individuals who have no "pure" ancestry (Küspert-Rakotondrainy forthcoming 2023). A Mao man from Kondala told me that he, as a Mao, is "pure" but that the Oromo family living next door is not because they do not have seven "pure" generations in their genealogy.[301] This "slave" family is not poorer or more dependent on wealthier farmers than my interlocutor, but he still looks down on them and claims his children do not play with the "slave children".

The following conversation may help us understand how local people define the concept of purity:[302]

> Sophie: What is the word for *qulqullu* (Oromo: "clean" or "pure") in Gwama?
> Yasin: It is *ssere*.[303]
> Sophie: *Ssere*, is that the individual or the *qomo* (Oromo: "clan")?
> Yasin's relative: It's the *qomo*.
> Sophie: For example, Kukulu (clan name), is that *ssere*?
> Yasin: Yes.
> Sophie: What if I am a slave of the Kukulu?
> Yasin: If you are the slave of the Kukulu, you are not *ssere*. […] The true Kukulu – they are *ssere*.
> Sophie: So, which *qomo* are *ssere*?
> Yasin: All *qomo* are *ssere*. But those who came and mixed with them, they are not *ssere*.

This conversation shows how both Mao and Oromo communities often understand purity.[304] It is not the formal membership of an individual in a clan that makes them "pure", but whether they are judged as "authentic" or "hereditary" members in a biological sense. When Yasin mentions clan members who "mixed", he refers to slaves who took the clan of their masters when freed. This makes them someone who has "lost their *zär*". Yasin is attentive to the fact that he is of honourable descent and of "pure *zär*". No matter how excluded his family is from political power in Oromia, he does not self-identify as a slave descendant or intermarry with them as Mao do in the Dabus area.

[301] Interview no. 186
[302] Interview no. 31
[303] *Ssere* in Gwama is pronounced /ts'ere/ with an ejective sound.
[304] I have had similar conversations with users of other Mao languages and with Oromo-speakers, and the understanding of "purity" was the same as the one expressed here.

Over the last 30-40 years, Mao has gained some prestigious connotations besides all the less favourable meanings. Particularly, the establishment of the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* and the categorisation of the high-status *mana* Dawd (Kiring) as Mao has caused this development. It is therefore likely that people whom Wendy James in 1980 categorised as Kwama, who had been victims of slave raiding which "disrupted communities severely", may today gain prestige through the cultural and geographical closeness to the Kiring (James 1980: 61). Finally, the local discourse creates a diffuse definition of Mao, conveying associations with, yet distance from, slaves. Furthermore, the Mao-slave relation differs according to location. Although Yasin regards his family ancestry as "pure", it does not mean that others around him recognise this as an honour; for Oromo neighbours, he may be seen as just another Mao. As we will discuss in the next chapter, living in an area where the Mao intermarry with slave descendants makes it difficult for them to marry individuals with more prestigious backgrounds.

Racialising Discourses

Däm in Amharic and *dhiiga* in Oromo (lit: "blood") is a concept primarily used to describe biological ties between people who are believed to be related, for example through being members of the same family or clan.[305] For example, the term *hambilionno* in the Hozo language (*Ak'mo Wandi*) means "of-the-same-blood" and is usually used for kin who are "blood-related", especially through their father's line since this society is patrilinear. However, "blood" can also be used as another way of expressing that some communities are similar in social status, regardless of whether they are formally members of the same clan or ethnic group.

I once overheard a conversation between a Mao woman called Ibse and her daughter in the countryside outside of Begi. Ibse gestured towards a female visitor of Mao descent from Tongo town and commented on this lady's behaviour and appearance. Then, she whispered to her daughter that the lady had *dhiiga magaalaa* (lit. "city blood") to emphasise her difference from them. Both Ibse and the lady self-identified as Mao but the lady from Tongo had a significantly lighter complexion. In this example, differences in "blood" means that the two people belong to separate social strata but this is often expressed by their dissimilar physical traits. Although

[305] "Blood" is by some researchers thought to be a European concept (cf. Kopytoff 1987). However, it is also a concept used by native scholars in Africa in general (Thioub 2012), and in Ethiopia in particular (Tokuma 2010; Gemetchu 1996; Tesema 2006; Dereje 2011). E.g., the ritual of *meedhicha*, a custom for adopting alien clans into Oromo lineages, involves the mixing of the blood of an adopted and the adoptive Oromo clan (Tesema 2006: 41).

they may use the same ethnic label, their social position and lived circumstances differ greatly. No one in Ibse's family has ever married anyone with a light ("red") complexion or with "city blood". This story exemplifies the connection between "blood", blackness and status which we will now examine.

In the Begi area "blood" is interpreted as a determining factor for skin complexion which has become a category of hierarchy in Ethiopia (R. Pankhurst 1968; Boylston 2018; Smidt 2011) and in other African countries (Cooper, Holt and Scott 2000; Hall 2011; Thioub 2012; Rossi 2020).[306] Although slavery did not "doom" "dark-complexioned people […] to natural slavery", it may still manifest itself in contemporary discourses as if this had been the case (Yonas 2022:52). The history of slavery is commonly retold in a way similar to the words of a man from Tongo: "Whoever was black, [the slave raiders] could sell them. Whoever they got – if they were black, they would sell them."[307] The above-mentioned 105-year-old man retells that his father's slaves were "black in their faces. They were Leqa [branch of Oromo], but those who were black."[308] Hence, although the slaves were adopted into Leqa clans, they were still recognisable as having "different blood" from other Leqa.[309] Also the slaves of *mana* Dawd families are often characterised as having been "black", although descendants of Dawd themselves may, at times, have a dark complexion. In this case, skin colour is not so much a descriptive characteristic as it is a metaphor for "slave". As concluded by Philip Burnham in the context of Cameroon, "'slavery' has become part of racialised discourses of status and identity or has otherwise acquired new semantic connotations" (Burnham 2009: 208).

The euphemism "black Oromo" (*Oromoo gurracha*) refers to individuals who are assumed not to be biological descendants of the founding father of the (Oromo) clan they are members of. A young woman called Fayise Wakene told me that she is a "black Oromo". When I asked her what "black Oromo" means, she answered:

> My grandparents were bought as slaves. Then, they lived with the Oromo and when our fathers died, those who remained were called the slaves of the Oromo (*garboota Oromoo*). It's only a short while ago that we were called black Oromo instead. […][310]

[306] Bruce Hall (2011) looks at Arabic writings before the arrival of Europeans in West Africa where "black" can be found as an inferior category.
[307] Interview no. 54. The original speech was in the present tense, but it refers to past events.
[308] Interview no. 132.
[309] One of Triulzi's interviewees said: "the Oromo are not black so they are not to be called *yăbättā* [prisoners that had become slaves] but they rather sold the *yăbättā*." (IES MS 1887, interview A-BG-6, 25.02.1972, with Oromo elders)
[310] Interview no. 91

The "grandparents" Fayise talks about are her ancestors in the sixth generation on her father's side and the fourth generation on her mother's side. She knows their names, the markets where they were bought (Kobor and Babo Gambel) and the names of the buyers. She does not know where they originally came from but assumes, they were originally "Berta, the black ones [or] Mao". She also does not know if or how any one of them were formally manumitted. Although she is a member of the Oromo clan *warra* Wanaga, the community does not accept her as "pure" Wanaga, since they believe that she is not blood-related to the ancestor, called Wanaga.[311] Again, what matters for an individual's social position is their assumed genealogy and "purity" of ancestry, expressed through the status of blood.

The same logic applies to descendants of alleged slaves of Mao families. In this case, they are not called "black Oromo" but, for example, "slaves of Kiring". Common terms used are *Kiring kusun* (Gwama: "servants of Kiring") and *Kiring kwama* ("Kwama of the Kiring"). The name Kwama, which is a self-designation of communities from rural areas around Tongo and in the lowland (speakers of Gwama or Komo), is here used in a derogatory way although it is in itself not derogatory (Küspert-Rakotondrainy 2021). This shows the unequal power between former Arab clans (Kiring) and the so-called "original population" (Kwama); Kwama only denotes slave descent in the case of dependency on the more prestigious Kiring. We can here see that "Mao" may both denote descendants of alleged slaves and of slave masters, but the decisive factor for their "blood status" is the evaluation of the "purity" of their genealogy.

The internal power differences between Mao and within the same racial category can be illustrated by the case of two neighbouring families with contrasting social positions although they are both Mao. The neighbours of Kareem Otman in a village close to Tongo are so-called "slaves-of-*mana*-Sasa" (Sasa was one of Dawd's sons). They sometimes come to drink coffee with Kareem, and the two families have friendly relations. Kareem claims descent from one of Dawd's other sons. He would therefore never give a daughter in marriage to one of the "slave sons". Kareem has a dark complexion and sees himself as a *sit shwala* (Gwama: "black person") but describes his neighbours as *gurracha* ("black" in the Oromo language).[312] Hence, having a dark complexion or being a *sit shwala* or a *nama gurracha* (lit: "black person") is not the same

[311] Fayise is a member of another Oromo clan; the clan name has been pseudonymised.
[312] Interview no. 17

as being "black" like a slave descendant (i.e., *Oromoo gurracha*). In the latter sense, blackness acts as a "proof" of slave descent while in the former, it demonstrates non-Oromoness.[313]

Fayise usually hides her ancestral "blemish" and presents herself as a "normal" Oromo. In daily interactions, it is unlikely that anyone will publicly denote her as a slave. Nevertheless, she is afraid that someone who knows her family history may expose her behind her back, perhaps in coded language or with gestures like shrugs when the conversation comes to her ancestry. Slave descent is not always at the forefront of day-to-day relations, but it certainly increases importance in practical matters of marriage or land ownership.[314] Alleged slave descendants are often landless (and landless people are easily stigmatised as "slaves"), as chapter VI discusses. Categories that seem inclusive and diverse, such as Oromo, may not be experienced as such by individuals who are expected to assimilate but are not accepted as "true" members and may conceal significant differences in power and prestige.

As we can see from the above discussion, Maoness is a hereditary concept linked to the ancestry of an individual, meaning that the perceived honour of their genealogy impacts what Maoness means and does in their lives. Social status is linked to having "blood relations" to other members of one's clan. Furthermore, the prestige of the ancestors matter, for example, whether or not they are believed to have intermarried with alleged slave descendants and, hence, shared the same rank. Mao may not be seen in all situations as the lowest ranking layer within local hierarchies and blackness is usually derogatory only if it stands in relation to slavery. We will now discuss how individuals with different hierarchical and morally stratified Mao identities relate to religion and conversion, and thereby examine their clashing definitions of honour and how it affects discourses and lived experiences.

4.4. Discourses on Religion

The division between Mao and Oromo is often understood as a division between Muslims and Christians. Islam is an essential part of the Maoness of many individuals. Below I will discuss how these individuals interpret becoming a Christian as mandatory Oromisation and further

[313] "Of course, I know they are slaves because they are black," said a young man who himself has a dark complexion, about his neighbours (interview no. 16).
[314] For an example of slavery not always being "relevant to every social context", see Boylston (2018: 92) on the Amhara Region of Ethiopia (cf. Lempereur, 2022, on how in post-slavery Southern Benin).

Mao subordination to Oromo, which they associate with a status like "slaves". Despite this interpretation, especially for less prestigious Mao, converting to Christianity also provides an opportunity to re-negotiate their identities within a new context. We will explore this below through the example of a man called Simon Merga who deliberately identifies as Mao in the largest Protestant church in the area, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). Simon aims at overcoming the stigma of being "impure" by creating a new form of Maoness: Christian Mao.

Mao as Muslims

Islam is the most widely practised religion in the area. The government reports 94% Muslims in the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* and 76 and 85% respectively in the districts Begi and Kondala (*Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Results for Oromia Region* 2007; Melkamu, Gemechu and Habtamu 2018).[315] Many Mao individuals are conscious of their Muslim faith. Most seem to believe that their ancestors adopted Islam as soon as this was introduced through Dawd and other preachers and traders although many families until recently practised traditional worship.[316] "From generation to generation, we are Muslim. There are no Christian Mao," said Kalid, a man from Begi *Wäräda*.[317] A publication by the Benishangul Gumuz Bureau of Culture and Tourism states that "the Mao are followers of the Muslim faith" (Melkamu, Gemechu and Habtamu 2018: 14).[318] Most local Oromo are also Muslims. However, Oromo immigrants, often from Gidami and Mendi, have over the last half-century increasingly been Christians – first Orthodox and later Protestants.[319] For reasons explained below, I argue that the memory of Mao having "always" been Muslims is largely a projection of the present situation on the more distant past than based on historical facts (cf. Chapman, McDonald and Tonkin 1989/2016; Hobsbawm 2012).

[315] This means that, on average, the population is 15% Christian (5.5, 24.3, and 14.5 respectively). Only between 0 and 1% of the population in Western Ethiopia follows traditional religions.
[316] Several of my interlocutors told me how they participated in traditional worship in their childhood. One of Triulzi's informants in 1972 said to him that the "Mawo […] were Oromo" (IES MS 1887, A-BG-2, 12.02.1972). Here, Oromo refers to traditional believers as opposed to Läqqa or "Galla" (Leqa is an Oromo clan). This corresponds with how my 105-year-old interlocutor used "Oromo" to mean traditional believer vs. "Galla", meaning Muslim (interview no. 132).
[317] Interview no. 178.
[318] Original wording: ማአዎች በእምነታቸው የሙስልም እምነት ተከታዮች ሲሆኑ…
[319] Interviews no. 163, 165, and 173 with Christians from the Mekane Yesus Church.

We may ask why the Mao would want to remember how they have "always" been Muslim. The first answer can be found in piety: Performing Muslim prayers, using Arabic expressions, and seeing oneself as a pious Muslim has today become a part of many of my interlocutor's sense of self (cf. Mahmood 2005). The second answer can be found in the concept of "ethnodoxy", where society links a community to one religion (Mao to Islam), meaning that converts are not anymore seen as "true" members of this community (Karpov, Lisovskaya and Barry 2012: 645).[320] In the Mao area, I found opinions resembling ethnodoxy, particularly among individuals who claim descent from Dawd. Islam has helped promote their power and cement their prestige by associating them with *sheikh* Khojele and other prominent rulers (cf. Elwert 1995). That the political Mao category in Benishangul Gumuz is both prestigious and strongly rooted in Islam has likely contributed to strengthening the link between being Muslim and being honourable for individuals who identify as Mao, whether *mana* Dawd or not. Religion also enables a clearer separation between being Mao/Arab on the one hand, and Oromo (or "slaves of Oromo") on the other. As we have seen, individuals who self-identify as Mao and who possess a certain reputation or prestige, have an interest in distancing themselves from Oromoness to protect both their positions of power and their honour as "pure".

One or two generations ago, almost every village used to have a spirit medium who gathered people in a "spirit house".[321] Several of my older interlocutors (who are Muslims) can explain in detail how the traditional ceremonies are held. Some of them still regularly visit a spirit house for sowing and harvest, or go to the spirit medium for guidance, healing, and help in difficult times (cf. Muktar, Lelisa and Temesgen 2017). However, they often walk ten or more kilometres to reach the closest one. Two of my interlocutors are performing spirit mediums who invited me into their spirit houses – one west of Tongo, and the other east of Kondala. One of them claims his business goes well in terms of payment for his services (sacrifices/ blessings), although he admits that there are fewer people attending celebrations nowadays. The other one has become bitter because he feels that the youth today does not respect him and the spirits as they once did, and that much of the traditional knowledge will die with him. None of the sons of these two spirit mediums has taken up this position and both old men remain without successors.

[320] For examples from other regions, see James (1994) on Uduk in Sudan and B. Cooper (2010) on Hausa in Niger.
[321] There are own words for "spirit medium" in the different Mao languages. *Sit shumbu* in Gwama, *bish mai* in Seze and *biash mo* in Hozo, all mean "spirit man" or "spirit person". These spirit mediums usually perform their duties in a "spirit house" *(swal shumbu* / *biash kera*).

Over the last generation, there has happened a change in the attitude towards the traditional religion, caused by increased Muslim "revivalism" and the spread of Protestant Christianity (Abbink 1998: 123). Many young Muslims today renounce any relation to the traditional belief "because it doesn't follow Allah's word."[322] Similarly, Protestant churches often demonise traditional worship and demand a complete cut with any traditional religion upon conversion (Data 2005: 316-317; 2008). A Muslim man described traditional worship as "not having a religion", and a Christian woman said that those who worship the spirits "live just like animals".[323] Despite the emphasis on culture brought by ethnic federalism, traditional belief (usually called *qallicha* – Oro.: "witchcraft") is not among the customs that governmental and non-governmental actors in the field of cultural preservation and development include as worth preserving.[324] The exclusion of traditional religion from what is judged "good culture" does not prevent many of my interlocutors from feeling connected to the traditional worship as part of their "Mao authenticity". They say they do not practice it because they consider it backwards and potentially harmful, but still regard it as an important cultural heritage, almost as "proof" that the Mao have their own cultural heritage, different from the Oromo. Simultaneously, my interlocutors usually wished to present themselves as pious Christians or Muslims.

In contrast to this negative attitude towards traditional religion, some of my younger interlocutors, especially those conscious about their Maoness, tended to evaluate this religion more positively; they perceived both Christianity and Islam as a threat to the "traditional Mao culture". A young Mao expressed the opinion that religious and political leaders "want our culture to be behind. To achieve this, they say 'your culture is bad'. […] They say the *shari'a* and the culture are not compatible. The *farsoo* [local alcohol] is not allowed'."[325] Even more so, most of my interlocutors believe that Protestant Christianity, which is more expansive and missional than Orthodox Christianity, may harm "Mao traditions".

Demeksa, who has converted back and forth between Christianity and Islam, said:[326]

[322] Interview no. 116
[323] Interviews no. 132 and 102
[324] Interviews no. 24, 103 and 177. There are contradictions in the argument that some cultural features are "good" and others "bad"; traditional medicine (a knowledge system supported by the government) is often administered by spirit mediums (i.e., "witchcraft"), and brewing and consuming alcohol (a "harmful practice") is closely related to the rituals of communal cooperation, which is seen as a custom worth preserving.
[325] Interview no. 69
[326] The habit of converting back and forth, so-called "religious oscillation" (Abbink 1998: 119), is common in the area, especially among the younger generation, who may try out Christianity but realise that this does not meet the expectations of their families and, therefore, return to Islam.

> Mao people had their own, nice culture. […] Then [the Christians and Muslims] said: "Culture is the enemy of religion." Our people don't have education and don't know much. Therefore, they believe everything the Oromo say. Afterwards, this religion became a political weapon to make our culture disappear. […] When this disappears, our people will disappear, and the others will take over.[327]

For Demeksa, it is not only that the mainstream religions "destroy the Mao culture", but it is about power relations between social groupings. Socially superior groups administer the religious institutions; like the churches, most mosques in the area are led by people with Oromo backgrounds who preach in Arabic and Oromo languages. Demeksa has never visited a spirit house, yet he feels a sense of nostalgia for these traditions (cf. "exonostalgia", Berliner 2020: 9). It is not the personal attachment to the traditional worship that provokes Demeksa, but rather what he perceived to be the domination of Oromo in mosque and church which mirrors power relations in society.

Culture, Church, and Ethnicity in Begi

We can examine these power relations through the case of the Mekane Yesus Church. The link between Oromo and Christianity goes back to the evangelism efforts of the Oromo by Catholic and Protestant missions in the 19th century (Krapf 1858: 97; Arén 1978). In Western Ethiopia, this started in the 1880s with missionaries freeing slaves at the market in Jimma (Arén, 1999: 60).[328] Out of these mission efforts grew the Mekane Yesus Church (EECMY), today the biggest Lutheran church in Africa. In 1965, the first Lutheran congregation in the Muslim area of Begi was founded.[329] After this, Protestant Christianity spread to different villages, especially among families from Gidami who had previously been Orthodox Christians (Arén 1999: 287-288; Gidada 1972).[330] The evangelists and missionaries were also Oromo speaking, and to date, the spread of Protestant Christianity is faster among Oromo-speakers (largely Orthodox Christians) than among Muslims and Mao-speaking communities.

Before the Derg time, the local Protestant churches were already associated with Oromo resistance and the community began seeing them as "Oromo churches" (cf. Etana 2018: 297). Based on my investigations, "Oromo church" means that most Protestant Christians in this area

[327] Interview no. 5
[328] We can assume that most of these slaves had been neither Muslims nor Christians. None of my interlocutors mentioned this regarding the beginning of Christianity in the area.
[329] Interview no. 77. This is cross-checked with other interlocutors.
[330] Cf. IES MS 1887, Triulzi interviews A-BG-2 (22.02.1972); A-BG-6 (25.02.1972)

identify as Oromo and that those who become Christian are or become (like) Oromo. So far, no action has been taken by the local Mekane Yesus Church regarding the incorporation of any language other than Oromo in evangelisation or preaching (Küspert 2020).[331] However, the church has recently started engaging in some donor-initiated projects with a focus on "Mao people". In the early 2000s, this work primarily consisted in building churches in rural areas, although it is unclear how the project worked with the "Mao people".[332] Later, several NGOs started working with the production of Bible materials in different Mao languages through the EECMY.

Many of my Mao interlocutors associate conversion to Christianity with subordination to Oromo supremacy in society. They argue that Mao who have become Protestant Christians "may have gone somewhere for work and [their employer] was a Christian [Oromo], and then they became Christian too, and their children became that too."[333] This implies that only descendants of individuals who worked for Oromo families as labourers, servants, or slaves, can possibly have become Christian. For Oromo individuals, everyone with a darker complexion and who (they assume) has non-Oromo biological ancestry may be categorised as Mao, regardless of their official clan membership or language skills. However, the community in the villages identify a number of these Christian families as descendants of slaves or servants adopted into Oromo clans (hence, not members of Mao clans). Other Christian non-Oromo may not have explicit slave ancestry but may have converted while they worked in Christian households. Yet others may be landless or just poor.[334] I suspect that more "black Oromo" than Mao could be Christians; they are less attached to the idea of *maoumma* and Islam since they self-identify as Oromo. However, there are no statistics confirming this. It may not always be clear if an individual converted because they were categorised as "black Oromo" or if they became "black Oromo" because they were Christian.

When Mao people convert to Christianity, it intensifies the already existing asymmetrical power relation between Oromo and Mao, especially in Oromia. In Benishangul Gumuz, large-

[331] This is based on both own observations in local churches and interviews with current and former church leaders, and former Norwegian missionaries (interviews 5; 25; 63; 69; 73; 77; 84). Cf. report from 1997 (NMS 013, *Report and assessments of the work*, 01.03.1997). The lack of use of minority languages in the church is also criticised by users of Mao languages (interviews 27; 74; 96; 97; 159; 161).
[332] NMS 007 (A*nnual report for Mao's Evangelism Outreach for 2009*, 22.01.2010); interview no. 84
[333] Interview no. 111
[334] Cf. story of my interlocutor Yusuf in chapter V – a landless Mao man who married a Christian "black Oromo" woman and converted to Christianity.

scale conversion of Mao would mean a weakened power basis of the Islamised elites and a setback for the newly emerging Mao nationalism which seeks to distance itself from Oromo social and political dominance. As I have argued above, Mao functions as a counter-identity to Oromo. Whoever claims Maoness may be interested in distancing themselves from an undertaking perceived as having an assimilative "Oromo" agenda, such as the church. This does not mean that there are no Mao who decide to become Christians. My Christian Mao interlocutors counted around 300 believers they identified as Mao in the Mekane Yesus congregations in the Begi area.[335] This would be around 1.5% of the members of the EECMY-Begi-Gidami Synod.[336]

A majority of these Protestant Mao are from the Dabus area which came under direct imperial control at the turn of the 20th century. Consequently, parts of the population here had already converted to Orthodox Christianity and the step to becoming Protestant was smaller than for Muslims. Furthermore, the connection between Maoness and Islam seems weaker along the Dabus, likely because this area has been less influenced by the Islamised elites around Begi/Tongo. Since the distinction between Mao and "black Oromo" is more blurred here (they intermarry), there is also not such a clear division between Mao Muslims and (black) Oromo Christians. However, also around Begi, there are communities of non-Oromo Christians. Some of these families trace their ancestry to individuals who were brought from the lowland to work on the fields of wealthier landlords in the imperial period. These landlords may have been Oromo or Kiring/ "Arab". Until today, dependency and landlessness reinforce the stigma associated with slavery as chapter VI discusses. The families of the descendants of these labourers are usually monolingual in Oromo and do not have a connection to a specific Mao or Komo clan, yet many self-identify as Mao. They typically live close to each other, separate from other Oromo and Mao.[337]

It appears to me that social stratification in the church differs from the official ethnic system. Individuals in the church whom I talked with used descriptions such as "majority" or "red" on the one hand and "minority" or "black" on the other hand. They usually called the former

[335] The EECMY likely has the highest number of non-Oromo members ("Mao") compared with other churches in the Begi and Kondala area. The Full Gospel Church (*Mulu Wangel*) has some Komo-speaking congregations in the lowland of Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* towards Sudan (oral information, 08.10.2020).
[336] This Synod comprises the area of the former Begi *Wäräda* in addition to the Gidami area. The EECMY has a total of more than 10 million members in Ethiopia (2020 statistics, oral information, 05.05.2022).
[337] I visited some of these Christian families and got to know some members of this community.

Oromo and the latter Mao, but not all individuals in the two categories would identify with these ethnic (political) labels. The logic behind this division is an asymmetric power relation, yet it is different from the ranking between pure and non-pure that was discussed above. Since the church is so strongly associated with Oromoness, everyone who does not represent this majority category is "Mao", whether "pure" or not. Therefore, although Christianity is apparently "hostile" towards non-Oromo minorities, the church also becomes an institution where individuals associated with lower prestige seek to find a new way of being honourable by becoming "Mao". Below, I will examine some examples of individuals who seemingly allow the church to "assimilate" them into its power hierarchies, yet skilfully negotiate their Maoness by reconstructing their identities in a new context.

Politics of Conversion

Since Maoness is associated with Islam and Christianity with Oromoness, the religious conversion of Mao people simultaneously entails a cultural conversion. When a non-Oromo becomes Christian, they will not only start believing in a different God but also adapt to a new way of worshipping. The necessary adaption was expressed by several pastors I talked with in terms of conforming to "the universal Christian culture".[338] In the Master's thesis of a Protestant pastor from the area, conversion of Muslim Mao is described as "learn[ing] from the life of Christians" (Teferi N. 2016: 44). However, for individuals external to this specific Protestant tradition, the Christian worship (e.g., music and prayers) resembles Oromo cultural expressions rather than a "universal culture".

Two pastors told me, independently of each other, that they "humbled themselves" when they visited Mao families and another said, "we teach the Mao to clothe themselves".[339] They spoke about how the Mao need to be treated with brotherly love to improve their lives, and they used expressions like "I told them", "I prayed with them" and "I educated them". These statements exemplify a "benevolent superiority" many individuals in the church express towards the Mao. Hand in hand with the Christian mission goes teaching about farming, saving money, and building better houses (cf. the church as a development agent, Freeman 2012). Consequently, evangelisation becomes a "civilisation project" of the majority on the minority comparable to

[338] Interview no. 167
[339] Interviews no. 73 and 164 and various informal conversations.

the practices of Western missionaries in 19th and 20th century Africa (Meyer 2002; Maxwell 2016).[340]

To analyse the conversion of Mao to Christianity and the subsequent subordination to these internal hierarchies, we will look at the case of Simon Merga, a Christian convert who identifies as Mao. As a child, Simon was a worker in an Oromo-speaking home and was later a shepherd in a Protestant Christian Oromo family. Here, he converted from Islam to Christianity because, as he says: "They pray before working and eating and I liked that lifestyle." He was then baptised and changed his name to Simon. As a teenager, he started learning the Mao language of his ancestors and made an effort to "become Mao". Today, Simon is one of only a few Mao Christians in his village in Oromia. Being Mao and Christian has for him a theological foundation of God loving every people and language:

> The [Mao] need to first respect their own culture. […] It would be easy to have a [Mao] church. Then we could serve the Lord and it would come from the people.[341]

Simon here emphasises the dual purpose of being Mao and Christian: To worship God authentically ("from the people") and thereby also strengthen their identification as Mao ("a Mao church"). As we will see, Simon builds on this vocation when he negotiates his Maoness in the church.

Several of my Mao interlocutors who are proud of their genealogy and knowledge of the language shake their heads when talking about Simon to express that he may present himself as Mao, but that they do not accept him as such. This is because he does not know exactly which clan his ancestors supposedly were members of and does not have full mother tongue competence.[342] Since "Mao" misleadingly refers to contrasting hierarchically defined identities, Simon may identify similarly to Yasin or Faris in ethnic terms but has a contrasting social status from them. For the local pastors, Simon is a "showcase Mao", proof that the mission among the Muslim Mao works. Simon accepts the "benevolent superiority" from the pastors, while

[340] Cf. Jürgen Klein (2021) on Christian-Muslim relations and the "C1-6 spectrum"; C1 means a complete cultural separation between Christians and Muslims and C6 represents a close to complete merge of lifestyles. Some Christian churches in Ethiopia allow more diverse lifestyles (Klein 2021: 340).
[341] Interview no. 27
[342] For more on language endangerment and loss, see Küspert-Rakotondrainy and Küspert (2022). Individuals use limited language skills as "proof" that individuals whose "ancestral purity" is in doubt are not "real" Mao. By contrast, the exact level of language proficiency does not matter so much for individuals who are acknowledged as "pure Mao".

Yasin and Faris would not. Still, all three of them use the label Mao to (re)claim a sense of honour.

One may draw parallels between Simon's story and observations by Frantz Fanon who discusses how the "black man" is expected to be "good" in the sense that he conforms to a lifestyle deemed "appropriate" for him. For this, he should be grateful (Fanon 1986: 35-37).[343] For Simon, this means that he is allowed to be Mao as long as he does not challenge the present hierarchies and universal "truths" that church and development work are built on. Part of these truths is the above-mentioned idea that certain customs are "bad" or "harmful" and others are not. This leads to the belief in the superiority not only of Christianity (i.e., Jesus Christ and the Bible) but specific customs such as music, food, clothing, and linguistic expressions. A pastor explained the expected adjustment by stating that he did not believe the cultural expression of the worship in his congregation would change no matter how many Mao would become Christians.[344] For the EECMY in Begi, Simon can only be "good" if he is obedient to a suitable "Christian" behaviour – in other words, not behaving in a manner that is too "Mao-like".

For Simon, being Mao in the church is a conscious choice. According to Foucault, "Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free" (Foucault 1982: 221). In this sense, Simon has chosen to submit himself to the very power that subjects him and, through this, exercise his agency (Butler 1997: 17; Werbner 2002: 37). For example, he proudly talks about how he has converted people in his surroundings to Christianity and has taught them to build better houses and roofs. As Saba Mahmood (2005) argues, choosing to submit oneself to a set of norms and values may be a conscious choice for individuals, especially if this gives them a sense of piety; agency does not have to result in open resistance (cf. Ortner 1995). Donald Donham found that, in revolutionary Maale, individuals who were the weaker party in an unequal power relation started using religion to challenge existing inequalities (Donham 1999: 61). Although Simon does not openly challenge inequalities, religion is also for him an ideology – and the church an institution – he employs to overcome an ancestral stigma.

Although Simon is not fluent in his ancestor's Mao language, it counts as his "mother tongue" among his Oromo-speaking fellow Christians. The church opens the possibility for Simon to

[343] Cf. Hobsbawm (2012): The idea that the colonial subject should conform to the "white man's" language and lifestyle but should in no way become too similar to them, is a well-documented phenomenon.
[344] Interview no. 167

do something for "my people", as he says. While submitting to the hierarchies of the church, he has also gained a self-understanding as an advocate for the Mao. Towards me, as an outsider, he insists: "We want our own [music] instruments [to be used in church]. And we want to use our language." With this subtle emphasis on his otherness in the church (a role the church has also assigned him to) he has gained an important purpose and an emotional attachment to a particular identity. Paradoxically, the moment Simon became a Christian Mao or a Mao Christian, a characteristic often indicating less honour, he became a "real" (or even "pure") Mao in his social environment. Although other Mao may still not regard Simon's ancestry as "honourable", several of my interlocutors were approving of his efforts to do something "for the Mao people", such as language development efforts.

In the introduction, I argued that not all connotations of Mao apply to all bearers of the label. The story of Simon also shows that similar connotations may be achievable through different methods. Some Mao seek to attain "honour" through being Muslim. Simon seeks to become "honourable" through the opposite mechanism; he became a Christian Mao in an Oromo-dominated church. On the one hand, ethnic federalism has had the effect that people self-identifying as Mao today may emphasise their commonness. On the other hand, the different variations of Mao identification may drift even further apart through the way individuals make use of newer developments, such as the Protestant mission, to negotiate their ethnicity.

4.5. Conclusion

Mao is a label with several meanings and functions in a context where not all identities have the same prestige. Mao may, in some situations, carry favourable connotations like being authentic "owners of the land", and it is associated with the power of certain political leaders (in Benishangul Gumuz). Therefore, none of the individuals who self-identify as Mao, whom I have spoken to, advocate ceasing to use the term "Mao", even though the term also has negative associations. Instead, they may seek to define and redefine what Mao means in relation to, for instance, autochthony, purity, and (religious) righteousness. They do so, particularly by drawing a boundary between themselves and classificatory "slaves" despite the tangled connection between the two categories.

This chapter has discussed the negotiation of various meanings of Mao in different discourses in the former Begi *Wäräda*. It has considered shifting interpretations of indigeneity, conflicting connotations of slavery and various expressions of identity through religion. Some of the meanings of Mao expressed in these three discourses are deep-rooted in generations-old notions of who should be considered a firstcomer, a slave, or a pious person. Other meanings are of newer date, caused by the division of the former Begi *Wäräda* into the two regional states of Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz; the border between the two regions has further influenced an already confusing social landscape. Although the search for honour and purity is grounded in ideas of ancestry, the options an individual has for social, economic or status mobility are related to how they can make use of their Maoness within the newer, ethnic-political paradigm. Mao is a heterogenous category because it is being negotiated and created in social discourses relative to an individual's position in the social hierarchy. It is multidimensional because it acquires different meanings in different discourses of hierarchy.

The demand by ethnic federalism that an individual should be a "true" (i.e., hereditary) member of a nationality strengthens the old ideal of ancestral purity because of the emphasis it puts on "blood-descent" from ancestors of the respective nationality. In the case of Mao, ancestry is negotiated in the tension between the categories Mao and Oromo, whereby Mao of "pure" descent may consider themselves more honourable than Oromo of slave descent. In other words, it is better to be a "true" Mao than a "false" Oromo. Yet, the Mao category would not exist without the Oromo category since it was created as an identity signalling alterity to Oromo. The next chapter will analyse how present-day bearers of the label Mao forge kinship relations across the whole area to build a stronger sense of groupness vis-à-vis Oromo. This political construction of a "Mao nationality" is born out of the discourses discussed in this chapter and emphasises the ideals of authenticity, purity, and righteousness. However, since Mao represents diverse identities which affect the daily lives of individuals in contrasting ways, these ideals remain contested.

CHAPTER V – MARRIAGE STRATEGIES, KINSHIP, AND FAMILY-MAKING

5.1. Introduction

When individuals in the Begi area make decisions related to kinship and love, they consider multiple aspects of social hierarchies which are, among others, related to the discourses discussed in the previous chapter – autochthony, slavery, and religion. Some of their concerns arise from interpretations of honour that linger from before the socialist revolution, while ethnic federalism today represents a set of newer logics that have increased the importance of ethnicity in marriage choices. The way communities interpret marriage strategies mirrors how they believe Maoness should be "appropriately" exercised in their area. Individuals who wish to marry outside of what is considered appropriate may experience disapproval and sanctions by their family or their partner's family. Because of the multiple meanings of Mao, being categorised as such does not affect marriage options in the same manner and to the same extent in all groups and places. This thesis explores how Mao may act as a manifestation of both high and low prestige because of the heterogeneity of the people assembled into this category. This chapter argues that the way individuals and communities use Maoness to pursue or avoid certain marriages is contingent on their position in the social hierarchy and their intentions and opportunities within the political context.

We may approach kinship from different angles. First, it is a matter of both "emotional qualities" and practical considerations (Carsten 2004: 24). Secondly, as the political context changes, so do marriage strategies (Ellison 2009). Thirdly, "doing kinship" demands making normative decisions. In this chapter, I will discuss all three perspectives but with a special emphasis on the third. Opinions on whom to love and to marry are often based on honour as a currency in the social hierarchy. Interpretations of "blood" and the status of having a "pure" (non-slave) ancestry (*zär*), seen as biologically credible, are of vital importance for the marriage options of an individual. As pointed out by Samuel Lempereur, the "analysis of kinship and marriage can shed light on present-day social and economic relations between descendants of enslaved and free family members" (Lempereur 2022: 394). Marriage, thus, becomes a privileged site for understanding intricate social dynamics of hierarchies and power relations

(Yanagisako and Delaney 1995), related to official ethnicity and clan membership as well as how individuals evaluate their ancestral prestige and that of their affine.

The focus on marriage strategies does not ignore love, considering that love represents not only romantic feelings but is nurtured by an attachment based on a shared struggle for survival (Fisher 1998: 24; cf. Cole 2009). Anticipating material or immaterial factors that generate love involves "knowledge", according to Alfred Gell (2011). I will use Gell's theory to explain why not all Mao families interpret Maoness in the same way and, hence, do not all acknowledge the same premises for mutual love. Gell sees love as a "knowledge system, a procedure for obtaining, distributing and transforming knowledge of preeminent social value" (Gell 2011: 2; cf. Strathern 2005). Families that share the same interpretation of Mao in their "knowledge system" are more likely to engage in exchange – marriage representing the highest form of interfamilial exchange (Piot 1991). They may use this as a foundation for their attachment, yet what "similar" means is negotiated in light of shifting social hierarchies, conditioned by a changing political climate.

Individuals with diverse social positions experience the effects of Maoness in contrasting ways in matters of marriage. The political division of the former Begi *Wäräda* into two regional states in 1995 influenced individuals and families to change their perspectives regarding kinship. Most residents became more sceptical about marriages across the border. However, others started emphasising a common sense of Maoness regardless of residence; the political recognition of ethnic identities had created possibilities for new types of unions between communities that did not necessarily intermarry before. From an ethnic perspective, all Mao belong to the same "imagined community" (cf. Anderson 2006) and should, therefore, be able to intermarry. That said, the concepts of "titular" or "indigenous" are interpreted differently in the two regions. Over the last generation, some Mao groups have adopted the label Mao but not altered the way they tend to marry, whereas others have changed their practices but not their label.

Communities today engage in a complicated web of different, often contradictory explanations to justify certain kinship relations and reject others. This chapter will discuss how people's actions influence how they think, as opposed to only looking at how "rules" result in certain behaviours. With their actions, individuals contribute to transforming the existing "knowledge" about what Mao should mean since choices of partners and alliances affect how Mao is

perceived as a social category. Although the communities provide certain logics behind kinship relations (norms), these do not necessarily correspond to real-life choices (practice).[345] Examining the latter provides insights into how the transformation of hierarchies and social categories impacts ordinary peoples' experiences. Practices of kinship are multi-situated with negotiations around purity, honour, and status cutting across distinctions such as Mao and Oromo, "red" and "black", different socioeconomic conditions, and religious affiliations. Maoness interacts with various other characteristics of an individual, including their gender, and contributes to creating or limiting marriage opportunities.

The marriage practices investigated in this chapter give insight into how individuals perform various identities and how social stratification practically impacts their lives. Their stories reveal the alliances that unite families and communities across the area of my fieldwork and connect different communities on both sides of the regional border by bonds of kinship. I will use two marriages in particular as illustrations. These are hardly representative of all marriages in the area; on the contrary, they represent rather uncommon unions between families and communities with little previous intermarriage. The two marriages developed differently: the first serves as an example of how a couple has overcome past hierarchies by claiming a common ethnic identity. The second ends in a divorce, instigated by the wife's family, apparently because the pair are too different in status, even though they both self-identify as Mao and are in similar wealth brackets.[346] These two marriages exemplify how communities deal with exceptional alliances and why they are more likely to accept certain unions than others. Alongside atypical marriages, the chapter also considers examples of families who today still do not intermarry because they consider their inherited prestige unequal.

After introducing the two marriages which will illustrate some of the complexities surrounding kinship and affinity, this chapter is divided into two main sections. The first is concerned with the local logics of marriage and kinship – the commonly recognised ("official") strategies of kinship and existing realities, especially related to notions of "blood". It shows how old ideas

[345] Pierre Bourdieu discussed the tension between theory and practice, between the expectations of what is "right" and how individuals perform their actions in his work *The Logic of Practice* (1992). He discusses how "rules" are created in correspondence with social realities and generate a logic that is "rarely entirely coherent and rarely entirely incoherent" (ibid: 12). Michel De Certeau (2011: xx) uses the concepts "strategy" and "tactic" to describe the discrepancy between "rules" imposed by power structures and real-life actions and interaction.

[346] These two stories have undergone careful anonymisation to prevent any reader, even from the area of my fieldwork to know who these individuals are. This process has stripped the events of some, otherwise important, details to ensure the anonymity of my interlocutors.

of marriageability based on patrilineality and ancestral honour continue to influence which unions are deemed "proper" and which are not. The second section provides alternative perspectives and deliberate breaches of kinship rules. It investigates how increased ethnicisation of society after 1991 has impacted marriage choices. Today, being classified as "Mao" has become increasingly consequential in matters of marriage.

5.2. One Successful and One Failed Marriage

The protagonists in this chapter are two young women from Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* in Benishangul Gumuz Regional State, Zara Mustafa and Malika Salman, and their respective husbands Jiregna Gemechu and Hadi Walid from Oromia Regional State. In the communities where the two women grew up, individuals from local Mao and Oromo lineages frequently intermarry. Both Zara and Malika's fathers self-identify as Mao in an area where the label Mao has become common among political elites. Neither of them is from a particularly wealthy family but some of their educated male relatives have become government employees in Tongo, promoted by the policy of employing mainly Mao in such positions. Both Zara and Malika use Oromo as their mother tongue but Zara's father speaks the local Mao language (Gwama), which he calls *ttwa sit shwala* ("mouth of the black people"). Yet, both women are perceived as "red" (a term that denotes an allegedly light complexion), like many others in this ethnically mixed area.

Jiregna and Hadi are Mao men from different areas in Oromia and their social positions are not the same. Hadi's grandfather was a *qorro* (landowner) who owned "black Oromo" slaves, according to Hadi. This type of family is not expected to intermarry with slave descendants as Mao people around the Dabus River do, but intermarriage with "red" families (often Oromo) is also rare in his area. Jiregna's family is less affluent than Hadi's but also takes pride in a "pure" male lineage. From the perspective of Zara and Malika's more prestigious families, most Mao communities in Oromia represent poor, sometimes landless, low-status families who originate from communities that have been exploited since pre-imperial times without regard for internal differences.

Zara and Malika met their husbands via mobile phone - a common way to get in touch (cf. Gilbert 2019). Jiregna got Zara's phone number from her cousin; they started calling each other

and soon arranged meetings. Zara liked this young man with a polite and calm personality and secondary education. Jiregna appreciated Zara's cleverness in performing household tasks and caring for guests. A few months later, Jiregna sent elders to Zara's family to ask for her hand in marriage. This is regarded as the proper way to initiate marriage. Their wedding took place approximately one year later. Jiregna paid for the celebrations in both Zara's and his own village (the families of the bride and groom do not celebrate together).[347] He did not have to pay bridewealth (Oro.: *gabbra*) since they did the wedding in the "Muslim style".[348] The marriage between Zara and Jiregna is an uncommon one, as their lineages have different pasts and levels of prestige. But both families accepted the marriage because Zara and Jiregna are "Mao" and therefore seen as fit to intermarry.

A contrasting story is that of Malika. Hadi tracked down the phone number of this young lady, and they started meeting. Malika says she loved his kindness and the fair manner he treats others and decided to become his wife. She figured he would be a good breadwinner for the family she wanted to build, as he had a decent income from farming. Although Hadi had originally planned to send elders to Malika's parents, they ended up moving in together without their knowledge. This way of starting a marriage by elopement (Oro.: *ba'uu*) is widespread today, especially among young couples who do not have the money to pay for a wedding ceremony or think their parents will not approve of the marriage. Malika probably already knew that her father would not allow her to marry Hadi; although Hadi is a relatively successful farmer, his lineage is perceived as less prestigious than Malika's, which is allegedly "Arab". Today, the regional border between Hadi's Oromia and Malika's Benishangul Gumuz strengthens this division.

After Malika had moved into Hadi's home, he sent an elder called Usman to Malika's parents to inform them. Usman relates that Malika's father, Salman, had told him to go away and refused to acknowledge his message although there was little he could do at this moment to end his daughter's relationship with Hadi.[349] Usman felt uncomfortable going to Malika's parents; for him, they represent people who for generations have belonged to a social stratum that

[347] Jiregna bought all the necessary clothes and jewellery for Zara and her relatives. He paid her family ETB 4,000 (64 GBP) for preparing the wedding ceremony at their place.
[348] Lit.: "The way of the religion" (Amh.: *yähaymanot*/ Oro.: *amantii*). It is implied that the religion is Islam. This way of marrying is acceptable if both families profess the Muslim faith; according to the local interpretation, the *shari'a* law prohibits the payment of bridewealth.
[349] According to Usman, Malika's father had "insulted" him, but he did not mention the content of the insult.

constituted the political and land-owning elites and later educated leaders. Malika's family is not particularly affluent and both Usman and Salman are Mao, yet they have contrasting social positions. Fearing that Malika may be pregnant, Salman finally agreed that they should have their union blessed in the mosque so she would be officially married according to traditional and religious norms. A child of an unmarried mother will be considered "without *zär*", which is arguably worse than having a father of low status (Dejene 2009; cf. challenges regarding illegitimate children in Islam, Sikandar and Haneef 2016).[350]

The difference in status and lifestyle between Jiregna and Zara's families is relatively similar to that between Malika and Hadi's. However, Malika's parents were never as interested in common Maoness as Zara's. Their family had, for generations, lived as Oromo-speakers with a lifestyle that did not differ from that of other Oromo. Malika's father Salman says, "Mao and Oromo are the same".[351] This may seem to indicate unity, but in this case, it means that issues other than ethnicity unify these two groups. In Salman's eyes, they are related by status and occupy different positions in the same hierarchy. Zara's father, on the other hand, self-identifies as *shwala* ("black", i.e., not "Oromo").[352] This shows that even within neighbouring Mao families in the same community (Zara's and Malika's), there are differences in the way individuals imagine identity.

Only months after Malika and Hadi had gotten their marriage blessed, Malika's brother came to collect her. She had no choice but to finally bow to her father's will, leave Hadi and move back to her parents. According to the gossip in the village and Malika's relatives who have observed this marriage, Hadi could not persuade Malika's father to accept him as an equal. What is special about Zara and Malika's two stories is that on the one hand, they exemplify that individuals who were not marriageable in pre-federal times, today may regard each other as possible partners. On the other hand, it shows that individuals from families that officially belong to the same Ethiopian nationality and are relatively similar in wealth or education, in practice, may still not be deemed fit to marry because the hierarchical logic is less concerned

[350] Dejene Debsu writes, in the context of the Guji Oromo: "Customarily children born to single mothers are considered illegitimate, and this perception is strengthened by the patrilineal ideology which stresses inheritance and lineage through the father's line. Having children under such circumstances has a structural implication since children cannot trace their descent back to any particular clan or lineage" (Dejene 2009: 34, footnote).
[351] Interview no. 48
[352] Interview no. 62

with ethnicity. It may consider ethnicity only if it denotes a certain position in the local hierarchy.

5.3. Kinship and Marriageability

This section is concerned with how families and communities in the area understand the "rules" of kinship in their society. First, it will discuss the patrilinear logic that is commonly followed in Ethiopia (Tewodros 2022). Not all "rules" are explicit; kinship strategies also follow practical criteria and unwritten conventions. My interlocutors often used the term "blood" to express similarities and differences concerning ancestry. As discussed in the previous chapter, "blood" signifies not only biological relatedness but also concerns regarding the social aspect of kinship such as belonging to a similar hierarchical stratum. In this regard, exchange "produces blood", as I will argue. Considerations about blood interact in complex ways with other criteria and practical concerns through the ways Mao women and men make decisions in kinship and marriage. Kinship in the Mao area is often concerned with building alliances. This will be exemplified in the later sections of this chapter. The section that follows will provide the basis for understanding the "family-making" among Mao. Exploring issues of blood and exchange, ethnicity and residence, honour, stigma, and slavery will help appreciate kinship as a flexible construct in which Maoness does not always function as a unified entity.

Patrilinear logics

Most communities in Western Ethiopia are patrilinear and exogamic.[353] This means that children inherit the clan membership of their father and need to marry outside of his clan (Meckelburg and Küspert-Rakotondrainy 2019). This is not only the case for Mao but also for Oromo clans. Children of two brothers (parallel cousins) belong to the same clan and do not marry each other. Children of a brother and a sister (cross-cousins), however, can usually be permitted to marry "because [the mother] is a woman."[354] This statement indicates that a woman's clan membership is not passed on to the child (Uthman 2006: 68; cf. Holcomb 1973). A saying in the Mao language Hozo (*Ak'mo Wandi*) goes like this: "if one clan marries from among themselves, the children that are born will not grow".[355] Hence, several of my

[353] Cf. González-Ruibal (2014: 91) on matrilineality among the lowland population toward Sudan.
[354] Interview no. 30. I met several women who had married their maternal uncle.
[355] Interview no. 72. Original wording: *Onno moo zara yaya wek'ena ena daggash melka mera edzuwi*.

interlocutors believed that diseases would infect children born from parents who have the same father's clan.

Intermarriage between different *zär* (ethnic/descent groups) is common in many areas. However, my interlocutors who had parents of different *zär* still portrayed themselves as "100% Oromo" or "100% Mao" and not "half-half". A young man who identified as Mao stated: "One person cannot be two. How can one person be two? Either this [*zär*] or that [*zär*]."[356] There is a high degree of intermarriage between Oromo and Mao lineages around Tongo, but Zara's uncle explained: "even if we marry each other's women, why should we become one?"[357] What he means is that the male lineage does not change its *zär* no matter how many women with other *zär* are married to the men in the lineage.

A *zär* is usually understood to be made up of several clans called *gosa* or *qomo* in Oromo. This is a simplification of the intricate Oromo kinship system which has also spread to non-Oromo communities (cf. Paulos 1984: 29; Baxter 1994: 174). Several clans that today are identified as Mao call themselves *warra* (Oro.: "family") meaning that they believe to descend from the same named ancestor (e.g., *warra* Setta, descendants of Setta/Seid, son of Dawd).[358] Other clans are not named after an ancestor but according to their profession (e.g., Kukul or Kukulu – the clan of the spirit mediums). Numerous clan names do not seem to have a known meaning. The clan membership of an individual is, just like their *zär*, inherited from their father and has consequences for their opportunities in marriage, as we will see.

Several types of marriages are common: legal marriages with one wife, religious (Muslim) marriages with up to four wives, and traditional marriages with one or several wives. Polygyny is widespread in both Oromo and Mao Muslim communities while Ethiopian law only accepts marriage between one man and one woman.[359] Children from all wives should inherit equally although only the first wife may have the legal (governmental) status as a wife. Christian men

[356] Interview no. 69
[357] Interview no. 59
[358] Here, the meaning of *gosa* and *warra* ("clan") has merged. Previously, *warra* only used to refer to "those [who] patrilineally descended from a still-living man" (Knutsson 1967: 41). Setta today is around six generations ago. Paulos (1984) describes the lowest level as the family (*warra*), which is part of a lineage (*balballa*), which again is part of a clan (*qomo*), a maxi clan such as Leqa, which is part of the Macha branch, which is part of the Oromo Nation (called *gosa* by Paulos).
[359] The mosque accepts marriages of men with up to four wives; concubinage is not widely practised (interview with Dr Abdussamad Ahmad, 30.06.2022).

usually marry only one wife. Younger widows are commonly taken in marriage by one of their late husband's brothers as a second or third wife (Abebe, Atnafu and Shewa 2018).

Virilocality is usual. It means that upon marriage a woman will leave her parents' (father's) house and move into her husband's without changing her clan membership. Thereby, "a woman's sexuality [is transferred] from her father […] to her husband" (Oduyoye 1995: 137). The local logic seems similar to that of Claude Meillassoux; men do not depend on women from their own society for their "group's reproductive capacity" if they can find enough women from outside their community to bear their children (Meillassoux 1981: 33). Several of my male Mao interlocutors said that they saw it as an advantage if they used Oromo women to give birth to their children since this would give the Mao a chance to grow faster in number (the children will formally become members of the Mao clan of their father). They further emphasised that the Mao are so low in number that their women should not marry Oromo men to "give birth to Oromo children. We don't want that [because] her children will be Oromo."[360]

Language often plays a subordinated role in marriage. For example, there is little intermarriage between Mao in Ishgogo/Kobor and Tongo although they use dialects of the same language (Gwama). By contrast, intermarriage across different mutually non-intelligible (Mao) languages is common in the Begi and Kondala area. I met several women who had a different mother tongue than their co-wives (Seze/Hozo/Gwama). Together, the family speaks Oromo, but the children may understand the language of their respective mothers. A man from the lowland in Benishangul Gumuz told me while speaking in the Oromo language, that they cannot marry Oromo. "There is a problem with the language. […] We cannot understand them," he said.[361] Since he spoke Oromo fluently, this is not a matter of communication but it means that he regards the Oromo as too different to marry. Hence, language differences provide an excuse for individuals to avoid intermarriage with Oromo or alleged descendants of Oromo slaves (Küspert-Rakotondrainy and Küspert 2022). Ultimately, alliances are more often based on status than on region, religion, or language. However, such similarities may as well matter if they match hierarchies and patterns of exchange between families and communities and may be used to support the "creation of blood".

[360] Interview no. 15
[361] Interview no. 52

Blood and Exchange

The category "Mao" is racialised and bears certain stigmatising connotations as discussed in the previous chapter. Social divisions based on complexion ("blood") and (perceived) origin from communities labelled with the now outdated term *shanqəla* still play a role today. After Emperor Menilik had conquered western and southern areas in the late 19th century, the Abyssinian society did not regard *shanqəla* as "proper marriage partners for Abyssinians" (Donham 1986: 12). Although "informal Abyssinian-Shankilla sexual unions" were not uncommon, their descendants were stigmatised and could be traced for generations (ibid). By contrast, Abyssinian intellectuals regarded Oromo as assimilable and, therefore, marriageable for Amhara despite the power hierarchies within the Abyssinian society (Bahru 2002b: 132; Marzagora 2016: 197). From a Mao perspective, Oromo and Abyssinians/Amhara represent the same category of people who have a light complexion and a superior social position.

Alessandro Triulzi's interviewees in 1972 claimed that there was no intermarriage between Oromo and "Mawo" as there was enmity between them "let alone relations like that."[362] Government functionary Bekuretsion stated the same in 1971.[363] Meckelburg (2019: 175) uses the term "marriage taboo" when he discusses the "social marginalization" of Mao and Komo in the area. With this, he means that "[f]rom an Oromo perspective, relations between Mao and Oromo are often not welcomed but they happen". The idea that Mao and Oromo do not intermarry was also a recurrent topic in my discussions with people in the area. One of my interlocutors said: "In the Mao culture, we marry Mao and not Oromo."[364]

A lack of history of exchange between these communities limits the building of relationships between families whereas communities who have intermarried before are likely to continue their relationship. Charles Piot (1991) argues that the exchange of things, food, and women, produces lasting relationships between families. "As a relationship grows, it moves into successively higher spheres and becomes identified with different types of exchanges. This […] can produce a relationship of permanence between the two exchangers (and their houses)" (ibid:

[362] IES MS 1887, Triulzi interview A-BG-6 (25.02.1972) in Begi with two informants who seemingly identify as Oromo.
[363] IES MS 359, Bekuretsion Tilahun, *The history and culture of the people of Asosa Benishangul* awraja, 19.09.1971
[364] Interview no. 109

412).[365] Before bridewealth became usual, marriage by sister exchange was common among non-Oromo communities in Western Ethiopia. Marriage by exchange means that two men and their families agree to exchange women – either sisters or another female relative without the payment of bridewealth (James 1986).[366] The Macha Oromo society does not have this custom of exchange marriage. This tradition also excludes parts of the "Arab" or Kiring clans around Begi/Tongo (Abosh 2014).[367] Although marriage by exchange is not practised anymore, a division remains between families who would previously have exchanged women and families with whom they would not have exchanged. Today, these divisions do not coincide with ethnic boundaries because the Kiring ("Arab") are categorised as Mao.

Exchange implies that there is knowledge about the other party. Alfred Gell (2011) argues that knowledge of the other is a prerequisite for love, whether this knowledge is of the concerned person or obtained from other sources such as fiction (e.g., love stories from novels). Similarly, Marilyn Strathern calls kinship "an artefact of knowledge" (Strathern, 2005: 46).[368] Individuals from families who have not previously had relations of exchange may not figure as potential affines because of the lack of mutual knowledge. "We didn't grow up together," said my interlocutor Muktar, a young Mao man from the Dabus area, to indicate the unbridgeable gap between his brother and the family of his brother's Oromo wife.[369] By contrast, to the question of why the *warra* Iso (descendants from Dawd's son Isa) often marry Oromo and usually do not intermarry with other Mao (except other Dawd clans), a man whose clan is *warra* Iso answered: "There are generations of relations between the Oromo and the [*warra* Iso]".[370] He referred to intermarriage and closeness in prestige, culture and language (Oromo).

Mutual exchange does not only produce intimate relations between families, but in the local discourse, it also produces blood. The word *hambilionno* ("of-the-same-blood") discussed in the previous chapter may refer to individuals of the same patrilinear line who cannot intermarry,

[365] The context in which Piot discusses relations of exchange is a particular society in Northern Togo. Although many aspects of this society and their particular customs and rules of exchange do not apply to Western Ethiopia, the argument that exchange creates long-term relationships applies to other societies as well.
[366] Sister-exchange marriage is today considered an outdated and "harmful" practice. A 42-year-old man is the youngest person I encountered in my fieldwork who had married his wife by exchange.
[367] Abosh Mustefa, who is from the highland around Tongo, does not list exchange marriage among the forms of marriage of the Kwama (Mao) and only the Komo.
[368] Although Marilyn Strathern mainly refers to consanguine relations in this quote, she also discusses kinship in general in similar terms, beyond the division between consanguinity and affinity.
[369] Interview no. 71
[370] Interview no. 51. This shows the importance of a history of intermarriage (cf. Lempereur 2022).

as opposed to individuals related through their mothers, in which case they do not have "the same blood". It can also mean being of the same *zär*" (such as Mao), in which case two people can intermarry provided they belong to different clans. Most significantly, it may refer to individuals who belong to the same social stratum, for example, communities believed to descend from enslavable people (previously called *shanqəla* and/or Mao in this area). Most of my interlocutors expressed that such people should marry among themselves and not others. The belief in the genetic closeness (i.e., "similar blood") among individuals of the same racial category ("black") refers to both biological (the "given") and social or cultural (the "made") elements of kinship (Carsten 2004: 9; cf. Yanagisako and Delaney 1995). Consequently, blood becomes a racialised concept that exemplifies the creation of groupness and hierarchical relations in the Mao area.

Despite the seemingly absolute categories of "red" and "black", skin colour is to a certain extent a matter of interpretation; individuals often use complexion figuratively to express other conditions. I argue that it is not the complexion per se that matters, but what it represents – usually family prestige. With sufficient ancestral reputation, also "black" men can marry "red" women. Even in Kondala, where few Mao and Oromo intermarry, the sons of a former Mao landlord have all married "red" Oromo women in addition to their Mao wives. Although they have a dark complexion, these men do not self-identify with the social stratum of *saba gurracha* (lit: "black nationality" in Oromo).[371] Some of my other interlocutors used the expression *saba gurracha* to denote low-status families – groups who have had low prestige since before the 1974 revolution.[372] For example, a young man said about his mother that she is not a "true" member of the Oromo *zär* but a member of the *saba gurracha* – not only because of her dark complexion but because she is, allegedly, of slave descent. What matters for individuals' marriage options is their family's comparable prestige rather than their ethnic category or their actual shade of complexion.

Several of my elderly interlocutors argued that when a couple has different "blood" (here meaning different complexion), their children will get ill, for example, get a kind of skin rash or "not be fully normal", almost similar to when a couple has the same father's clan.[373] My

[371] Interview no. 158 with one of these sons. He said, his father was "not red, not black but in the middle".
[372] Interview no. 76. The idea of a "black nationality" was also expressed in interview no. 26 with an elderly Mao man whose second wife is a so-called "black Oromo" woman.
[373] Interview no. 15

interlocutor Yakob from the Dabus area in Kondala explained that "Mao marry Mao," yet he has married a woman who self-identifies as Oromo from a so-called "black Oromo" family.[374] Yakob believes they are biologically related to the same kind of "black" ancestors as they both share an equally low rank in the local hierarchy. First, this suggests that some families, by definition, are considered descendants of communities in the "slaving zone" although no one can prove that they descend from the same group. Secondly, it shows how an assumed biological relatedness is attributed to groups of similar prestige.

I have come across several examples of "red Oromo" families that refuse the choice of their daughter to marry a "Mao" (here meaning "black", rural and/or poor). She will "destroy her *zär*"[375] and "make [the Oromo *zär*] dirty,"[376] is, seemingly, the reason for their refusal. The brother of my interlocutor Muktar from the Dabus area fell in love with a "red Oromo" woman and they decided to marry but her family did not approve. According to Muktar, her father said: "Why did you need to marry a Mao? We will kill you if you come back to our house."[377] She, therefore, severed ties with her family: "She tried to create a relationship, but then she gave up. She just didn't engage with them anymore," says Muktar. This story is an example of the impossibility of the two communities to exchange and thereby unite through marriage – i.e., lack of a common "knowledge system" (Gell 2011). One of my Mao interlocutors from Begi told me that "the Oromo", apparently, say: "Our oxen and your oxen don't plough together." According to him, this means "we're *gurracha* [black], they're *diima* [red]. They feel superior."[378] This could be a local way of expressing what Fredrik Barth (1969: 15) calls "playing the same game" or, in this case, *not* playing (or ploughing) together.

An aspect which may create mutual "knowledge" that facilitates intermarriage is material wealth – not only currently but that of past generations. Differences in wealth are a barrier to marriage. An Oromo man from a family of imperial *qorro* (landlords) called Umar told me about his marriage which happened during the Derg time. His parents had insisted he and his siblings "married people with equal wealth. […] My wife is from that kind of family. [Her parents] wouldn't have given her to a poor person."[379] Although the wealth of the former

[374] Interview no. 75
[375] Interview no. 140 (Similar statement in interview 71)
[376] Interview no. 92
[377] Interview no. 71
[378] Interview no. 117
[379] Interview no, 101

landlords had already decreased significantly due to the redistribution efforts of the Derg government and many formerly prominent families had lost their positions, the prestige of past riches lingered. Umar continued talking about how the times have changed and that his children today are free to marry whomever they want. To my question, if any of his children have married Mao, he answered: "Oh no! None married Mao!" This idea sounded almost absurd to him. For Umar, "Mao" is a category of people with low prestige, wealth, and education, and a term that may act as a euphemism for the slaves of the past. Therefore, Mao are not marriageable for his family, whatever their current affluence. A similar logic was behind the refusal of Malika's family to accept Hadi as a worthy husband for Malika.

Characteristics like historical purported enslavability are, until this day, significant in marriage relations alongside ethnic divisions of newer dates. Further below, we will discuss how the way communities today interpret "blood" is not necessarily how it used to be interpreted as it adjusts to perceived differences across communities that contrast in prestige. It appears that as the criteria for prestige transform, so does the concept of "blood". Yet, hierarchies from a time long before the current ethnic divisions remain. These lingering logics are also the reason Mao women accept to marry some men and refuse others, as we will now discuss.

Women, Residence, and Intermarriage

Local people, policymakers, and scholars often portray women as a group of low importance in a patrilinear system, that has minimal power in decisions on marriage. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they cannot influence both the process of marriage and the long-term effects of kinship relations (Carsten 2004: 13; Thubauville and Gabbert 2014: 187). Many women can say "no" to a suitor, and thereby influence which marriages are possible between different families. Furthermore, it is significant that women are responsible for the upbringing, and through this, the skills and values passed on to the children; children of Oromo mothers are usually monolingual in the Oromo language.

Women from Mao clans and families do not marry Oromo men as often as Oromo women marry Mao men (cf. similar findings by González-Ruibal 2014: 335). It seems that Mao women are, in general, more reluctant to marry outside of their *zär* than their male counterparts (especially if they self-identify as black). Only one of my 25 married female Mao interlocutors had married a husband she identified as Oromo whereas 28 of my 73 male married Mao

interlocutors had at least one Oromo wife (38%) (Appendix B, table 5).[380] The Mao men who marry "red Oromo" women tend to be quite well-off, such as descendants of former landlords. The lack of intermarriage between Mao women and Oromo men comprises two opposite phenomena, concealed by the use of "Oromo" as a generic term. One is that "black" women usually refuse to marry "red Oromo" (hypergamy) and the other is that many Mao women who consider themselves "pure" refuse to marry "slaves" or "black Oromo" (hypogamy). To the question of why Mao women refuse to marry "red Oromo", there may be as many answers as there are Mao women and some may sound both illogical and contradictory.[381] Numerous explanations revolve around the allusion to slavery (González-Ruibal 2014: 336), although the above-mentioned logic that Mao women should not give birth to Oromo children (and thereby increase the number of Oromo) also play a role.

The enslavement of women through marriage is as old as the institutions of marriage and slavery themselves (Sikainga 1995; Quirk and Rossi 2022). Lambert Bartels (1983) found that Mao women have, in the past, been taken as slave "wives" (concubines?) of Oromo men with the prospect of becoming "free" (cf. *umm al-walad*, Schacht 2000).[382] It is unclear what Bartels means by "slave wife" but he implies that these women had, prior to their marriage, been enslaved although they may also just have belonged to the "Mao stratum" of society. He writes:

> …taking their land from [the Mao] people, the Matcha took slaves from among them and married Mao women. […] A Mao girl who became a Matcha's wife was sure that her children would become free people in the long run […]. Married Mao slaves had a chance to be set free at some time and inserted into a Matcha clan (Bartels 1983: 22).

Today, the reluctance among women who self-identify as Mao to marry Oromo is related to the collective memory, be it ever so vague, of Oromo slave masters marrying Mao/enslaved women. This may also explain why women from clans that descend from Dawd are more willing to intermarry with Oromo. Instead of having been victims of slavery, these families were often slave masters and took slaves or servants from local Mao or Kwama families (James 1980: 61). The *mana* Dawd, therefore, have a completely different relation to the history of slavery.

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[380] 28 of the 73 Mao men among my interlocutors who were married, had at least one Oromo wife (some had one or several Mao wives too). That is 38%. The other 62% had married only Mao women. Among the 28 who had an Oromo wife, 5 of the wives were categorised as "black Oromo", and the remaining were identified as "red".

[381] I got these and many more explanations: "The Mao culture will be destroyed" (interview no. 11); the fathers do not allow the Mao girls to "take the secrets of the Mao into the Oromo families" (interview no. 23); her Oromo husband "may beat her" (interview no. 64); and "Mao men have a better attitude" (interview no. 32).

[382] An *umm al-walad* is an enslaved woman who legitimately gives birth to her master's child and thereby acquires a change of status (she is usually regarded as free after the death of her master). Whether this was the case among the Mao is unclear.

Virilocality influences the refusal of Mao women to marry Oromo men; the woman moves into the house of her husband who usually lives with his relatives in the community where he grew up. Dirribe, a Mao woman from Kondala, said:

> The Mao women don't agree to marry Oromo men because they are afraid that the Oromo in the neighbourhood and his family will make fun of the woman if she is the only Mao around.[383]

Coming as a "black" woman into a "red" family is something few Mao women seem to want to experience. "They will shout 'Mao, Mao'," said Dirribe. We do not know how many Mao women who marry into Oromo families experience taunting or discrimination, but it has become an unwritten "rule" among Mao women that they do not marry Oromo men who may see them as "slave wives".[384]

Despite the more flexible attitude towards intermarriage with Oromo among Tongo Mao, the latter may also fear discrimination in Oromo families. The young woman Galiba has married an Oromo man who lives in Begi, Oromia Region. Her father is from a highland Mao clan and identifies as "black". He suspects his Oromo neighbours of secretly looking down on his family. His wife, Galiba's mother, is of Oromo lineage. For Galiba, there are no differences between her background and that of her husband – they are both Oromo-speaking, live and farm the same way and eat the same foods – a good basis for lovingly building a common future. However, when Galiba visited her parents in Benishangul Gumuz Region, she told me that her parents had given her the advice not to disclose too openly that she is Mao when she is in the community of her in-laws, out of fear that she may be ridiculed. One of her friends expressed the same fear, but Galiba laughed and said that she experiences nothing of that sort. Because of her light complexion, Galiba can easily pass as "red Oromo". Certainly, Galiba's Oromo-like appearance and the long tradition of mutual exchange between her father's and her husband's communities may have made it easier for her to fit into the family of her in-laws.[385] Nevertheless, her friend was not completely convinced that "the Oromo" in Begi treated Galiba well because she "is Mao". This scepticism is strengthened by the regional border between the communities which creates another barrier, as we will discuss below.

[383] Interview no. 119
[384] Interview no. 97 with two Mao men
[385] Since I did not get the chance to visit Galiba at her husband's place, I cannot say anything about the relationship between her and her in-laws.

It is not accidental that the example of Galiba's marriage with an Oromo is that of an individual from a relatively prestigious family and clan who has an Oromo mother. Yet the above discussion shows that the main marriage "taboo" is not necessarily between "Mao" and "Oromo" as politically defined ethnic groups. The main division is based on perceived honour inherited from one's ancestors. It involves factors other than ethnicity, such as slave descent. The practical performance of Maoness depends on hierarchical circumstances, meaning that this category is influenced by an individual's social position which in turn impacts what Maoness does in kinship relations.

Marriage and Slave Descent

Honour and stigma are part of the "knowledge system" that shapes marriage and love; honour is contested, interpreted, and reinterpreted in various ways in kinship, especially related to the legacies of slavery. In the Mao area, being categorised as "slave" or "pure" remains central in matters of marriage despite the socio-political changes that have happened over the last generations. Considerations based on ancestral honour (*kəbər*) convey social rankings that the Derg government could not eradicate. Outside of the supervision of Derg *cadres* and after the downfall of the Derg, communities across Ethiopia continued to distinguish between classificatory slaves and non-slaves, craftworkers and farmers and allowed this distinction to influence social relations (Freeman and Pankhurst 2003: 353; Aalen 2011b; Bosha 2018: 70; Kiya 2018: 167). However, honour is not conceptualised only in relation to one measure of worth and is not ever-present in all situations. As a system of stratification, it co-exists with categories such as ethnicity, wealth, or complexion which together influence people's attitudes and possibilities in marriage in complex ways.

A Mao man from Begi said: "The *garba* [slaves] cannot marry red Oromo".[386] Indeed, in the whole area, I could not find any example of a couple consisting of one "red Oromo" spouse and one spouse who is a descendant of enslaved ancestors or classed as a slave descendant (cf. Holcomb 1973: 109).[387] Contrastingly, in the area close to the Dabus River, Mao families frequently intermarry with alleged slave descendants. Here, Maoness tends to be characterised consistently by negative stereotypes; the society in the region excludes families designated as

[386] Interview no. 97. Similarly, in other areas of Ethiopia, like Wollo in Amhara Region, intermarriage between *balabat* and *barya* is discouraged, although they do take place (Kiya 2018).
[387] There is also reluctance among many people, whether Mao or Oromo, to marry descendants of despised craftworkers such as *tumtu* (smiths) or *faqi* (tanners). Among Mao clans, these despised strata do not exist.

Mao socially and politically. Yakob explained: "We marry *gamt'a* [Hozo: 'slaves'], but not *galla gará* [Hozo: 'pure Oromo']."[388] According to my analysis, the label "slave" can be used for anyone who is seen as having low prestige, which in some areas may include Mao and in other areas not. This is among the reasons the "logic" seems incoherent.

The day Jiregna sent elders to ask Zara's family for her hand in marriage, her father inquired into several issues. He asked whether Jiregna was a "real" Mao or a "black Oromo". Apparently, Zara's father had said: "Among the Mao in Oromia, there are 'black Oromo'. They say they are Mao, but they are not true Mao."[389] The elders gave their word that Jiregna was a "pure" Mao by counting his male lineage back to a former landowner whose descendants are considered honourable in the local community. Counting lineages is traditionally a central method for establishing trust in the ancestry of an individual (Oljira 1994: 124).[390] However, this did not yet satisfy Zara's father. He wanted to know if Jiregna was a good Muslim since he had heard that some Mao (especially "black Oromo") in Oromia convert to Christianity. The elders again assured that Jiregna was not only a Muslim but a person who takes his *ṣalāt* seriously. The main issue of concern for Zara's family was to make sure Jiregna was not of slave descent, although they expressed this by asking if he was a "true Mao" and a "good Muslim" (cf. chapter IV).

Fayise Wakene, the young woman introduced in the previous chapter, who identifies as "black Oromo", complained that she would never get a "red Oromo" husband because they refuse to marry *garba*.[391] She has better chances finding a Mao husband although she formally belongs to an Oromo clan and is monolingual in Oromo; their communities occupy the same social rank. One of my interlocutors, an elderly Mao man from Kondala, explained what he regarded as appropriate marriage partners for individuals characterised as "black Oromo": "Slaves should marry from their own *qomo* (Oromo: 'clan') […], the black ones."[392] What this man means is that slave descendants are expected to marry within the social stratum (expressed as "clan") of "black people". Although not all people with a dark complexion have low status, the term *saba*

[388] Interview no. 75. Cf. Boylston (2018: 98) on marriage among *barya*, *buda* (evil eye) or artisans in the Amhara region.
[389] Interview no. 28, one of the elders
[390] For a discussion on the importance of counting genealogies to ensure "trust" in someone's ancestry, see Oljira Tujuba's research on Eastern Welega (Oljira 1994: 124).
[391] Interview no. 91
[392] Interview no. 26

gurracha ("black nationality") here implies people of low prestige, whether officially Mao or Oromo.

The marriage prospects of men of alleged slave descent are more limited than those of women. Parents refuse, in particular, to give their daughters in marriage to individuals they categorise as slaves because it would mean that her children would not be "pure".[393] A woman called Hanan Tolesa married a man called Milkeysa Dhuga. According to Hanan's brother Jafar, "everyone" knows that Milkeysa is "without a *zär*" because his clan, allegedly, is that of his grandfather's master.[394] Jafar cannot understand how his parents could give his sister to a *garba*. Now, Hanan's children are born without a "proper" *zär*, although Milkeysa's clan is Yalo, a respectable Mao clan. Hence, the marriage between Hanan and Milkeysa is between two "Mao" individuals, and yet, seen as inappropriate. That said, Jafar also commented that this marriage could help the children "become clean" by the influence of his sister's "pure" Mao *zär*. In theory, a woman cannot pass her lineage to the children. In practice, it may be possible to negotiate a certain level of "purity" for the children through their mother, which may pay off when they start negotiations for marriage.

Inter-religious marriages, or lack of such, can demonstrate relations of hierarchy and honour. For example, Christian women from Oromo families may convert when they marry Mao men of relative prestige. Kalid Abdusalam, a Muslim Mao man who married a Christian Oromo woman, told me their story:[395]

> [I said to her:] "I love you. If you would allow me [to marry you]… if you agree." She answered: "I love you too." Therefore, we were wondering what to do about our different religions. Then she said: "It's ok. I will turn to yours since I love you. It's my free will." Then she became Muslim, and we agreed with her family.

It was completely unthinkable for Kalid to convert to Christianity and so his wife converted, and her parents agreed, likely both because they respected her choice and because they saw that Kalid's community would take good care of her. In Kalid's area north of Begi, there is, to his knowledge, no single Christian Mao, and he would risk falling out with his family if he converted. Social cohesion greatly depends on shared celebrations and meals, which become

[393] This is not unique to Western Ethiopia. In Southern Benin, having an enslaved female ancestor is not as shameful as having an enslaved male ancestor (Lempereur, 2022: 395).
[394] I could not verify if Milkeysa's grandfather had been a slave or servant. Jafar repeats what others in the local community have told him. However, in his childhood, Milkeysa lived as a "servant" boy in a more prestigious family.
[395] Interview no. 178

impossible when families with different religious practices for slaughtering share food (Orthodox Christians and Muslims have strictly different rules). Kalid expressed that "if we are all together, we will be happy, because we have the same religion but [if we do not have the same religion,] our plates [of food] will be different [and] there will be sadness."

The difference between Kalid and a man called Yusuf Beka illustrates how marriage and religion are related to alleged slave descent. For Kalid's family, there is an association between slavery/servantry and conversion (cf. the idea that only Mao who are "servants" convert, chapter IV). Yusuf from the Dabus area, in contrast, converted to Protestant Christianity when he married a Christian woman although he regards himself as "pure". He categorises his wife as "black Oromo" and, with this, indicates that he believes her ancestors were enslaved by Oromo families and eventually did not only adopt their clan membership but also their religion. His wife refused to convert to Islam, so Yusuf discussed the matter with his father, who agreed to let his son convert.[396] The difference between Yusuf and Kalid is that Yusuf has fewer opportunities for upward social mobility as a Mao in the Dabus area ("pure" or not). After the wedding, Yusuf started going to church and he has now found some opportunities to work for wealthier Christian Oromo farmers as a labourer. Yusuf told me that his family "now sees my *adeemsa* [Oro: 'lifestyle'] and they see the many chances I get. When they saw that, they made two of my sisters Christian."[397] Hence, for Yusuf, conversion through marriage, irrespective of any considerations of "honour", has provided him with new possibilities. The opposite would be the case for Kalid.

The social positions of Kalid and Yusuf are contrasting. Therefore, also their judgements of how to exercise their Maoness, what is "appropriate" and not, and what is "honourable" and not, are radically different. Intermarriage with "black Oromo" in the Dabus area and subsequent conversion are among the factors that may make these Mao families unmarriageable for Mao of higher status. It was this that worried Zara's family concerning Jiregna. The designation "Mao" does not always indicate which choices and chances an individual is likely to make and have in matters of marriage. Mao people may take radically different decisions and still justify

[396] Conversions both ways happen regularly in the area and often involve few or no formalities beyond getting the acceptance of the concerned families or severing ties with them if they do not agree.
[397] Cf. the association between Protestant churches and an improvement in living standards (Freeman 2012). Most of my Christian interlocutors claimed that Christian prayer "works better" than other prayers and that Christians, therefore, tend to be wealthier. Becoming Christian also often means adopting more modern farming methods, having better "working morale" and getting support from wealthier families.

them with their Maoness. We will now turn to recent socio-political changes that have transformed the Mao category and with this, also marriage practices.

5.4. Transformation of Marriage Practices

The political changes in Ethiopia over the last half-century have altered the social environment and as such the parameters for love and kinship. The political and social transformations have contributed to changes in labels as well as marriage practices, but not uniformly in different communities depending on whether the change of label or the change of practice increases families' marriageability and circle of "compatible" potential partners. In the following section, we will discuss examples of shifting marriage patterns, the mutual influence of marriage and ethnicity, and how discourses about Maoness affect these changes.

Changing Notions of Ethnicity

The above-mentioned logic of a patrilinear and exogamic society is not static but flexible and changes over time.[398] Social stratification has been subject to different transformations over the last generations. Families with different backgrounds who immigrated into the area and intermarried with the local population have influenced the existing boundaries between various groups and forged new relationships. Oral history has it that Dawd's sons ("Arab"/ Kiring) took women from the local Mao while it is unclear if they took them as slaves, concubines, or wives. Again, over the recent decades, intermarriage between Macha Oromo families and families categorised as Mao has increased. The above-mentioned elders who talked about the skin rash affecting children from "mixed blood" marriages admitted that this disease may not happen to the younger generation who choose their marriage partners more widely. Individuals may today not strictly follow the "traditional rules", yet this does not mean that marriages happen randomly. Marriages still follow a multitude of complex principles which differ in nature and significance depending on personal preferences and the social position of the individuals involved. In the Begi area, we can appreciate how an idea of "rules" helps define what kinship means in a specific context and how these "rules" maintain a sense of "groupness", be it ever so negotiable.

[398] Already half a century ago, Edmund Leach discussed how "elements of flexibility" enabled a couple to behave as if they followed the official *mayu-dama* marriage system when, in practice, their behaviour deviated from the ideal, which was difficult to satisfy for most families (Leach 1970: 76).

Current policies protect and promote the Oromo identity in the Oromia Region and Mao (and four others) in the Benishangul Gumuz Region. Consequently, individuals may want to become more closely connected to these categories which give access to different resources. Mao from Oromia are inclined to intermarry with Mao from Benishangul Gumuz, who are recognised as indigenous, as the example of Jiregna and Hadi shows. Similarly, the prestigious Kiring clans build on a history of intermarriage with the local Mao population while they do not need to maintain close relations with less prestigious families. Today classified as Mao, the Kiring are officially indigenous but largely marry the same way as before – among themselves, with Oromo clans or other groups they consider of the same status.[399] Hence, the former group (Kiring) changed their label but not their marriage practices, whereas Mao from Oromia may seek to change their marriage strategies but not the label Mao.

Ethnicity or descent (*zär*) has gained importance due to ethnic federalism which institutionalises ethnic divisions while young people today place less importance on clan membership in their daily lives.[400] As discussed in the previous chapter, it is not only descent and not only characteristics such as appearance and language that matter for ethnic categorisation, but usually both. Although which *zär* an individual belongs to weighs heavily in kinship relations, institutionalising ethnicity in politics has not necessarily made this nebulous concept clearer. Despite the rigid kinship system presented above, *zär* membership remains contested and the seemingly straightforward principles of patrilineality are handled flexibly in practice. For example, because of Zara's light complexion and use of the Oromo language, Jiregna's friends categorised her as Oromo when they first met her. Hence, Zara and Jiregna's marriage can be characterised as inter-ethnic as well as intra-ethnic.

In southern Ethiopia, James Ellison (2009) documented how changing local and global politics influence kinship. He argues that because of the impact of neoliberal individualism that started in the 1990s, individuals can today more freely choose their kinship relations and thereby defy generations-old status differences.[401] In Begi, changes have happened over the last generation

[399] Triulzi documented that they, as the local ruling elite, also intermarried with families identified as Funj and Oromo (interview with Joseph Solomon from Gidami, IES MS 1887); cf. Triulzi's interview IES MS 1887, A-BG-4 with Harun Soso of descent from Dawd who identified as Arab (23.02.1972).

[400] People do ask each other for their clan or ethnic group affiliation in certain situations. In the Hozo language (*Ak'mo Wandi*), one would ask *ingi moo tokka?* – "what person/ people are you?" I thank Olana Lencha and Klaus-Christian Küspert for this information.

[401] Ellison bases his analysis on the case of individuals who initially belong to different social strata (Etenta and Xauta) but today intermarry more flexibly and construct kinship in ways that allow them to influence their affiliation with a lineage.

but not to the extent that individuals easily overcome asymmetric power differences and stigma. As the hierarchies transform over time, so do the possibilities of individuals, which the example of Zara and Jiregna shows; their union would have been considered outrageous less than one generation ago. Yet the power hierarchies of the past linger despite other changes.

Marriage and a Regional Border

We will now look at how marriage opportunities and limitations have changed with the drawing of the border between the two Ethiopian regional states, Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz. My interlocutors often said that all Mao people can intermarry provided they love each other; it is particularly positive if the families have the same religion and are comparably similar in wealth. All this is the case with Hadi and Malika. Hadi has two oxen and a house with an iron sheet roof, and although his farm is rather small, he is among the better-off farmers in his neighbourhood in Oromia. Malika's father, Salman, does not have more oxen than Hadi and his house is not bigger than Hadi's. Yet, there is a gap between these families which we cannot explain without looking at social and political transformations starting from pre-imperial times until the present-day ethnic categorisation and regional division. For Malika's family, Hadi is incompatible in a double sense. Firstly, communities such as that of Hadi have never intermarried frequently with the community of Malika, neither in imperial times nor later, as discussed above. Malika's family belongs more to the "Oromo stratum" and they have little interest in intermarriage with Mao who belong to communities they have never had relations with and who do not fit into the same social environment as them. Secondly, a new boundary has divided them further: Hadi lives in Oromia Regional State and Malika lives in Benishangul Gumuz where she is a member of a politically recognised indigenous nationality.

Local communities in the former Begi *Wäräda* have interacted for generations. Both east and west of the regional border, Gwama-speaking communities have intermarried as far back as anyone can remember, and they also engaged in mutual exchange with speakers of Omotic languages. Testimonies from elderly people about whom they and their parents married show that Mao in the northern part of what today is Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* (around Ishgogo, including the Kobor area) intermarried not infrequently with Mao from as far east as the Dabus

River who spoke "a different language" (little is known about the language shift in the area).[402] Older people from the Dabus area can also remember that they took women from Ishgogo. There are still elderly people who speak Gwama in Kondala *Wäräda*. Some of these individuals are women who have moved there because of marriage, but others may be descendants of entire families who spoke Gwama. Seze-speaking families also moved to the Kobor area north in Begi *Wäräda* three generations ago, found land there, and intermarried with the local Gwama-speaking Mao.

After the border was drawn in 1995, whereby Begi and Kobor became part of Oromia and Tongo and Ishgogo of Benishangul Gumuz, significant changes happened. An increasing number of young people in the Ishgogo area (Benishangul Gumuz) today cannot remember – and see no advantage in remembering – previous marriage relations across the former Begi *Wäräda* into the Oromia Region. They orient themselves more according to the current political border between the regions. I had the following conversation with Rana, a young, unmarried, Mao woman from Ishgogo:[403]

> Sophie: [Joking] Where shall we find a husband for you?
> Rana: [Laughs] From Region 6 [Benishangul Gumuz], not from Region 4 [Oromia]. I don't want from "Four". I am from "Six".
> Sophie: But there are Mao, too, in Region 4.
> Rana: Yes, there are.
> Sophie: Are they not the same as you?
> Rana: [Hesitates] They are the same… But I don't want to. That is my opinion. The Mao in Region 4 live with the Oromo; they have relations.
> Sophie: In what ways?
> Rana: They are like Oromo. Here, they are not like that.

The regional border came in the middle of communities that had previously intermarried and speak the same language, but for 25-year-old Rana, the border represents a social and political boundary that is older than herself. Whether or not there are people on the other side who speak the same language as her and call themselves Mao, for her, they are "different". She would not feel comfortable marrying a man from there, likely because she would then have to move to a region that "belongs to the Oromo" and where she would lose her status as indigenous.

[402] Interview no. 39 with an old Mao man from Ishgogo who said his grandfather had successfully negotiated to marry women in the Dabus area even before Oromo had become the lingua franca in the area. It is unclear, which common language they used.
[403] Interview no. 87

Ethnic federalism has added a new layer to the already stratified society. The status as "indigenous" or "titular" in a region is today a factor that contributes to an individual's honour besides ancestral purity. Being "indigenous" may provide previously disadvantaged communities with new prestige. However, it may not help individuals in the "wrong" region, such as Mao in Oromia. The story of Hadi and Malika illustrates how past hierarchies may be strengthened by the regional border between Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz Regional State. Furthermore, the stigma against marrying alleged slave descendants remains today and is intensified through the elevation of some identities to the status of indigenous in specific areas; slave descendants are not "real" members of their clans and, therefore, not "really" indigenous. In general, the continued lack of intermarriage between "red" and "black" makes these categories appear fundamentally different from each other. This belief is reinforced by the regional border in the middle of the former Begi area. The border increases the reluctancy to marry across, not because all people on the Oromia side are categorised as Oromo or all people on the Benisuangul Gumuz side are categorised as Mao (or other Benishangul nationalities) but because the border emphasises that there are tangible differences between the different communities.

For Love and for Ənjära

Above, we discussed how differences in "blood" or complexion may make families incompatible in the eyes of the community regardless of ethnicity. Here, we will discuss wealth as another criterium for affinity that may, at times, override local principles of kinship. When someone does something for a specific purpose to obtain material benefits, it is often said they do it "for *ənjära*" (i.e., for bread or food). This is often used in a negative sense, implying that it is "cheap" to do something for *ənjära* although families in the Begi area frequently bend "rules" for whom to marry for utilitarian considerations. While we will below discuss how ethnic federalism has hardened ethnic boundaries, we will here discuss how individuals may transcend ethnic and clan boundaries for the prospect of gaining tangible benefits. Despite incompatibility between different families according to the "theory", the practice shows how considerations of high and low status are reverted or made relative without necessarily abandoning the principles themselves.

One of the most common and sought-after items a family can obtain through marriage, is land. According to customary laws, a woman does not inherit land (Temesgen O. 2018: 101).[404] "Land is not exchanged for women!", as one of my interlocutors expressed it.[405] Wives move to their husbands' land and farm there and should not inherit land because this would then become the property of her husband and be transferred from one family and clan to another (Temesgen O. 2018: 100; Takele 2021: 93; cf. Raga 1983: 13). A daughter may inherit a coffee plantation, but not the soil on which the coffee is planted. She can then sell the coffee and take the income from the sale. Still, there are examples of marriages where the husband gets land from the wife's family, or the wife's family gets land through her marriage, whereupon the local community says the marriage was "for *ənjära*". Economic opportunities like this open for new interpretations of the possibilities of love which again impacts individuals' perceptions of self and identification (Ellison 2009: 89).

One story that exemplifies how fathers and brothers may obtain land through their daughters and sisters, is that of a man called Abraham Feyissa. Two interlocutors told me this story independently of each other, but I did not get the chance to talk to Abraham or his wife.[406] Abraham is a man from a Mao clan who lives in a village in Oromia. In his area, Mao and Oromo clans do not intermarry frequently. Abraham had a rather large plot of land and one Mao wife. One day, two Oromo men he knew, but was not related to, from the town, came to visit him. One of the men mentioned that he had a beautiful daughter. Some weeks later, Abraham went to see the daughter. They met again, and she agreed to become his second wife.[407] Their wedding was in February and in May of the same year, shortly before the rainy season, the wife's family came to Abraham's village to sharecrop on a part of his land. The year after, they agreed that Abraham's brother-in-law would get another part of his land permanently. Abraham's sons will inherit their father's land, but not the part that their maternal uncle has obtained. However, Abraham also benefits from this union. Previously, he did not farm all his land effectively due to a lack of oxen. Now, he can use the oxen of his Oromo in-laws and has increased his harvest.

[404] Temesgen Oljira did his fieldwork in Eastern Wollega, but the situation he witnessed was similar to Western Wollega. Personal conversations with him and comparing findings have been a way of triangulating my data regarding land ownership and inheritance.
[405] Interview no. 31
[406] Interviews no. 76 and 158
[407] I have no information about the story from the perspective of the woman. We cannot know if she liked Abraham and wanted to become his second wife.

The narrators of such stories of intermarriage may choose contrasting positions: They may focus on how the Oromo and Mao started entering a symbiotic "win-win" relationship, how the families have overcome previous barriers to intermarriage, increased the pool of marriageable individuals, and how both parties have benefitted materially. The narrator may further emphasise how love today may conquer ethnic, linguistic, and racial boundaries. Alternatively, they may focus on power inequalities and the narrative of the Oromo who bypassed the "rules" by appropriating land through a woman. In the end, as not only marriage patterns but also their narratives change over time and vary according to location, both explanations have their place in their specific context.

Marriages, where the families acquire land or other assets, may be portrayed as functional alliances. Simultaneously, they represent an act of defying "taboos" on who is marriageable. The exchange of resources and material benefits is not per se mutually incompatible with affection and love. Indeed, mutual affection may originate from "the ability to provide for a family" (Thomas and Cole 2009: 24). Jennifer Cole further argues that economic interests and providing materially for the partner are important components of love and intimacy (Cole 2009). An economic benefit may, as shown in the context of East Africa, be a powerful force behind a social change that may alter marriage patterns (McMahon 2013: 230; cf. Fair 2001). The choices that individuals and families make in matters of marriage contribute to the transformation of kinship relations. As the "knowledge system" changes, so do the possibilities for love (Gell 2011). Hence, as the definition of Maoness transforms, so do the options and choices of individuals. We will now turn to this transformation that influences both principles and practices of kinship.

5.5. Creating Maoness – Making Family

The Ethiopian political system that functions according to formal ethnicity has for Jiregna and several other Mao influenced their perspective on marriageability. Ethnic logic makes all Mao families potential affines. This recognition constitutes a foundation (knowledge) on which marriage can be pursued. In turn, altered marriage patterns impact how the concept of ethnic identity is perceived and performed. When Mao across different groupings begin intermarrying, this strengthens the idea of a common Maoness or even "Mao blood". (By contrast, marriage failures like that of Hadi and Malika confirm that intermarriage between different strata is not

appropriate.) Jiregna told me that he is determined to create a more unified "Mao nationality" by encouraging alliances between Mao families and clans and cultivating their common "Mao identity" (*maoumma*). It is important to him that his family accepts Zara as "Mao enough" and he makes an effort to integrate her into the community.

Approximately ten months before Jiregna married Zara he accompanied me to visit Qasim Hamsa in Tongo. Qasim uses the same language as Zara's father, Gwama and has not had much prior contact with Mao from Oromia. After the two men had talked about "Mao languages and culture" for a while, Qasim took Jiregna to the side and gave him the piece of advice which I presented in the introduction of this thesis: He encouraged Jiregna to focus on the unity between all Mao people so that they can remain resilient as one united nationality against "the Oromo", who "will do whatever they can to stop you."[408] This advice by Qasim strengthened Jiregna in his efforts to marry Zara, with whose family he had not yet finalised the negotiations. Evidently, Jiregna was more successful in persuading Zara's family of the compatibleness between him and Zara, than Hadi was with Malika's family. The main reason is that Zara's family is more committed to "being Mao".

Aspiring to increase the network of "allies" within and outside of the local Mao community is a reaction against what many, especially younger individuals who identify as Mao, consider "Oromo supremacy"; they feel that people who claim Oromo ancestry are superior in society and politics, not only in Oromia but also in Benishangul Gumuz. The advantage of combining different communities into one category, Mao, is that it gives the impression of a stronger, more numerous and more important nationality. This is a strategy the Oromo political identity has benefitted from for decades and which was already laid out in the Oromo Liberation Front programme in 1976.[409] The creation of an idea of "Father State and Motherland" through metaphors of kinship is not peculiar to Ethiopia (Delaney 1995: 177; cf. Anderson 2006). Through strengthening an idea of ethnic Oromo groupness, political actors have managed to negotiate an important position in Ethiopian politics. This has not remained unnoticed by Mao "political entrepreneurs". The idea of a "Mao nationality" is an important prerequisite for legitimising claims over territories that also Oromo groups claim (Abosh 2014, cf. chapter III).

[408] Interview no. 72.
[409] The programme states: "To consolidate the gains secured by the struggle of the people and march forward to attain the liberation of the Oromo people, we have to have an even better organization, capable of uniting all the Oromo people" (PP MS 282207132, Oromo Liberation Front. Political Program: 9).

While neither Mao nor Oromo need to exist as "ethnic groups", ethnicity is an extremely powerful concept (Brubaker 2004: 11). My interlocutor Nasir from the Tongo area said: "We are making family. […] Through this, we will defeat the Oromo."[410] What he means is that the Mao should marry Mao so that wealth, power, and territorial control stay within Mao lineages.

Who is and is not "Mao" is subject to change and so is the content of Maoness. The concept of *fira* (Oro: "relative" or "kin") "embraces all kinsmen, both consanguineal and affinal" (Knutsson 1967: 42). In the case of today's Begi area, *fira* may be related through female and male relatives, through descent or marriage. This allows an adaptable understanding of who is a relative and it can create bonds between different strata and ethnic categories. When Nasir speaks his language Gwama, he uses the term *is mini* ("our people") about individuals who are Gwama-speaking or related through membership in the same clan. The way Nasir uses it about Jiregna, *is mini* is extended to include everyone whom he identifies as "Mao" and in his opinion has *maoumma*. Accordingly, Jiregna, who speaks a language completely unrelated to Nasir's, also becomes "known", and thereby *is mini*. Since it is malleable, Mao is on the one hand an inclusive concept. On the other hand, it may be used to exclude anyone seen as not similar enough to be "our people" at a particular time or in a certain situation. The vaguer the definition of "Mao", the freer are the people to decide who their *fira* (kin) are going to be and the larger can the network of affiliation and exchange among different families expand.

Individuals who employ this strategy of creating a united Mao ethnic group, like Jiregna and Nasir, are often individuals who feel marginalised but who are not necessarily as socially and politically excluded as many others. Mao or not, they often have at least secondary education, a relatively wide choice of marriage partners and an economic situation that allows the payment of wedding ceremonies, the mobility to travel and visit their relatives, and a wider geographical and social horizon than poorer and more rural people. Although they promote more intra-Mao marriages, the marriages they facilitate are often between families of a certain prestige and wealth. It is, therefore, as so often, the relatively better off who speak on the behalf of the "marginalised" (Eriksen 1992: 317).

Many of those who promote more and closer relations of affinity and exchange between Mao (often younger individuals) argue that the survival of their language is an important reason for

[410] Interview no. 28

choosing Mao partners. However, the only language everyone among Nasir's *fira* can understand is Oromo, and they give little attention to which Mao language someone speaks (or does not speak). In these processes of groupness, the focus is often not on the cultural or linguistic *content* but on the boundaries or "glue" (associations) between communities (cf. Latour 2005: 5). When husband and wife speak completely different Mao languages (such as Zara and Jiregna), usually none of their languages ends up being transmitted to the children because the parents communicate in Oromo and the outside environment also uses Oromo.[411] Furthermore, the above-mentioned strategy of Mao men to marry Oromo women who then give birth to their children may backfire in a way not accounted for: The influence women have over the upbringing of their children, like their use of language and their closeness to the maternal family has the effect that children from mixed marriages may not be as loyal to their *maoumma* as their fathers expect. Nasir's idea of "defeating the Oromo" happens at the expense of intergenerational transmission of language and attachment to a cultural community. Hence, they end up reproducing "ethnic networks […] without high degrees of groupness" (Brubaker 2004: 26).

Ethnic federalism has, with its focus on ethnic groups, contributed to a restructuring of society into groupings that comprise communities previously considered distinct. However, the Mao category has not necessarily become more inclusive. The increased focus on being a "true Mao" reinforces the principle of ancestral purity and honour. Stigmas that linger from the past are not easy to overcome for individuals who, for example, are considered descendants of slaves. The more clearly Mao establishes itself as a nationality, the more defined its boundaries as an "ethnic group" become. This keeps certain individuals and families excluded and hinders their social mobility.

5.6. Conclusion

Marriage practices today are influenced by a combination of different considerations. Some of them can be traced back to an idea of honour that originated several generations ago whereas others are based on an ethnopolitical logic of a more recent date. Today, Mao is considered one

[411] There are many examples of children from either one or two parents who speak a non-Oromo language, and who do not become fluent speakers of any language other than Oromo. Even in Benishangul Gumuz where Gwama is a recognised language, in villages like Zara's, where many in the adult generation have Gwama as their mother tongue, most children prefer to use Oromo.

of Ethiopia's nationalities. Some individuals who identify as Mao, therefore, support the idea that all Mao now can – and even should – intermarry, although not all of them intermarried before. However, ideals of prestige and honour, associations with alleged slave descent or ancestral closeness to groups believed to have been enslavable several generations ago, as well as official status as indigenous or titular, may hinder intermarriage between individuals and families that belong to different Mao communities. Consequently, certain groups continue to have more options in marriage, whereas others remain with fewer.

In this chapter, I have narrated the marriages of Zara and Jiregna, and Malika and Hadi to illustrate the transformation of marriage patterns and beliefs of affinity in the area. These stories illustrate how families who are categorised as Mao may have different and incompatible perspectives on their own and others' Maoness. Maoness is constructed in a tension between the "made" and the "given" aspect of kinship as it is used to signify "blood relations" that are produced vis-à-vis flexible and transforming social hierarchies. The union between Malika and Hadi broke apart although the couple initially sought to overcome their divergent backgrounds and convince their families that they could engage in mutual exchange among equals. In the end, there were too many factors speaking against Hadi from the point of view of Malika's parents, most importantly that Hadi is a Mao from Oromia and thus represents a community of lower rank than Mao in Benishangul Gumuz Regional State. The situation was different for Zara and Jiregna, although Jiregna is also from Oromia. Jiregna argued that he, as a "pure Mao", is working towards creating a unified "Mao nationality". He managed to convince Zara's family that he "plays the same game" as them.

Individuals from prestigious clans find it easier to obtain spouses from families with similar social positions, regardless of their formal ethnicity. For example, among descendants of former landlords, intermarriage between Oromo and Mao clans (some formerly "Arab") occur regularly; there have been relations of kinship and exchange between them for generations which have created "knowledge" of each other (Gell 2011). Families that consider themselves "pure" – no matter their ethnic affiliation, may not want to intermarry with alleged slave descendants, except in the rural areas of Kondala, e.g., along the Dabus River. Here, we can find a high degree of kinship relations within the whole stratum of the population categorised as "black", whether they are believed to have slave ancestry or not. In these areas, the label Mao stigmatises their bearers due to their proximity to and intermarriage with families that were previously seen as slaves or enslavable. This stigma is intensified by poverty and

landlessness, which we will discuss in the next chapter. Hence, for Mao people in these areas, marrying more prestigious individuals, whether Mao or Oromo, is often not possible.

The protection of Mao as an indigenous nationality in the Benishangul Gumuz Region has strengthened the prestige of highland clans around Tongo, such as the Kiring clans of alleged Arab descent. It has not necessarily facilitated an acceptance of affinities with rural Mao, especially from the Oromia Region. Similarly, the establishment of the Oromia Region has reaffirmed Oromo as a prestigious identity. The categorisation of society into ethnic groups has, therefore, not erased the division between different hierarchically ranked strata. Among these divisions is the gap between so-called "red" and "black" people that cuts across ethnic categories – a division that has influenced society for generations. The cases in this chapter have shown that personal choices cannot easily overcome this sense of incompatibility between families that previously did not intermarry. Kinship relations demonstrate how hierarchies, groupness and boundaries are negotiated and performed in society and with this, what Mao means and does. While marriage may contribute to an increased interconnection between social groupings and strata, it also highlights the continued exclusion of socially inferior families and communities that are classified as Mao in some areas and not in others.

CHAPTER VI – LAND AND LABOUR: WORKING FOR AND WITH OTHERS

6.1. Introduction

If you walk in the fields surrounding the highland villages of the Begi area in July, you will see women and children weeding and clearing the soil around the maize and sorghum plants. Men are ploughing and cultivating with oxen. Some of these individuals work their own land. A substantial part of the population, including the poor and owners of small farms, work for others. Many of these people are called Mao, although there are also Mao families that employ labourers. The latter have typically been landowners for generations and may belong to prestigious clans. The previous chapter showed how contrasting interpretations of honour and power influence marriage strategies among Mao groups. Internal diversity within Mao also impacts their opportunities in labour relations. The prestigious or stigmatising effects of Maoness have implications for politics, education, and kinship as discussed in the previous chapters, and these all matter for the physical or material aspects of daily life. This chapter focuses on labour relations in a rural area and the practical experiences of labour relations. The analysis of economic factors contributes to our understanding of Maoness as a category conditioned by hierarchical structures and power relations.

Not all Mao are disadvantaged. However, there is a stigma associated with Maoness which becomes relevant in cases where an individual is landless or in a situation of dependency. Over the last half-century, communities of landless peasants and groups classified as slave descendants have collectively ended up being called Mao which today makes Mao people have fewer opportunities. Yet, the economic situation of an individual is not primarily conditioned by Maoness (or non-Maoness) but by concrete circumstances concerning control over labour and land. An inter-generationally transmitted stigma of having an “impure” ancestry (i.e., slave ancestry), whether Mao or Oromo, provides individuals with a disadvantaged starting point and increases the likelihood of their exploitation while being in a situation of exploitation may give an individual the label “servant”. This further deepens their experiences of marginality and exclusion and, if they are Mao, strengthens the connotations of this category with slavery.

The aspects of time and location influence the terrains in which people operate and how honour and stigma affect power relations. Families that had started acquiring land over the last two generations frequently continue to acquire control over more arable land today. Interestingly, groups supported specifically by the socialist regime, such as minorities and low-status groups, are not among them. The more exploited and marginalised agricultural workers continue to depend on more affluent farmers for generations. This is the case in both Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz Regional States, but the ethnic labels used may differ between the areas. Prestigious Mao groups do not suffer from the stigma of Maoness but, by contrast, may benefit from possibilities of land ownership for "indigenous" peoples in Benishangul Gumuz Regional State and enjoy advantages when it comes to negotiating favourable conditions for land use and labour relations.

Despite the focus on indigeneity in ethnic federalism, individuals who self-identify as autochthonous in an area are not necessarily those who control the land. This is, for example, the case with rural Mao communities in Oromia where not all Mao own much land, and some have no land at all. They may declare that "the land belongs to the Mao"[412] – a claim that aims at establishing the local community as holders of "moral rights" over the land (Brown 2007).[413] "The Mao never buy land. The land is theirs from before, so they don't have to buy it. The Oromo buy [the land] with money," said my interlocutor Yakob Kuma from the Dabus area to express that he considers the Mao autochthonous as opposed to the Oromo (cf. chapter IV).[414] For many Mao in this area, not only the economic aspect of land ownership is important but also the emotional bond to the land. Etana Habte (2018) argues in the case of local farmers in Gidami after 1944, that their attachment to the land, which was occupied by *näfṭäña* ("soldier-settlers"), strengthened their "Oromo identity and consciousness" (ibid: 139). However, claims of "moral rights" may not reflect official regulations and actual practices concerning economic and legal rights over land.

The economist Yoram Barzel distinguishes between legal and economic rights. The former relates to "what the state assigns to a person" whereas the latter also refers to economic benefits from assets an individual does not legally own (e.g., when workers use a machine that belongs

[412] Interview no. 33
[413] Katrina Myrvang Brown looks at a land tenure system and legal policies in Scotland concerning so-called crofting (small-scale food production). She found that there was a tension between legal rights over a certain use of land and the way the community interpreted whether an individual should be allowed to exercise these rights and "interfere in crofting" (Brown 2007: 636).
[414] Interview no. 75

to their employer for private use) (Barzel 1997: 3). Both these rights determine what an individual can consume from the land. This chapter will pursue the question why some people in the Begi area cannot meet their family's subsistence needs despite having access to land – sometimes even legal rights based on the constitutional rules of inheritance that prohibit sale and mortgage of land. I suggest that this has to do with a combination of several factors such as an inherited dependency on other farmers and insufficient abilities to convert their resources (land) into supplies such as food because they lack manpower or oxen, or because they have, for various reasons, given away the (economic) rights to the land they previously controlled.[415]

Most rural labour in Ethiopia is related to farming; 85% of the country's population lives off of agriculture (Shimelles, Islam and Parviainen 2009: 12). The most common agricultural products in the Begi area are maize, beans, sorghum, teff and other grains, sesame seeds, coffee, and khat.[416] In principle, any farmer can grow any crop regardless of ethnicity or social status, contrary to other areas where marginalised "status groups" do not perform the same work as farmers of higher status (Freeman and Pankhurst 2003; Data 2007). In general, there is little commercialisation and most farmers only aim to meet their subsistence needs (Regasa, Afework and Adam 2019), as seen elsewhere in Ethiopia too (Temesgen Gebeyehu 2017; Aschalew 2020). A small number of farmers have accumulated wealth by commercialising their production of coffee, khat, eucalyptus, or honey. Animal husbandry is common and ranges from chickens, goats, and sheep to cattle. Animals are sold for cash and used for food. Donkeys and oxen are common for transportation and farming, but not all families can afford the investment. Although the area is rural and remote, people move, migrate and trade goods to other areas; there are shops and markets in every *qäbäle*. The government supports local cooperatives and provides health and agriculture extension services by using rural public servants – around 30 - 40 individuals in every *qäbäle* (cf. Howard 2019). Many lower-level government employees are also farmers.

[415] This can be seen from the perspective of Amartya Sen's entitlement approach which considers how successfully individuals can convert their endowments (e.g., land, physical labour power, oxen) into entitlements (goods and services) (Sen 1982). Entitlement is "a person's effective legitimate command" over goods or services (Gasper 1993: 2). Without making use of his theory in this chapter, the entitlement approach has helped me understand that the availability (of food) does not necessarily imply access (to food) and that not all entitlements necessarily include food or cover basic needs.

[416] EECMY-DASSC, Western Ethiopia ACO, *Green LIP Program (2015-2017), Baseline Survey*, 28.04.2015. This report done by the development NGO of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus is an important source of information on agriculture in the former Begi *Wäräda*. The project assessed four *qäbäle* located in Kondala and Begi and Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* respectively.

In this chapter, I will use the examples of several families to illustrate the change in land ownership and labour relations. The protagonists are spread over the whole of the former Begi *Wäräda* and some are labour migrants in Asosa. Among them are poor and landless peasants such as Yakob from Kondala whose only option is to sell his labour under unfavourable conditions. Others are significantly better off, like Abdulkadir Shanko, a descendant of Dawd who lives in a village outside Tongo. Despite their contrasting situations, both Yakob and Abdulkadir are typical examples of Mao farmers in their respective surroundings. This chapter will first discuss patterns of land ownership and landlessness in the Begi area and will then look at which options rural farmers have to obtain the necessities for life for themselves and their families. I will begin with labour conditions that permit the least autonomy, including labour agreements locally called "servantry" and various other forms of dependency, all seen as undesirable. Then, I will continue with mutualist labour relations and end with commercial agriculture before discussing attempts to escape dependency through migration.

6.2. Land Ownership, Wealth, and Landlessness

Land was one of the most important topics in my conversations with farmers. In general, the land is getting scarcer, especially in more densely populated areas; the population in Begi increased more than fivefold from 1966 to 2007 (cf. chapter II). This has led to overworked land and land degradation, as now almost all land is either cultivated or used for settlement (cf. Terefe *et al.* 2020).[417] Simultaneously, this has entrenched the inequality between those who have land, and those who do not have land, since the latter cannot clear new land (Temesgen O. 2018: 132). Research from other areas in Ethiopia shows that recent land reforms have not always been favourable for marginalised craftworkers and slave descendants. At times, these have had to return land they had obtained from the Derg as the main criterion for land distribution today is ethnicity, without consideration of other disparities (Freeman and Pankhurst 2003: 340; Epple 2018a: 37; cf. Vaughan 2003; Aalen 2011a; Data 2011). Below I discuss several stories that show how difficult it has been for families without ancestral prestige (honour) or positions of political power to keep or gain control over land throughout the political transitions.

[417] Terefe, Chala, Belay, Bamlaku, and Moges' (2020) study in the Didessa Valley shows that the size of cultivated land and settlement areas increased significantly between 1974 and 2014 at the expense of forest, bush and swampland. Similar findings would be expected from the Begi area, especially in higher zones as opposed to the lowland (EECMY-DASSC, *Green LIP Program Baseline Survey*, 28.04.2015).

Practices of inheritance in the Begi area follow a combination of *shari'a* law, local customs, and Ethiopian law. According to the latter, all children should inherit equally, but this is rarely the case. The local government offices usually do not interfere in matters of inheritance to keep their good relation with the population and because they also tend to interpret the law according to local customs (Temesgen O. 2018). Commonly and traditionally, all sons inherit a piece of their father's land, a practice that reduces the plot size for each generation. The sons can usually start farming on a share of their inherited land as soon as they marry. The father may distribute the land unequally among his sons, for example, the eldest may get a bigger share than his younger brothers, and the sons of the first wife may get more than the sons of subsequent wives. According to the local interpretation of the *shari'a* law, a daughter inherits one-third of what her brothers inherit, and commonly only items she can sell or bring with her (i.e., not land).[418] As elsewhere, women are among the main losers in practices of land distribution and inheritance (Zenabaworke 2003; Takele 2021).[419] Furthermore, as we will see below, certain social groups have continuously been at a disadvantage throughout the transformations of land ownership in the area.

Transformations of Land Ownership in Begi

To understand the local situation related to the use and ownership of land, we may compare the situation under the Imperial and the Derg governments with contemporary circumstances. In the early 20th century, the newly immigrated farmers from Gidami (Leqa Oromo) had an agro-technical advantage over the local farmers (cf. chapter II). Hence, already at this time, there was a difference between the immigrants and the local population, often categorised as Mao. Despite imperial land reforms, it was not until the Derg time that settlement and land ownership changed in Begi; the regime made all land state property (Crewett, Bogale and Korf 2008). Many of my interlocutors can remember that the government confiscated land and oxen and redistributed them. The area was also a target of villagisation programmes in the late 1980s. Farmers from remote areas in each *qäbäle* were resettled at a central place, usually on the hereditary land of a previous *qorro* (lower landlord).[420] The government gave each family a

[418] This was cross-checked in an interview with Prof Dr Abdussamad Ahmad (30.06.2022). Christian families, in principle, follow Ethiopian law but are also influenced by local customs that favour men over women.
[419] Zenabaworke (2003: 67) argues that using the household as the primary unit for land tenure promotes men's control over the resources and ignores that of women who can practically claim their rights only through that of their husbands.
[420] Interviews no. 15; 31; 62; 88; 109; 177

plot of land proportional in size to the number of family members. One of my interlocutors of slave descent confirmed that his family received land from the government in the 1970s which they have kept until today.

Although poorer families benefitted from the redistribution, wealthier farmers often restored the status quo under or immediately after the Derg, for example by offering money to the farmer who had received the land to vacate it. Most villagisation attempts in the area failed. Several of my interlocutors complained that the land they got was "very small, only enough to build a house."[421] The villagisation usually dissolved less than two years after it had been initiated as the families scattered to find more land or return to their original plots (Taddesse B. 2021: 97; Dessalegn 2009). In this process, immigrant farmers continued to move further into the area as they stood a better chance of getting larger fields; they had better farming techniques and were in general wealthier. Among these are several of my interlocutors who have today become relatively successful farmers.

As elsewhere, marginalised groups were often overlooked or disfavoured and continued controlling only small plots, as they had traditionally not been permitted to own land (Epple 2018a: 37). Giving a freed slave a piece of the master's land was an important part of the ritual of manumission among the Macha Oromo but it simultaneously kept the former slave attached to their former master and their homestead (Bartels 1983: 173).[422] As an example from Southern Benin shows, it may until today be difficult for former slave-owners to accept that slave descendants act as landowners who can sell land (Lempereur 2022). Although, in the Begi area, it is harder to identify slave descendants and trace how they entered in possession of their farmland, similar tendencies can be observed. An alleged slave descendant who owns land remains atypical although we do not know if they are categorised as a slave descendant because their ancestors were enslaved or because of their current situation of landlessness.[423]

[421] Interview no. 109

[422] The following is an excerpt from the recording of Lambert Bartels of the *lubabasu*, the ritual of freeing slaves (proclamation of the *saffu*), a question-answer session between a *borana* (1) and a *gabbaro* (2): "1. *Lafa goftasatirra jirataka* (He [the slave] shall live on his master's land.) 2. *EYE, JIRATAKA* (YES, HE SHALL LIVE [THERE]). 1. *Goftaansa lafa qodafka* (His master shall offer him a piece of his land). 2. *EYE, QODAFKA* (YES, HE SHALL OFFER HIM [A PIECE OF HIS LAND]). 1. *Garbichichi goftasatif ammayu hinergamaka* (The slave shall continue working for his master.) 2. *EYE, HINERGAMAKA* (YES, HE SHALL CONTINUE DOING SO)." (Bartels 1983: 173)

[423] I do not have reliable information about the precise land gains or losses of families with alleged slave descent during or after the Derg but I have heard many stories about alleged slave descendants who have become or remained landless or control only small pieces of land. The case of a family of alleged slave descent and their continued labour relation to the master's family is discussed in section 6.3.

The history of Ameyu Murtesa is an example of how a family moved across larger distances over a decade starting from the mid-1980s. The local Derg government resettled Ameyu's family from the western side of the Dabus River to the eastern bank. The land they received had belonged to a farmer Ameyu identifies as Oromo, who offered to buy it back from them immediately after they had settled. Since the government prohibited the sale of land, Ameyu accepted a monetary "gift" of ETB 300 (~GBP 80) for the land.[424] The new plot his family then found was too small for them and after the downfall of the Derg, they moved back to the western bank of the Dabus to regain their previous land. However, at this point, their plot had been distributed among other farmers. The new Oromo *qäbäle* chairperson who had replaced Ameyu's father gave them around three hectares of land in a nearby village. Ameyu and his family count themselves among the losers of villagisation and land redistribution because today they live in a more remote place than before and on a plot not smaller, but less fertile, than what they had before the Derg. They interpret this from an ethnic perspective, as an example of the many changes that disadvantage Mao people compared with the Oromo.

All land remained "common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia" after the Derg and the government grants only usufruct rights to farmers (Constitution of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1994: §40.3). In practice, this is a continuation of the laws of the Derg regime (Joireman 1996; Dessalegn 2009). The access to land for farmers "shall have no time limit" (FDRE 2005b, §7.1). However, landholdings can be expropriated by the government "for public purpose", a right the government exercises fairly regularly (FDRE 2005a, §3.1; Dereje *et al.* 2016). Dessalegn Rahmato (2009) and other researchers consider this insecurity of ownership one of the most damaging effects of the land law (cf. Zenabaworke 2003; Shimelles, Islam and Parviainen 2009; Aniel and Melkamu 2020). The Oromia regional proclamation from 2002 grants peasants relative secure control over their land. Still, Husen Ahmed (2018) argues that farmers, even in Oromia, are not sufficiently protected against what he calls "land grabbing" by the state.[425] As we will discuss in the context of the Begi area, poorer farmers do not only fear that the government will take their land but that more affluent farmers may end up with rights over the land they currently control.

[424] According to the 1989 exchange rate. Interview no. 15 with Ameyu and his cousin.
[425] Husen Ahmed represents a perspective different from that of this study. He regards "the Oromo people" as a group which is marginalised because they do not have the right "to own, control, manage and use the land and other natural resources in Oromia" (Husen 2018: 251).

Each farmer is entitled to a plot of land to farm on. In addition, the *qäbäle* administration can give usufruct rights to "model farmers" for up to ten hectares of land. This system favours farmers who have the potential to invest (Selam and Haug 2020: 480; Roo *et al.* 2021: 13). Model farmers are mobilised into the ruling party (Lefort 2012: 684). This extends the government's influence over the grassroots and involves the main landowners in politics. Not surprisingly, my Mao interlocutors in Oromia claim that no Mao has ever been chosen as a model farmer. While I cannot verify this, I assume that few individuals categorised as Mao would become model farmers, firstly because being Mao in Oromia frequently means being poor and secondly, because few Mao, as Mao, are members of the political party OPDO (since 2019 part of the Prosperity Party).[426] This is different in Benishangul Gumuz where Mao is recognised as an ethnic group in political power. However, even though better-off farmers may self-identify as Mao in Mao Komo Special *Wäräda*, the most disadvantaged farmers are also likely to be categorised as Mao (they may self-identify as Mao, Kwama, or *sit shwala*). The communities in this region face yet another challenge: Agricultural investors have signed contracts with the government which enable them to access large tracts of land in the lowland towards Sudan but local farmers largely remain without benefits from the investment (Tsegaye 2013; Meckelburg 2014; Regasa, Afework and Adam 2019).[427]

Land is not useful unless it produces harvest at the disposal of the owner. In the Begi area, disadvantaged individuals may as well be "landowners", but they may not have other resources needed to successfully convert one asset into another and thereby generate revenue. They cannot afford to pay for labourers or buy oxen to plough the land (cf. "transaction costs", Barzel 1997). In this case, a land size beyond what can be farmed by hand with the physical labour of the owner – around 1.25 hectares (McCann 1995: 47) – loses its appeal. Ox ploughing is more efficient than hoe cultivation; it needs less labour effort and yields more harvest. Statistically, a household without oxen produces only around half of a household that owns at least two oxen. Poor farmers who have land they cannot effectively farm are easily tempted to rent it out or sell it although this is legally prohibited. As in the context of highland Ethiopia, "land claimed but not plowed quickly ended up in the hands of those with the means to cultivate" (ibid: 80).

[426] Due to the heavy unrest in the whole area from the start of my fieldwork, most government programmes, like that of model farmers, have been suspended for the time being. In general, however, the practice seems to continue, newer research suggests (cf. Roo *et al.* 2021; Chalachew 2022).

[427] Research by Dereje Teklemariam, Hossein Azadi, Jan Nyssen, Mitiku Haile, and Frank Witlox (2016) suggests that large-scale investment in Benishangul Gumuz is largely unsuccessful; investors cultivate only a fraction of the land they have leased and the agreements with the government take a long time and are unclear.

Legal rights over land are a grey zone. Many Mao families claim rights over plots they have obtained "through inheritance" (FDRE 2005b, §8.5), based on the right to "perpetual use [of] their farm holdings" (Dereje *et al.* 2016: 23). In this case, the law, in principle, supports their moral claim of being "true" owners of the land. Nevertheless, land frequently changes hands against cash payment, called *yäkiray säbsabinät* (Amh.: "rent-seeking") (Bashir 2014: 24). Individuals who typically reside in a nearby town and have some education may pay a farmer to gain economic rights over their land. It is relatively common that poorer farmer mortgage their land and lose it because of (real or alleged) failed back-payment, although such practices are prohibited.[428] Government decentralisation has transferred decisions on land use to lower administrative units which may be susceptible to corruption; in addition, few farmers have written proof of their land ownership (Dessalegn 2009: 51; Chinigò 2014: 52). The authorities on their part rely on the memory of the community regarding who has lived on a certain plot of land for the last 2-3 generations.[429] As a result, poor, rural farmers who depend on labour contracts, support, or loans from wealthier farmers become the losers in legal land disputes (cf. Temesgen O. 2018: 120).

My interlocutors have told me many stories about lost land rights. I could not verify them but the sheer number of stories and the similarities between them indicate that there are some common tendencies regarding change of control over land in the area. One such story is from Ishgogo, north in the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda*. Across the border from Ishgogo, in Oromia, the farms are very small, and the soil is overworked, so the farmers migrate to Ishgogo where the settlement is less dense. Farmers and government workers in Ishgogo report a change of control over land from local (Mao) farmers to settlers from Oromia. A female government employee in the area explained how farmers from Oromia acquire control over land:

> Yes, they call it [sharecropping] in the beginning. […] Some [of the Mao farmers] are kind and share [land] with [the immigrants]. Others say they share equal, but then, [the immigrants] give them some of [the harvest] and take the rest [including the ownership of the land].[430]

What she means is that the immigrant farmers now present themselves as the owners of the land vis-à-vis the local government. The change of control from the previous user of a plot of land

[428] One of these stories is from my interlocutor Yasin from Begi *Wäräda* (interview no. 31): "The Oromo came at that time [early 1990s] and did *qixxee* [sharecropping] and day labouring on [parts of] my father's land. […] The Oromo have now become the owners of that land." Yasin's father had used the land to secure a loan he ended up not paying back, so the sharecropper took the land as a payment for the loan.
[429] Interview no. 24 with a politician and expert on land law in Asosa
[430] Interview no. 126

to the sharecropper is not unknown in other areas such as Eastern Welega and Amhara Region, especially if the latter is "better off" (Temesgen O. 2018: 214; Takele 2021: 108). Later, both the local community and the authorities affirm that the descendants of these sharecroppers have inherited the rights over the land.

Rural farmers usually have little formal education and few contacts in the government or judiciary system. They are easily persuaded, tricked, or pressured into selling their land cheaply because they may be in urgent need of cash, or they lose their land through the mechanisms discussed above such as sharecropping or mortgaging. Such agreements would be annulled should it come to a dispute in a fair court. However, if the farmers do go to court, as some of my interlocutors have done, they either lose or are threatened to withdraw their case prematurely, since the buyer influences the court in their favour.[431] Disadvantaged farmers may not have the right connections to negotiate or bribe successfully whereas prestigious individuals are more likely to get land and thereby gain more prestige. Prestige and wealth are interrelated and mutually influence each other, which we will now discuss.

Wealth and Land Ownership

Assessing "wealth" is an exercise that needs to be contextualised. In a society where the most common form of income does not come from salaried employment, and where there are different forms and types of wealth, simply ranking households on a scale from poor to rich is neither possible nor sufficient (Bevan and Joireman 1997). When analysing the "topography of wealth" in the areas around Begi (cf. Ferguson 1992), we can see that controlling land is among the main avenues to rural wealth – alternatives being commerce or animal husbandry. Without land, a household is severely disadvantaged (Takele 2021: 90). When farmers have usufruct rights over land, or can access other people's land through different arrangements, they can

[431] There is no space in this chapter to develop a case study on land disputes and court cases. Among the many discussions I have had with my Mao interlocutors, I have collected a large number of stories about how "the Oromo" allegedly take land from Mao farmers. I cannot treat these as much more than rumours. However, since almost every Mao in Oromia can tell at least one such story, this is certainly a powerful common theme in the social discourse. One of the stories goes like this: "First, the land was that of the Mao [man called] Kemal. He [the Oromo] came and asked to work the land with equal benefit [sharecropping]. Then, when [Kemal] said yes, they worked the land. The coffee harvest they got from that, they shared equally. Then, when they got the coffee seeds, [the Oromo] said: 'This [land and the coffee] is not yours. I bought it from you', he argued. [...] Kemal reported him [to the court]. The Oromo are like brothers [to each other], like relatives, and they ruled: 'The coffee is his and not that of Kemal.' That was the court in Begi, and it ruled in favour of the other man." (Interview no. 109)

produce wealth on it, but only by labour – their own or someone else's (as mentioned above, without labour, land does not produce revenue).

An example of a "wealthy" family in Kondala is that of the son of a former Mao *qorro*, today an old man, whose large farm has been handed down for generations. This man harvests 80 quintals[432] of coffee annually. According to my interlocutors, he is the only Mao in Oromia who has won a court case against an Oromo whom he accused of trying to gain ownership over his land illegally. They attribute this win to the man's wealth and honour (*kabajaa*) as a respected local figure. The community judges his wealth not only based on the monetary return from the sale of coffee, but they also perceive him as wealthy because he can control other people's labour and the fruit of their work. However, not all members of this man's family are wealthy, particularly descendants of second wives and old widows or family members who are believed to descend from former slaves who were adopted.

Since land is scarce in many areas, there is competition among farmers to control it. Among 65 of my informants who are rural farmers spread over the whole of the former Begi *Wäräda*, only three families control more than ten hectares of land (cf. Appendix B, Table 6).[433] One of them is a wealthy farmer from the Tongo area, of Dawd descent. The two others are sons of landlords (*qorro*); one is the above-mentioned Mao from Kondala and the other self-identifies as Oromo. Most farmers have much less than this size and almost half of my interlocutors have less than one hectare of land.[434] This size of land holding is small compared to other African countries, but quite similar to the Ethiopian average (Dessalegn 2009: 49). Landlessness, in the local understanding of the term, is when an individual or a family only has the land on which they built their house. Among my informants, five individuals were landless – among them two old widows. I found that control over land correlates with ethnic identification whereby being categorised as Mao increases the chance of having little land despite large differences within the Mao category.

[432] 1 quintal is 100 kg.
[433] I included these 65 informants because I have sufficient information to estimate the size of their land. 57 of them identify as Mao. They all live in rural areas and live mainly off farming on their own or other's land. Five of them are female; two are widows; the other three reported the size of land controlled by them through their husbands.
[434] My statistics show the following figures: 5-10 ha (15%); 1-4 hectares (32%); or less than one hectare (40%). These figures are self-reported as I was unable to measure the land. However, in most cases, I could check the information they gave with other informants. My findings are similar to those of the EECMY-DASSC (*Green LIP Program Baseline Survey*, 28.04.2015).

Most of my informants who had land by the end of the Derg time still have around the same size of land today, whereas those who did not have land in the late Derg time, also have no land today (cf. Appendix B, Table 8). Many families of imperial landowners (*qorro* or similar) have kept their land throughout the three governments while some only temporarily lost a few hectares during the Derg. Several of these families self-identify as Mao. This suggests that the prestige of the imperial landlords may still impact today's wealth distribution. However, I argue that the prestige of the *qorro* is only significant today for individuals who can successfully play the "ethnic game", i.e., utilise ethnic labels that are recognised in their respective territories to achieve political opportunities (cf. chapter III). I found that all eight families among my interlocutors who controlled land during the imperial period (some a considerable size) but who since then have lost large parts of this land are all rural Mao farmers from Oromia. Hence, their imperial control of land alone was not enough to secure their social position. All my informants who did not control any substantial size of land under any government also self-identify as Mao.

My findings support the assumption that, in some areas, Mao farmers are poor, have little land, and cannot freely choose the type of labour they would like to perform. As this chapter argues, the reason for this is that relations of asymmetric power are reproduced over generations which makes these families unable to break out of dependency on wealthier and more prestigious farmers. Based on the data from my interlocutors, we can conclude that families categorised as Mao in Oromia are among the main losers in competitions over land whereas families categorised as Oromo and Kiring/*mana* Dawd (the latter in Benishangul Gumuz), control increasingly larger fields. This means that families who had land and prestige under previous regimes and who today can claim high-status ethnic identities are the winners of the transformations of land ownership. The lack of control over land among Mao in Oromia stands in contrast to what many of them interpret as their moral right over this land. Despite their claim that they, as autochthonous people, should control the land, many do not have a choice other than to turn to wage labour to obtain their daily bread.

6.3. Working for Others

Among my Mao informants who live in the rural areas of the former Begi *Wäräda*, around one-third are day labourers and even more have entered labour agreements characterised by an

unequal power relation (cf. Appendix B, Table 7). Many of these have no land or only a small plot. The number of individuals who do low-status work (sharecropping and cooperation agreements with a skewed power balance) increases when I single out Mao farmers from Kondala/ the Dabus area (from 29% day labourers among all informants to 56% among the Dabus Mao). All of them categorise the individuals they work for as Oromo. These statistics, although not representable, suggest that land holdings among Mao families in the Dabus area are smaller or less productive than elsewhere and that farmers more often have to work on others' land. Only three of my Mao informants from the Dabus area work exclusively "for themselves" (12%) as opposed to 34% for all my interlocutors.

Below, I will discuss three forms of labour agreements common for poor people: "servantry", shepherding, and day labouring. All three permit the labourer little influence over the results of their physical labour. The consequence of working for a small payment is that the labourers cannot accumulate any wealth and remain vulnerable to poverty (Prowse 2003: 7).[435] Individuals born to a *garba* family (alleged slave descendants), or who from an early age have had to work as "servants", have few possibilities for upward social mobility or to improve their situation beyond that of their parents. They may, therefore, continue to work for others through disadvantageous and unprofitable agreements. For families that identify as Mao, hereditary stigma and unfavourable labour conditions may reinforce each other in areas where "Mao" is a social category of low status, just like it does for alleged slave descendants. This is the case in the Dabus area where Maoness is associated with a lack of social and political participation, uneducatedness and intermarriage with slave descendants. Yet, though disempowered, the individuals in the stories below are not without agency. They may use their situation of dependence to gain skills or opportunities or use the connections to a more prestigious family to their advantage, for example, to obtain material benefits or chances in marriage.

Working as a "Servant"

The arguably most stigmatised form of rural labour is that of a domestic "servant" (*ashkär*) who does not receive a salary for their work but gets food and shelter or a payment far below market value.[436] Their work includes domestic chores such as cooking and farming. Women

[435] On vulnerability, see Martin Prowse (2003: 8): "vulnerability is both a cause and symptom of poverty".
[436] The term for "servant" used by most people is the Amharic word *ashkär* or *askhari* in Oromo. There are corresponding terms in the various Mao languages. The Hozo language makes a distinction between *kedda* (lit:

and men may engage in this kind of labour relations with respective gendered tasks. A "servant" (hereafter without inverted commas) may not have kinship relations to the host family, in which case their situation is more stigmatising because the relation cannot easily be concealed as reciprocal family support.[437] The labourer may identify as a member of another ethnic group – a typical (or stereotypical) arrangement is that of Mao servants working for Oromo families. However, as we will see, the servants may also frequently identify as Oromo – "black Oromo" in the example below.

Several of my interlocutors argued that being a servant is worse – in terms of status – than being a "slave" (i.e., slave descendant) because they are in a relation of dependency or even abuse. Today, "slave" is a label used for real or alleged descendants of enslaved ancestors. It never refers to actual enslavement. It is a derogatory term that stigmatises its bearer because of their "impure" ancestry yet it does not automatically indicate exploitation. The difference is that the servants "are on [someone's] orders, day and night", according to my interlocutor Demeksa.[438] However, the same person may work as a servant and simultaneously be categorised as a slave. Furthermore, the relationship between being labelled a "slave" and working as a servant is not always clear; an individual may be called "slave" because they live in a situation of deep poverty caused by landlessness and dependency, in which case they are also easier to exploit in disadvantageous labour agreements ("servantry") (cf. Rossi 2020). Hence, it may not always be possible to know which condition came first: slave status or a labour relation as a servant. This is the case with Fayise's family.

The family of Fayise Wakene, the young lady encountered in chapter IV who identifies as "black Oromo" (i.e., descendant from ancestors enslaved by Oromo), still has relations to the descendants of their alleged slave master. Six generations ago, a man called Bikila supposedly bought Fayise's patrilinear ancestor. Later, the slave took the genealogy and clan membership of Bikila and settled on his land. Today, members of Fayise's extended family live next to the land where Bikila's descendants grow coffee, and they pick coffee for them as day labourers.

"slave", meaning "slave descendant") and *gamt'a* ("unpaid servant") although these are often used interchangeably, and some individuals operate with different connotations. There is also the word *gaatsa* which may denote a family worker or helper. I thank Dr Klaus-Christian Küspert and his Hozo-speaking colleagues for helping me understand these words and their meanings.

[437] Daughters of relatives who help in the household and babysit younger children are not usually considered servants in the same way as adults from outside the family. The former is a common reciprocal support that families give each other.

[438] Interview no. 5

When Fayise's relatives need money, they may borrow from the family of Bikila. Most significantly, they may do work the community categorises as servantry. Fayise told me that her aunts "boil coffee" (do domestic labour) for the descendants of Bikila and other ("red") Oromo families in the neighbourhood.

Although former slaves may have started working on their own plots of land, given by their masters, it is likely that these slaves and their descendants never fully exited the situation of dependency they were living in.[439] However, since it is six generations ago that Fayise's ancestors allegedly were enslaved, it cannot be proven that they descend from Bikila's slaves. Indeed, it is not always clear if the slave/master relation between descendants of alleged slaves and masters is historical or is based on newer relationships of dependency which may also be several decades old. There is a gradual transition from servantry to other forms of rural labour, remunerated in kind or cash, which we will now discuss.

Shepherding

Yakob is a landless peasant who lives close to the Dabus River. His grandfather cleared a field of estimated five hectares from the bush in imperial times. However, the farming was inefficient and yielded little harvest. During the Derg time, Yakob's father, Kuma, did not manage to cultivate all of it. He had no oxen and did not produce above subsistence. Kuma passed away early, and Yakob inherited only one hectare of land from his late father. When Yakob was 22 years old, he "sold" the one hectare he had to get enough money to pay for his wedding. By contrast, Yakob's uncle had eleven hectares of which he sold one part and distributed the remaining among his children. Therefore, Yakob's cousin, Nabe, has a slightly better starting point. Yet, both belong to the poorest in society. They both worked as shepherd boys in their childhood and are today engaged in labour agreements with, among others, the families they worked for as shepherds.

Shepherding is a common occupation for boys approximately between the ages of five and fifteen from poor families, especially around the Dabus River. They usually live and work in the home of cattle-owning farmers for one or several years. Apart from keeping cattle, sheep or

[439] Cf. Elisabeth McMahon (2013: 4) and Alice Moore-Harell (1999: 410) on former slaves who remain living with their former masters, in Islamic East Africa, and Sudan and Ethiopia respectively.

goats, shepherds may fetch water, find firewood, sweep the floor, and do other simple household tasks. They get up early, work the entire day, and rarely get the chance to go to school. One of my interlocutors, 30-year-old Mamadu Roba, who has worked as a shepherd for three different families in the Begi *Wäräda*, does not have any formal education. The employers "don't see us as children", says Mamadu. "They are taking good care of their own children, but no one was comforting me."[440]

The cost of a shepherd's host family is low. Acquiring and replacing shepherds is simple since many poor families are willing to let one of their sons try their luck as a shepherd in the absence of other opportunities. This means that the work conditions do not have to be good and that the employer does not have to invest in the labourer. The employer provides for the child's subsistence and pays one lamb or calf per year as compensation for the work. This animal is supposed to be the property of the child, but usually, the parents sell it and use the money for urgent expenses. According to Marcel van der Linden's (2008: 23) classification of labour, this kind of work falls between wage labour and slavery because the labourer is a child and those consuming the remuneration are their parents. There is a high prevalence of child labour both in Ethiopia in general and in the Begi area in particular as children are among the groups most vulnerable to exploitation (Getinet and Beliyou 2012; Tilahun and Abebe 2019).[441]

Mamadu's first employer was a man called Abbas for whom his father had "carried coffee" (worked as a porter on trade journeys). One day, Abbas' wife wanted to make Mamadu help one of the female workers knead dough, but he refused to do such "women's work", and it ended with him leaving the family. Like Mamadu, many shepherd boys eventually run away if they think they may get better chances elsewhere. At that time, Mamadu's father had started living with a Mao family, and Mamadu decided to come and work for the same family as a goat herder. (Mamadu categorises this family as Mao because they use the same Mao languages as Mamadu and because their clan is locally recognised as Mao.) Lastly, he again changed his employer and went to work for yet another family where his uncle also lived and worked.[442] These were descendants of the ancestor who, allegedly, had been the slave master of Mamadu's

[440] Interview no. 37

[441] Official statistics show that child labour (not defined) for children aged 5-11 years is 19.6% and 21.9% in Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia Regional States respectively (Ethiopia Data Portal, "Total Child Labour" 2014). It is unclear if the statistics capture rural labour agreements like shepherding, which are difficult to detect.

[442] I do not have information on which kind of labour contract his uncle had except that he was "farming". He likely worked as either a day labourer or a kind of "servant" – two categories between which there is a fluid transition.

grandfather. There is, therefore, a considerable difference in prestige between Mamadu and his employer's family although they claim the same genealogy. Over the years from he was twelve to twenty, Mamadu had worked for three families – two he identifies as Mao, and one as Oromo. The story of Mamadu exemplifies that shepherding is not only a relation between the child and their employer but often a relation of dependency between a poor family as a whole (cf. Mamadu's father and uncle) and more affluent families.

When he married, Mamadu managed to obtain several hectares of arable land allocated by the local government. Today, he is a comparatively successful farmer. This is quite uncommon. More common is the prospect of becoming a rural or urban low-paid worker. Numerous former shepherd boys work in the Manasibu *Wäräda* east of the Dabus River where farming and livestock rearing is more commercialised. The expectation from their parents is usually that they should occasionally send money home, also when they get older. This means that they continue doing unskilled labour after they quit shepherding. Another scenario is that they go back to their home village but stay in a relation to their former employers and work for them as day labourers or engage in other labour agreements, which is what Yakob and Nabe did.

Poor families in the Dabus area often already have existing relations with cattle owners before they send a child to become a shepherd.[443] These families may see shepherding as an opportunity, not only because they get one lamb per year and have someone provide food for their child, but because it builds and maintains their relationship with a wealthier family. It was Nabe's mother who offered him as a shepherd to a family she had worked for before and with whom her family had established labour relations already in the Derg time. Nabe explains why he thinks his mother did so:

> "… because our family gets support, and when we come back, we support [our parents] because we grew up with the Oromo. We can go to the Oromo family and ask them to lend us maize, and the Oromo also give us advice on economic development, for example how and when to sell sheep and goats. When we meet at the market, they invite us for tea and food."[444]

[443] In areas further away from the Dabus, such as Kobor and Ishgogo, Mao families often do not have personal contact with the big cattle owners of Manasibu. Therefore, I have heard that the children may be hired via brokers, who have contact with the cattle owners but could not verify this. Children also work as shepherds of farmers in their vicinity or in areas closer to Begi and Tongo.
[444] Interview no. 74

What for the child is a chance to achieve certain opportunities and miss others, is for the family an investment from which they expect certain returns. Some shepherd boys, when asked how come they became shepherds, shrug and say it was their *ədəl* ("chance" or "destiny").

Adoption of children is not an uncommon practice in the area; wealthier families may adopt a child from a poorer family, especially if they do not have children of their own.[445] Several of my Oromo interlocutors emphasised that such a child is usually from the same *zär* as their foster family (i.e., Oromo). Contrastingly, my Mao interlocutors sometimes used the terms *tiksuu* (Oro.: "shepherding") and *guddifacha* ("adoption") interchangeably, implying that Mao adoptees are used for labour (Küspert-Rakotondrainy 2018). Historically, *guddifacha* was one of the mechanisms by which individuals of slave descent were incorporated into Macha Oromo families (Negaso 2000: 144). Hence, this practice implies a difference in prestige between the adoptee and the adopter. An elderly man from the Dabus area said that "those who call themselves 'black Oromo' […] they don't have seven generations in their genealogy. They are slaves and *guddifacha* of someone."[446] Shepherds, in contrast to adoptees, usually do not take the name and genealogy of their employer. However, they may say "father" to the male household head. If the boy uses the name of his employer, it may give him future advantages. e.g., in marriage negotiations. The continued relationship of dependency between the child and their "father" is "analogous" or "metaphorical" to that between a previous slave and their master (cf. Cooper 2000; Rossi 2009).[447]

We may consider the practice of disguising child labour as "adoption" a kind of "symbolic violence." According to Pierre Bourdieu (1977: 191), symbolic violence is "unrecognizable, socially recognized violence", meaning that it is recognised in society, but not as violence. It refers to the way people exercise power between each other, concealed in normal relationships, and may take the form of debts or gifts. It is a "gentle, invisible form of violence", but nonetheless, a "mode of domination" because it demands gratefulness, loyalty, and submission (ibid: 192). Whether shepherding can be categorised as *guddifacha* or not, this labour agreement

[445] Cf. an account of adoption in Kondala: Gimbi Culture and Tourism Office, *Assessment of Naming of Children and Villages in Kondala District*. The report states: "Child adoption (*guddifacha*) is used as a traditional social mechanism to resolve such biological deficiency in reproduction. In some societies, families without a male child adopt a son from their kin or from different clans" (p. 35), translated from Oromo.
[446] Interview no. 186. An Oromo man mentioned, in passing, that "if the children are from outside [of Oromo], they are not *guddifacha* – they are slaves."
[447] Frederick Cooper discusses various "conditions analogous to slavery" after formal abolition – forms of coerced labour with a more "benign appearance" than the "bounded evil" that slavery was often portrayed as by colonial powers (which legitimized their rule) (Cooper 2000: 130).

is usually the beginning of a lifelong dependency of the child on its "adoptive" family, which may transition into other labour relations of asymmetric power, such as day labouring.

Day Labour

As a landless person without financial means, Yakob has few choices other than carrying out physical labour for someone else. Since he is ready to work for a low salary, he is highly employable by individuals who look for casual labour. A common form of labour is working for a daily payment in cash (Meckelburg 2019: 208). Farmers with several hectares of land may have five to ten day labourers on their land in labour-intensive times in the rainy season. As a day labourer, Yakob does seasonal farming activities such as planting, ploughing, and harvesting. A typical female work task is weeding, which is also the lowest paid. Day labouring is usually performed by landless peasants and especially widows. However, also Yakob's cousin Nabe, who has a few hectares of land, sometimes joins Yakob for day labouring. If the food storage (*gotera*) at home is empty before the new harvest and he has no money for buying food, he has no choice but to labour.

The daily payment is determined by prevailing norms and customs in the area; Ethiopian law does not prescribe a minimum wage outside of the government sector (FDRE 2019b).[448] In most areas, there is enough supply of labour for farmers who can afford the payment. Hence, employers do not have to make an effort to retain the workers and offer them any security or benefits other than their daily payment. The landlords supervise the labourers or ask a trusted neighbour or relative to keep an eye on them. If Yakob does not work hard enough, he may not be allowed to return to work the next day. Therefore, he cannot know how much he will earn within one week or month. What further makes his family vulnerable is that they cannot consume the revenue directly but must convert it into food on the market where prices are

[448] The payment for day labouring varies according to the kind of work and the area but is in general low. Around rural Dabus, the payment for farm work at the time of my fieldwork was as low as ETB 15/day, whereas it could be up to ETB 50 in Tongo. In Asosa, the wages are considerably higher. Since the parties in a labour relation in these rural areas do not sign contracts, the employment is not formally subject to the Labour Proclamation. According to Wageindicator (www.wageindicator.org), the minimum wage in the Ethiopian government sector is ETB 420/month. This would mean around ETB 20/day.

steadily increasing. The daily payment is so low that Yakob cannot buy food for storage – only for daily consumption (and even that may not be enough to feed his family).[449]

Although farming is the most common task for day labouring among poor women and men, there are other kinds of casual labour they can engage in. Men may try to go to the town to find work in construction, trade, or transport, as carriers or guards. At one point, Yakob worked as a doorkeeper for a bus on the route between Begi and Babo Gambel. This is an insecure job that does not give the worker a stable revenue as the salary usually depends on how much money is left after the owner of the vehicle and the driver have taken their share of the day's income.[450] Yakob's experience was short-lived as he was quickly replaced by "a guy from the town" and went back to his village. Collecting and selling firewood is a last resort for poor women. Selling firewood, besides "servantry", is among the most stigmatised tasks that individuals of low prestige do, maybe because it involves selling something that was collected as opposed to produced, or because only low-status women carry out this task. In fact, it is astonishing that all firewood sellers I have met on markets in Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz Regions, are female and identify as Mao. Women and men by far prefer to work on their own land even if it is only at subsistence.

6.4. Subsistence Farming

Many farmers in the rural society of the former Begi *Wäräda* struggle to get enough harvest to fulfil their basic needs such as food, clothing, and proper housing (preferably with a corrugated iron roof). Agriculture, in general, is inefficient with less widespread ox ploughing and fertilisation compared with the central Ethiopian highland (cf. McCann 1995). However, also in many other areas of Ethiopia, farming at subsistence is common (Data 2007; Temesgen G. 2017; Terefe *et al.* 2020). To increase their production, many farmers participate in voluntary arrangements where two or more families agree to contribute towards a goal that benefits them equally or differently. What van der Linden (2008) refers to as "mutualist agreements" are usually egalitarian arrangements where all participants contribute with approximately the same

[449] The price of the cheapest grains (maize, and sorghum) was ETB 10-15 per cup (less than one kg) at the time of my fieldwork. Hence, the payment of one person for one day of labouring can barely feed the family with a meal made from the cheapest food available.
[450] There are different agreements for doorkeepers in buses which depend on who owns the vehicle and which agreement the driver has with the owner (if the driver is not the owner). In general, the conditions for doorkeepers are poor.

input and get out approximately the same profit. Contrastingly, agreements that make two parties mutually dependent on each other through an asymmetric power relation may disproportionally benefit one party over the other. Still, the weaker/poorer party gets a portion of the product of the labour. Such arrangements are found in many parts of Ethiopia, especially in marginalised communities (A. Pankhurst 2003). For example, share-cropping and share-rearing are common in the south of Ethiopia (Samuel 2018) and in Eastern Welega (Zelalem 2017; Temesgen O. 2018). I will discuss several of these practices here and return to mutualist agreements in section 6.5.

Sharecropping

After Yakob had sold his only hectare of land to pay for his wedding, he had to find a way of feeding his family with a more predictable income than seasonal day labouring only. Near his home, a Leqa (Oromo) man from the town had recently acquired three hectares of land. Yakob remembers how this man had "bought" the land for the ridiculous price of ETB 100 (~GBP 1.6) from an old Mao man who "sold the land [to get money] to go to the doctor".[451] Yakob approached the Leqa man and asked if he could sharecrop on the land. He got permission to farm on half of the land and a Mao neighbour started farming the other half (1.5 hectares each). This arrangement for sharecropping is called *qixxee*.[452] The term comes from the Oromo word for "equal" and implies that the harvest is shared equally between the landlord and tenant farmer (sharecropper). A sharecropper can control both his labour and its results to a higher degree than a day labourer. Yakob grows only maize on this land; the soil in the area is not conducive for other, more high-priced crops such as teff or sesame, which also need oxen for ploughing. Since maize is a staple food for his family, Yakob has the advantage that he can immediately consume the harvest and does not have to rely on favourable prices at the market.

Despite the name *qixxee* ("equal"), Yakob does not regard the agreement with the landlord as fair. The latter purchases seeds, fertiliser, and pest control every year since Yakob does not have the means to do so. When the time of the harvest comes and Yakob has collected the maize, the landlord calculates the cost of his investments and deducts this from the harvest before sharing it. Yakob then ends up with considerably less than half of the harvest. The price

[451] Interview no. 76
[452] The "q" in Oromo *qubee* writing is pronounced as an ejective "k"-sound and the "x" as an ejective "t"-sound (cf. pronunciation of the alphabet stated at the beginning of the thesis).

the landlord calculates is usually only ETB 250-300 per quintal of ear maize which is the cheapest market price, at the peak time of the harvest.[453] In times when maize is scarce, the price per quintal of ear maize may increase fourfold. For Yakob, it would be better to wait with calculating the value of the harvest until the price rises. However, since he needs to stay on friendly terms with the landlord and cannot afford to withdraw from the agreement, he accepts the conditions. He knows that if he quits, another landless farmer will soon take his place as a sharecropper. Therefore, Yakob continues working with an arrangement he feels is unfair and demeaning.

Yakob's dream is to have enough land of his own, not only because he then would not have to share the harvest, but because he would not feel he works "for someone." The fact that the land he cultivates is now controlled by an Oromo farmer bothers Yakob particularly because the plot was originally that of an old Mao man who, in Yakob's opinion, was tricked into "selling" it. Although the Oromo farmer has economic rights over the land, Yakob argues that the moral rights remain with the Mao – not only this old man but "the Mao" as a group which, from Yakob's perspective, experiences continuously worsened conditions.

Borrowing Oxen: Dereba *and* Qote Qotanna

I will here discuss two agreements that involve the use of oxen in a society where this resource is scarce to illustrate prevailing patterns of dependence and control over resources. The first agreement is called *dereba* in Oromo. Farmers with livestock come to the river and swamp areas in the dry season to let a family there take care of the cattle while they graze. The family returns the cattle to the highland in the ploughing season. Nabe does *dereba* with the family he used to work for as a shepherd; as a child, he was recruited when the cattle owners came down to the river. This arrangement enables Nabe's family to consume milk if there is a cow that has just calved, and he can use the cattle for heavy work on his land. However, the *dereba* arrangement does not enable him to plough in the rainy season. To do that, he needs to enter another arrangement called *qote qotanna* or *anso* (Oro.). In this labour agreement, a family

[453] All prices and exchange rates used in this chapter refer to the situation at the time of my fieldwork in 2020/21. Many of the prices have since then increased considerably due to unrest and disrupted supply chains (blocked roads and bridges), and because of increased fuel prices for transport. Simultaneously, many farmers have remained unable to sell their products because they cannot access the market and, therefore, do not benefit from increased prices.

without oxen can use the oxen of another family if they also plough the field of the owner of the oxen.[454]

Nabe has land, but it does not yield much, firstly because the quality of the soil is poor. Secondly, without oxen, he cannot farm it effectively and can only cultivate maize and sorghum. Hence, he risks food shortage even though he has land. Through the *qote qotanna* agreement, he can get oxen to plough if a neighbour with oxen needs his assistance in ploughing their field. For Nabe, this agreement is necessary to effectively produce enough harvest. For the owner of the oxen, the *qote qotanna* agreement is not as crucial as for Nabe if there are other people around who can plough for free or with a small payment – for example, their own children or relatives. Nabe is, therefore, in a vulnerable position and has few and not very lucrative choices to make sure his family can get the necessities for life.

These examples of individuals who have entered labour agreements where one party is more dependent on the other reflect the social hierarchies in the area. It is not accidental that these examples are of individuals who either self-identify as Mao or as "black Oromo". Dependencies from previous generations still influence these families' options and make them vulnerable in labour agreements that are more favourable for their more prestigious counterparts. When a Mao person is in a situation of dependency and dispossession, this confirms the low status of Mao people even though it is not Maoness per se that causes an individual's subordinate condition. Their disadvantageous position makes Mao appear as a stigmatising label which normalises their situation and again exposes them to further exploitation.

6.5. An Attempt to Commercialise Farming

We will now look at other Mao farmers who have a different social position and do not under any circumstance want to represent the less prestigious party in skewed labour relations. Abdulkadir Shanko was born to a Mao family in a village close to Begi town. His father had a rather large land there, which he had inherited from his father, whose male line went back to the influential ancestor Dawd. Abdulkadir can remember that his father used to grow a variety of crops, including coffee, and that he had a small eucalyptus forest. The Derg government

[454] Cf. McCann (1995) for other mutualist agreements, such as *kendi* (Amh.) where a farmer with one ox borrows the single ox of another farmer to get a pair for ploughing. None of my informants had entered such an agreement.

confiscated most of this wealth and Abdulkadir's father joined the resistance against the regime. When the Derg fell, Abdulkadir decided not to struggle to get back the original land of his father on which other people had settled. Instead, he managed to obtain five hectares of good farmland from the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* government.

Abdulkadir quickly became an important figure in the local community as he is fluent in both Gwama and Oromo languages. His neighbours are settlers from Begi and Tongo (both Mao, like him, and Oromo) as well as families who have been in the vicinity for generations (who identify as *sit shwala* or Kwama). Abdulkadir married the daughter of a local Oromo, the owner of the mill in the village, and, soon after, another Oromo woman. He purchased his first two oxen and started farming maize, beans, sorghum, teff, sesame, and khat on his newly obtained land. By 2005, Abdulkadir had enough surplus to sell some of it even though he had eleven children to feed. Some of the children started helping to farm alongside poorer neighbours whom Abdulkadir occasionally hired as day labourers. The neighbours were local families who did not traditionally farm with oxen while Abdulkadir had already learned to plough from his father in the Begi highland.

It seems that, at one point, Abdulkadir had reached the maximum potential in his farming. One of his main challenges was the lack of opportunities for commercialisation. The transport between his village and Tongo town is unreliable, and unless you own a car or a truck, you cannot easily transport agricultural produce to the town. Then, a disease killed most of the cattle in the village in only a few months. For several years now, Abdulkadir has not tilled all his land. To farm at least a major part of his land, he pays ETB 200 (~3.2 GBP) per day to use another farmer's oxen. He lets his sons farm the maize and sorghum by hand but uses the oxen to plough for teff and sesame. Abdulkadir prefers to pay the farmer who owns the oxen a daily amount of money instead of doing *qote qotanna*, not only because his neighbour may not need his labour, but because it is below his dignity to work on another person's land. He has rented out around one-third of his land to a farmer who sharecrops on it and gives Abdulkadir half of his harvest. Additionally, he rears sheep of which he has around 20. By choosing these options, Abdulkadir gets enough revenue to avoid a humiliating situation, such as having his children or wives go for day labouring.

Although Abdulkadir gets income from his farming and sharecropping, he has experienced decreased harvest. This has again affected his ability to employ labourers. His wives sell grains at the local market, which is held twice a week. However, this is not a place where one can sell

agricultural produce in a quantity and for a price that gives returns from which Abdulkadir would quickly afford new oxen; these cost at least ETB 15,000 (~GBP 240) per animal. The distance to larger markets and low prices are major challenges for many farmers in villages around Begi (Regasa, Afework and Adam 2019).[455] For Abdulkadir and many other farmers in villages outside of Tongo, it is not the size of the land that is the problem, like in Oromia, but the lack of oxen to plough and markets for surplus produce. However, also farmers in Oromia face similar challenges. My interlocutor Yasin Ahmed has two oxen and a rather large land. He also struggles to increase his production due to the limited options for commercialisation. Yasin belongs to a different group of Mao than Abdulkadir as he does not have the prestige of Dawd descent and lives in Oromia. However, both men seek to achieve social mobility by improving their economic status but face the same limitations.

To prevent a further decline in production, and with the realisation that they cannot farm effectively with only the manpower of their families, both Abdulkadir and Yasin turn to mutualist agreements such as rotating labour arrangements. Contrary to the agreements of sharecropping and *qote qotanna* discussed above, the agreements Abdulkadir and Yasin enter are egalitarian as all members get the same outcome for the same effort.[456]

Taking Turns: Tera

The family of Abdulkadir benefits from cooperation with neighbours because their collective effort leads to better results than working individually. They have agreed to circulate their daughters to weed on each other's land and the sons to farm together. This practice is called *tera* which means "taking turns" (Amh./Oro.). One day, the whole group works for one of the families; the next day for another member of the group. The members of this group are usually of comparable wealth since it is easier to cooperate if everyone has the same starting point, like the size of land or the number of oxen.

[455] For similar findings, see Regasa, Afework and Adam (2019) and EECMY-DASSC, *Green LIP Program Baseline Survey* (28.04.2015). The road density in Ethiopia, in general, is low even by Sub-Saharan African standards (MoFED 2002).

[456] Abdulkadir and Yasin were also involved in governmental structures for *qäbäle* cooperation such as *got* and *garee* (cf. Emmenegger, Keno and Hagmann 2011). These have now been abandoned because of the insecurity in the area and I will not discuss them here.

Although Abdulkadir denies that Mao and Oromo families cooperate in *tera*, one of the families who take turns (*tera*) with his family, is of Macha Oromo descent. This is common in areas where Mao families also have larger plots of land and livestock. For Abdulkadir, "the Oromo" are those who came and started taking the land and the trade opportunities from the Mao and today "control everything". Therefore, he does not want to cooperate "with them". However, also Abdulkadir is a settler from Begi to the Tongo countryside. Hence, he is not a local like the Kwama peasants. From the Kwama community's point of view, Abdulkadir is a highlander, just like the Oromo, with whom his family intermarries (while they do not intermarry with the Kwama). Even Yasin's family engages in *tera* with one other Mao and one Oromo family although Yasin is a Mao in Oromia and none in his family has ever married a person of Oromo descent. The *tera* arrangement is an economic alliance where "ideologies" play a subordinated role although, when asked, my interlocutors mention different "principles" about whom they would cooperate with and not, which may not correspond to the reality.

Women do different tasks than men, especially in domestic work. It is commonly recognised that "the lowest work is that of a woman"[457] such as cooking, fetching water and cleaning, which is unpaid (Gudata and Moges 2018: 186). Housework is usually not viewed as "productive labour" although this unrecognised work of preparing food and taking care of household and children is essential for other work to go on (Meillassoux 1981; Sen 1990; Linden 2008). Indeed, Abdulkadir depends on the labour of his wives, unmarried daughters, and daughters-in-law. His wives work on average from 7 am until 9 pm every day whereas Abdulkadir works only some days and only some hours at a time. His sons also help at home, but usually only in farming or construction work, whereas the daughters, besides farming, also go to the market, do chores in the household, and fetch water and firewood. Through this, they greatly contribute to any success Abdulkadir achieves with "his" farming.

Abdulkadir's goal is to afford to buy two new oxen again. He has already started saving up, since he, through sheep husbandry, the communal effort, the sharecropping, and the hard work of the women, can produce above subsistence again. His son Rashid has entered an association (*mahəbär*) which saves up to buy a tractor. Rashid wants to modernise the farming on his father's land and has requested additional land for investment from the government. He plans to plant cash crops that give maximum profit, in the hope of finally being able to commercialise

[457] Interview no. 28

and afford a vehicle or a mill like other wealthier individuals. Although Rashid is unlikely to be as successful as big investors from outside of the region or abroad, he is already significantly more successful in accumulating wealth from farming than many local Mao (Kwama) families in the area who produce below subsistence.

Communal Cooperation: Debo

The practice of neighbour cooperation goes back many generations and is a common feature in most areas of Ethiopia. This practice called *debo* ideally includes the whole community in a rotating labour arrangement whereby the group carries out various projects for each other such as building houses (Taddesse B. 2021: 105).[458] Previously, it was common among non-Oromo communities to brew "local beer" and serve this to the community until the work was completed.[459] Nowadays, the practice of beer has disappeared in many areas. The reason for the decline seems to be a less cohesive community, meaning that individual families mainly focus on providing for themselves. Van der Linden (2008: 83) argues that when money becomes more important, such forms of mutualism tend to lose their importance. "Everyone only thinks about their private work," said one of my interlocutors.[460] Furthermore, Islam has branded this practice *haram* because of the alcohol involved.

In the context of the Begi area, I argue that the decline in *debo* must also be seen in connection with other labour arrangements through which power relations are expressed. Society has become more heterogenous, more hierarchically ranked, and more competitive. An increased prevalence of labour relations between less prestigious families (often Mao) and more prestigious families (often Oromo) provides a context where individuals may consider working for "someone else" an indication of low prestige, especially if the recipient is better off. In rural lowland villages in Mao Komo Special *Wäräda*, which is outside of the main focus of this study, working in communal cooperation continues until today. Here, social hierarchies seem to a lesser extent expressed in and through labour relations. The community may be more homogenously poor in the lowland and there are fewer highlanders ("Oromo") in this area. "Of

[458] *Debo* is a term used in both Amharic and Oromo. The practice of *debo* also has a local name in the various Mao languages. In Abdulkadir's language (e.g., *ho shegi* in Gwama and *yayangwa* in Hozo).
[459] Similar drinks exist in the different traditions in the area and have their respective names in the various languages such as *shul* or *shwi* in Gwama and *pu* in Hozo.
[460] Interview no. 39

course, we work on our land!" expressed a lady I met from the lowland.[461] She does not see the practice of working "for beer" as labouring for someone else. The division between rich and poor widens in the area between Tongo and the Dabus. This does not only obstruct communal cooperation. It makes numerous individuals feel they have no possibility to increase their prospects and break out of old patterns of dependency. They may, therefore, migrate out of the area, preferably to the city of Asosa.

6.6. Migrant Labour

There is a steady migration from rural areas to the regional capital of Benishangul Gumuz, Asosa, approximately 100 km from Begi.[462] According to oral information from the Labour and Social Affairs office in Asosa, close to 90% of all the unskilled migrant workers in Asosa, from outside of Benishangul Gumuz Region, are from the districts Begi, Kondala, and Manasibu bordering the region (cf. Appendix A, Figure 6; Muluneh 2021).[463] Among these migrant workers, there are individuals and families who identify as Mao. The community of Kondala Mao in Asosa consisted, in February 2021, of approximately 40 men and 23 women, most between 15 and 40 years old.[464] The selection of these 63 adults was done by members of the Mao diaspora when I asked them to make an overview of all Mao in Asosa. My interlocutors included only members of "their" Mao community, i.e., not individuals from Begi and Kondala who have higher positions in Asosa or Mao from Tongo.

One of the migrants from a village outside Kondala is Biritu Seid, a young woman who has lived in Asosa for five years. She came to the city to join her husband. The story of Biritu's family in Kondala resonates with that of Yakob:

[461] Interview no. 41
[462] Asosa is a town with 62,632 inhabitants as opposed to the 5,000-10,000 inhabitants of Kondala, Begi and Tongo towns (Asosa Statistics Office, *Population Size of Towns by Sex, Region, Zone and Wereda*, July 2020). The town is an expanding centre for trade and commerce and hosts regional government offices. It has remained relatively peaceful amidst unrest in the whole area.
[463] Conversation with a functionary at the Labour and Social Affairs office in Asosa, 11.02.2021.
[464] The numbers are frequently fluctuating because people go to the countryside to farm or dig for gold and they may marry or get divorced. Of course, who is a "member" is highly subjective and, therefore, the numbers can only give an approximate indication of the size of the community. During my fieldwork, I met and interviewed 32 of the Kondala Mao migrants in Asosa and made an overview of their kinship relations, home village, language, occupation and livelihood, and current residence.

> We were day labourers on the land of Oromo. That was the only work we did. My parents used to have land, but now…. my father died and they sold the land. The land wasn't even enough for one person. We had maize on it – from here to there. It was so tiny![465]

Biritu's family was, therefore, eager to let her move to Asosa and marry a man who lived there. Her husband had come to Asosa looking for casual labour in the hope that he would save enough to continue his schooling. He had dropped out in eighth grade in his home village in Kondala *Wäräda* but he never started any classes in Asosa.

Almost half of the female and male Mao migrants from Oromia in Asosa are day labourers, often in the construction sector. Women may wash clothes or serve in street kitchens. Another half of the Kondala diaspora (mostly male) are formally students, although some only go to school sporadically or take night classes and work in manual labour during the daytime (cf. Appendix B, Table 9). Most of the wives do casual work besides being mothers and housewives. Only two families are currently farming in the outskirts of the city. Biritu has been lucky: She got a job as a cleaner in a hospital and gets a monthly pay of ETB 1,000 (~GBP 16). Her husband recently got work as a night guard for a hotel. This income secures enough for food and house rent.

Since Biritu works outside of her home, she has a ten-year-old girl living with her who takes care of her youngest child. The girl is the daughter of Biritu's sister, for whom Biritu worked as a babysitter too when she was younger. This exchange of labour is a normal arrangement between women. The girl working for Biritu may expect one of Biritu's daughters to work for her when she has children one day. It is not questioned whether the girl *wants* to do this work; this is her *ədəl* ("chance"), just like the shepherd boys mentioned above have their *ədəl*. The girl does not receive a salary but gets food and clothing from Biritu. Many girls come to the town like this, and they may again attract other girls to migrate. The Mao men from Kondala mostly marry women from their home area, whom they meet in Asosa or at home visits in Kondala. This marriage preference has created a diaspora that is closely knit together.[466]

The Mao migrants come to Asosa for various reasons, but most commonly because they believe they will have better chances than in Oromia, where they say their only option is being a farmer at subsistence. However, I estimate that around two-thirds of the Mao diaspora in Asosa were

[465] Interview no. 180

[466] The intermarriage or lack of intermarriage resembles the pattern of the migrants' home areas where alliances adhere to social status in specific locations (cf. chapter V).

not landless or "very poor" in Kondala in comparison to others in their communities when they migrated. The poorest farmers in Kondala may also attempt to migrate but may not come to Asosa before they run out of money, start working for wealthier families wherever they are stranded or are being transported back by the police.[467] Those who make it to Asosa are typically young people with some education, e.g., sons of former *qorro* who became less influential and wealthy during the Derg time, or younger brothers who did not inherit enough land. Biritu's husband has land in Kondala and continues farming on it by sending home money for the payment of day labourers. This way, he and his family can transport the harvest to Asosa or get cash from the sale, although the surplus is rather meagre.

The labour market in Asosa is saturated with unskilled labour, and it is getting increasingly difficult to negotiate fair conditions.[468] Still, the prospect of maybe getting some more education, or maybe, one day, earning some more money, keeps many of the migrants going. This mindset resembles what Marco Di Nunzio (2019) describes as "hustling" among "youth" in Addis Ababa; this lifestyle gives them a sense of moving somewhere, even if that somewhere is more horizontal than upward. Some of the migrants in Asosa live with better-off families where they work for food (cf. "servantry" mentioned above). One young man grew up with an old woman who used him as a domestic worker. She enabled him to go to school and later gave him a small plot of her land. The community may consider this boy "lucky" to have found this woman although he lived and worked without pay for her for sixteen years. Rather than returning to the countryside, which would be perceived as a failure, most migrants try to survive in the city. In this difficult circumstance, the Mao community can be an important support for struggling individuals.

Biritu laughed when I asked her if she considered going back to Kondala. Her sister, who also lives in Asosa tried to explain why they have no wish to live as farmers in Oromia:

> The Mao work like the Oromo on the field but they don't get much. The Oromo work little but get much harvest. Why it is like that, I don't know. I don't know what happened to us. We work hard but we get little result. The Oromo work little and get much.[469]

[467] I have heard several stories from young Mao boys who tried to migrate to Asosa but failed. One of them ran out of money in Bambasi and was so scared of being alone on the street that he asked the police to imprison him for a night. When he got the chance to return to Babo Gambel *Wäräda* (east bank of the Dabus River) where he came from, he started working as an errand boy in a tea house.
[468] Especially after September 2021 when increased unrest broke out in the whole area (both in Benishangul Gumuz and parts of Oromia), large numbers of migrants and refugees who have come to Asosa are making it more difficult to find casual labour.
[469] Interview no. 10.

For her, it is a mystery that some people work hard but get little surplus. The Mao, in this young lady's opinion, do not manage to get out of a permanent struggle for survival despite hard labour. According to my analysis, less prestigious Mao groups in Oromia have difficulties obtaining profit because they work under unfavourable conditions, because they use much of their income to pay off debts or shares as part of various agreements, or because they are cheated in sales or exchange transactions. In the city, they are not necessarily less vulnerable, but they may avoid generations-old relations of dependence that expect submission to the domination of more prestigious families. This chapter has shown how inequalities and hierarchical relations that linger from past times in practice affect individuals' abilities to negotiate favourable labour agreements and thereby obtain sufficient income. Migrating out of the area is one way of breaking the patterns of past generations.

6.7. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed various forms of rural labour and land rights in the area of the former Begi *Wäräda*. Some of the main factors that influence the kind of work performed by an individual are control over land and the ability to invest and commercialise. Although a family may be the legal heirs of, and hold the usufruct rights to, a piece of land, they may not be the ones controlling it in practice. Part of the reason these individuals and families have insufficient income to secure their well-being is that they have had an unfavourable starting point. They may have given away the economic rights over the land or are forced to enter so unfavourable agreements that they can only consume a small part of the produce. Different labour arrangements, such as borrowing oxen, increase their yield but also their dependency. Farmers who can afford it, therefore, prefer to enter mutualist agreements among equals.

This chapter has provided a detailed insight into how and why some farmers "have remained poor" (Temesgen G. 2017: 428). It is not so that everyone has the same likelihood of being poor. An individual's opportunities in the present are impacted by conditions that originated in the past; their families may have inherited low prestige and fewer possibilities from previous generations. Asymmetric power relations from both before and after the socialist revolution continue to influence the opportunities of individuals in the area. The most vulnerable peasants are often landless families and/or alleged slave descendants. They may self-identify as either Mao or "black Oromo" depending on their family background and location. Their

characteristics other than their ethnic identities are significant for their socio-economic situation, meaning that although they may be "indigenous" in an area according to today's logic of ethnic federalism, they find themselves trapped in the same dependencies as their parents and grandparents. Therefore, despite historical and social transformations, some families have remained at the bottom of social hierarchies.

Patterns of wealth and labour interact with an individual's Maoness. Those who remain unable to provide enough income for their family are frequently categorised as Mao, while there are also wealthy Mao farmers. It is not Maoness itself that causes an individual's exploitation, but in many cases, "Mao" is associated with a subordinate social position which again deepens the stigmatising effects of this identification. Mao people in Oromia are particularly vulnerable; it is the socially and politically powerful that can secure economic rights over increasingly more land, and most Mao in Oromia do not fall into this privileged category. History, discourses, and political circumstances shape the environment in which Maoness influences individuals' struggles for survival and advancement. Thus, Maoness is not a unidimensional indication of an individual's social position and does not uniformly influence their opportunities and chances in matters of land rights and labour relations. Maoness is as Maoness does: it makes already vulnerable communities even more disadvantaged but may be beneficial for individuals with ancestral prestige in territories where Mao is a politically recognised identity. Along with previous chapters, this chapter has substantiated how the Mao category encompasses different identities and statuses, and how its effects on ordinary people's lives vary.

CHAPTER VII – CONCLUSION

In the opening of this thesis, I recounted an incident where the farmer Qasim Hamsa from Benishangul Gumuz Regional State met young Jiregna Gemechu from Oromia. Both are Mao but in different ways: they speak mutually non-intelligible languages; they do not have the same social and political opportunities; and they are influenced by different ways of interpreting prestige. Yet, it was important for Qasim to create a connection between his Maoness and Jiregna's. As I have discussed in this thesis, Mao is more than an ethnic category. However, it also increasingly functions as an ethnic identity which can be instrumentalised politically and used as an ethnopolitical currency. Qasim wants to make sure that Jiregna evaluates his Maoness positively and starts acting in solidarity with other Mao, especially in opposition to what both men interpret as increasingly aggressive Oromo nationalism. The problem is that there is no *one* recognised notion of Maoness; the living conditions of both stigmatised and honourable, excluded and powerful groups are often attributed to their Maoness. Yet, despite its inconsistency across individuals, situations, and areas, Maoness is significant in everyday interactions.

7.1. Mao as a Hierarchical Concept

This thesis has investigated the category "Mao" – its connotations and consequences in the lives of local people in different locations of the former Begi *Wäräda*. It has considered the historical development of labels and categories and inquired into various factors that have influenced how "Mao" acquired its diverse meanings. The 1974 socialist revolution sought to reverse the inequalities created by the imperial feudal system but was only moderately successful. In 1991, the government reorganised politics according to ethnic divisions. This added complexity to the already multi-layered hierarchical social landscape in the area. Elites who previously would not all have associated themselves with "Mao" started to use this category self-referentially in a power struggle over the territory of Begi town and district. This study has analysed local discourses and power relations from the vantage point of the political transformations that surrounded the drawing of the border across Begi *Wäräda* in 1995 between the Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz Regional States. It found that "Mao" is expressed, negotiated, and performed in various and opposing ways in politics, kinship, and labour relations as well as

within education and concerning religion. Yet individuals may claim that their lifestyle is the only "right" way of being Mao and their interpretation the only "true" meaning of Mao.

"Mao" is so nebulous, contested, and heterogenous because this category functions not only according to its (imaginary) boundaries to other identities but varies based on how it relates to social hierarchies. This means that hierarchical relations in specific contexts shape how individuals understand and perform Maoness – how they use "Mao", e.g., to appear as "honourable" or "true" owners of the land or to gain political positions as representatives of indigenous people. Comparably, when a family is believed to have had ancestors that ranked similarly to slaves, this not only influences their social status but also defines "Mao" as a label that signifies enslavability. For them, characteristics framed in terms of racial traits, socio-economic situation, political recognition, and ancestral qualities intersect with Maoness to shape their experiences of marginality, especially through limited opportunities for social mobility, such as upward marriage. Discourses and practical experiences that associate Mao people with negative attributes produce a power that "attaches [them] to [their] own identity" and traps them in their Maoness (Foucault 1982: 212). Hence, their vulnerable position deepens their disadvantage and exclusion which again strengthens the historical association of Mao with subordination. In other words, different ways of "doing Mao" vis-à-vis social hierarchies lead to different meanings of Mao.

Mao is usually understood as a hereditary label although it is not known if those who today call themselves Mao descend from ancestors who also self-identified as Mao. (Often, these ancestors are assumed to have been less prestigious.) Being Mao accentuates individuals' and families' otherness in society, particularly in contrast to the Oromo category. While this may be stigmatising, establishing a shared meaning of Maoness – e.g., a sense of groupness through kinship relations – may support individuals who self-identify as Mao in their struggle against real or perceived disadvantages and strengthen their claim over political power and territory, especially in the Benishangul Gumuz Regional State. Yet, individuals who descend from poor or marginalised lineages often cannot take advantage of this possibility of improving their status. Finally, Maoness both denotes stigmatised communities (and contributes to their stigma) and is used by prestigious (Mao) groups to legitimise their power.

The current system of ethnic self-determination is built on the assumption that ethnic identities function as unified groups that are, in principle, equal. It does not consider local hierarchies and

how some identities within one ethnic category are internally ranked. Factors other than ethnicity, such as "ancestral purity", influence individuals' opportunities and practices. Ethnic federalism did, therefore, not necessarily lessen social inequalities, but rather may have increased the power differences that remain from past regimes. While the policies in the two Regional States of Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia promote different identities, the situation has not improved for all individuals and groups that were already of low prestige on either side of the border. Regardless of their official ethnic categorisation, landless peasants and slave descendants continue to be among the most vulnerable, although the intensity of the discrimination against those identified as Mao is significantly worse in Oromia. These groups did not benefit from the emerging opportunities of ethnic federalism while the elites (some of which identify as Mao) have successfully navigated the various identities. By examining the case of the Mao, this thesis has demonstrated why and how some people remain marginalised for generations.

7.2. Empirical, Conceptual, and Contextual Contributions

This study has provided evidence that addresses broader contemporary questions and challenges in Ethiopia, particularly regarding how social categories adapt to changing political conditions. It has presented a particular example of how changes at the national level from the beginning of the era of Menilik II before the turn of the 20th century until now have played out in contrasting ways for people locally. Its empirical contribution lies in examining how the transformation of hierarchies has practically affected the everyday lives of "ordinary people" in the former Begi *Wäräda* over the last forty years. The analysis of historical documents such as letters, interview transcripts, and government reports from the imperial and Derg time has shown that the way local people define collective identities today is not how they did some decades or generations ago. While "Mao" over time has gained an ethnic connotation as an Ethiopian "nationality", its social and political relevance, as well as its consequences, vary based on hierarchically and morally coloured meanings that affect people differently in specific times and locations.

This thesis has contributed to the body of research on Ethiopia with its detailed evidence of how hierarchies of the past are not eradicated by the emergence of new ones. The study not only investigated how ethnic federalism divides citizens into different ethnic categories but also

explores the hierarchical stratification of these categories and their interaction with non-ethnic social categories that also appear ranked. The thesis has analysed the practical manifestations of identities in the realms of marriage and labour relations, exploring how individuals and groups strive to improve their disadvantaged positions and capitalise on new opportunities, while facing hinderances due to the lingering memories of slavery and the stigma that remains attached to various characteristics. Appreciating the complex lived realities of Mao people enables us to analyse mechanisms behind exclusion and stigmatisation and the failure of certain political measures to combat marginalisation.

Since the 1950s, Ethiopian Studies, particularly studies of Ethiopia's peripheries, have increasingly considered the circumstances surrounding "hereditary occupational groups" like hunters and craftworkers, artisans, former slaves and other marginalised communities that live within and among majority groups, who are often farmers or herders (Freeman 2018: 9). For centuries, social norms and values have shaped exclusionary practices that deny slaves and marginalised occupational groups the rights and duties, including land ownership, which are enjoyed by members of non-stigmatized clans (Aalen 2011b). Therefore, the social stratification that stigmatises marginalised occupational groups as inferior, despised, or "dirty" while also limiting their freedom to interact with the majority community, is frequently regarded as an inherent "natural order" (ibid: 112). Groups like the Fuga (artisans) among the Kambata, Gurage and Yem (Freeman 2003), the *ayle* (slaves) among the Wolayta (Aalen 2011b) and the Manja (people traditionally living off forest resources) among the Dawro (Data Dea 2011) are considered inferior and are excluded because they work with substances seen as polluted and polluting, because they are said to have the "evil eye" (*buda*) or because they consume or are accused of consuming food seen as impure, such as hippopotamus meat.

In some societies, the craftworkers rank higher than slaves and slave descendants in the local hierarchies (Data Dea 2011), whereas in others, the craftworkers are assigned a rank even lower than slave descendants (Aalen 2011b). Lovise Aalen (2011b) and Data Dea (2011) analyse the role of social stratification, occupational status, slave descent and inherited position in the 2005 local parliamentary elections. Like researchers before them, they give little consideration to aspects beyond the conventional characteristics of the respective "cultural categories" of farmers, craftworkers, and slave descendants (Data 2011: 92). For example, how ideas of honour may transcend the different social strata and contribute to social identification and opportunities, and how individuals move between different ranks, remains largely unexplored,

an exception being the work of Ellison (2006). While Data Dea briefly mentions that among the election candidates "a significant portion of the Malla [high status farmers] were 'non-pure Malla', i.e., they have some history of internal slavery within the Dawro" (Data 2011: 99), he does not elaborate on this point further. In general, researchers who study these societies often depict the divisions between the various strata (from the farmers to the craftworkers to the slaves) as static and portray the boundaries between them as fixed.

In parallel with research on occupational and status groups, researchers have for decades studied Ethiopian ethnic groups or Nations, Nationalities and Peoples as they are called since 1991. These two research traditions have usually remained separate and distinct from each other, the contribution of Alexander Meckelburg (2018) in the edited volume *The State of Status Groups in Ethiopia: Minorities Between Marginalization and Integration* being one of the exceptions. While the aforementioned studies on occupational groups usually have looked at how different strata (or "castes") within one ethnic community interact, the studies on Ethiopia's nationalities usually operate from the perspective of ethnic groups as self-contained cultural entities with specific traditions, languages and customs that are stable over time. As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, this essentialises ethnicity and, furthermore, does not open for analyses of stratifications within and across ethnic categories. The case of the Mao as examined in this thesis investigates various aspects of both these traditions. On the one hand, it explores the complexity surrounding notions of "purity" and enduring stigma related to slavery and labour relations. On the other hand, it recognises ethnicity as a significant yet negotiable factor of identification. This perspective enhances our comprehension of inter-ethnic stratification and deepens our understanding of the intricate role ethnicity plays in shaping flexible societal dynamics.

While studies on various disempowered groups often take the marginalisation of certain pre-defined communities as a given, this thesis puts the question of who is marginalised, why and how at the centre of the inquiry. Hence, as Cooper and Brubaker (2005) argue that "identity" should not be made the "category of analysis" but rather a category to be analysed, "marginal" has, in my study, not functioned as an analytical category. While it is commonly assumed that the term "Mao" denotes communities less prestigious than Oromo, this investigation goes beyond the rigid categorisation of society into two groups, namely the "marginalised Mao" and the "prestigious Oromo". Instead, it delves into the significance of concepts such as "purity" and honour, as well as how ethnic identities are judged and qualified by whether individuals

are considered “true” (authentic) members of their respective clans, be it Mao or Oromo. Hence, this study underscores the need to analyse boundaries as negotiable and identities as graduated despite the persistence of historical stratification, shedding light on the complexities underlying social status.

Hierarchies are, and increasingly become, more fluid as individuals from groups of lower prestige seek to improve their situation and society becomes more flexible and mobile (Epple 2018b). Moreover, Ellison (2006) shows that boundaries between different status rankings are malleable and highlights that not all individuals within the same stratum possess equal prestige. In the context of Ethiopian research on status groups and minorities, the Mao case showcases the importance not only of comparing the different strata within social hierarchies but also of considering other aspects of identity that influence social relations, beyond the commonly used social and ethnic categories. This perspective aligns with the concept of intersectionality, as discussed by Crenshaw (2003). It emphasizes the interconnectedness of various categories of difference and their impacts on individuals’ experiences within hierarchies. This provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities underlying social status and the factors that influence it.

Conceptually, this thesis has contributed a discussion of how local notions of status, prestige, and power are expressed through the concept of honour. Honour as a social value, in practice, relates to Maoness by providing a “measurement” of what this identity means in a particular circumstance. Maoness is used as a “proof” of honour for individuals who establish themselves as descendants of “pure” (non-slave) ancestors while Mao in other situations may be an indication of descent from communities considered “enslavable”. Hence, honour is a matter of social discourses and collective memory of genealogies tracing back to ancestors of high or low status, but these considerations are born out of practical, real-life circumstances. In its most striking case, stigma or lack of honour mutually affect and are affected by an individual’s vulnerable material condition and inability to provide for themselves, as illustrated in this thesis by the example of farmers from the Dabus area. In their eyes, renegotiating Maoness may give them opportunities to restore their honour despite economic dispossession, while in the eyes of outsiders (non-Mao people), their economic status confirms Mao as a category of low prestige. Therefore, the different perceptions of honour simultaneously also represent different perceptions of what Mao signifies.

This study has further explored in depth the Mao case that, in its specificity, exemplifies how local people in a particular area of the country engage in shaping and transforming hierarchically ranked categories. The division of the Begi *Wäräda* between two regional states made this heterogenous district even more complex and has provided an opportunity to compare two contexts in which the transformations of hierarchies have played out in opposing ways in the lives of communities that previously shared the same territory. This research builds on the work of Alexander Meckelburg (2015; 2017; 2018; 2019) and, earlier, Wendy James (1980; 1981) and their analysis of how shifting local identities relate to historical changes. It provides a contemporary and local illustration of Yonas Ashine's (2022) historical (and state-focused) argument that power structures have remained constant, despite the changes in regimes and actors, by discussing how communities in this region have adapted new and old power relations. The study's findings are restricted to this particular case which intends to understand how social inequalities matter in practice.

The case of the Mao underscores the value of adopting an inclusive and multidimensional approach when studying marginalisation, status, and social hierarchies. It contributes to anthropological theories of identity and boundaries, providing insights into the potential transformation of status and prestige, even in the presence of persistent historical hierarchies (Amselle 1998; Geschiere and Jackson 2006; Burnham 2009). It further adds to global anthropological discourse by examining ethnicity from the conceptual perspective of hierarchies and social inequalities. It argues that ethnic identification is influenced by hierarchical relations in specific circumstances and locations. Hence, as Rogers Brubaker predicts, "Mao" does not function as an "ethnic group" that behaves socially as a "collective actor" (Brubaker 2004: 8). What is more, any process of "Mao group-making" requires not only analysing transformations of alliances and power relations but reconfiguring how identities remain fragmented along hierarchical lines (and may become even more fragmented) and what this means for the way they are interpreted and utilised.

This research also contributes to African Studies as a field. Over the last decades, African Studies have increasingly recognised the fluid and dynamic nature of ethnicity and the complex interplay between ethnicity and other forms of social differentiation (Cooper, Holt and Scott 2000; Geschiere and Jackson 2006; Burnham 2009; Haour and Rossi 2010). Scholars have sought to understand how ethnic identities intersect with power dynamics, economic disparities, and political processes. This thesis contributes to a growing emphasis in the field concerning

the agency of individuals and communities in shaping ethnic identities and challenging social hierarchies (Fair 2001; Hahonou 2009; Regnier 2019; Lempereur 2022). The present study adds a concern with the complex dynamics of being caught between conflicting paradigms of hierarchy, where labels and identities carry diverse interpretations and implications for their bearers. As a result, it fosters a more nuanced and contextually grounded analysis of ethnicity and social hierarchies on the African continent. A better understanding of the category Mao enriches debates about social hierarchies in ethnically stratified societies by providing a detailed example of how local people manoeuvre ranked identities. This research demonstrates how identities are at once hierarchical, multiple, negotiated and reinvented – an issue relevant far beyond the Mao case.

7.3. Further Research and Outlook

In my thirteen months of fieldwork, I travelled between various locations in the whole of the former Begi *Wäräda* and the regional capital Asosa (where I also lived with a Mao family). Due to the scarcity of previous research on the region, I judged it necessary to cover a broader geographical area to include a comparative aspect to the analysis. This limited the time I could spend in any one location. For future research, an in-depth ethnographic study in one location in the area would complement the insights gained from this research. Especially the Kondala *Wäräda*, which remained inaccessible to me for extended visits, would be a valuable location for future research. Also remaining largely unaddressed by this study is the western lowland area of the Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* towards Sudan (although discussed in more detail by Meckelburg 2019).

Ethiopia is today in a process of political adjustment. This enables us to ask how labels understood as ethnic, such as Mao, transform, especially in relation to other categories, such as Oromo. This study invites comparative research on non-settler minorities in the Oromia Regional State that investigates the effect of national and regional policies and practices. Another topic of importance for further research is the legacy of slavery and the practical effects of alleged slave descent, including the racialisation of society and the interconnection between race, ethnicity, and social status. Furthermore, this research has not examined in detail the aspect of gender – if and how women "do Mao" differently to men and how female honour differs from male. A question to be answered is to what extent Mao will continue to function

as an ethnic designation, and how the hierarchical connotations of this label will change vis-à-vis political transformations.

This thesis has used the conflict in the early 1990s which resulted in a regional border between Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz as a turning point in the history of the Begi area. Despite the relatively stable and peaceful decades that followed, hostilities continued in a half-suppressed state. This was not unique to the Begi area as communities in the whole country increasingly and more vehemently expressed dissatisfaction with the government based on claims that their entitlement to ethnic self-determination remained unaddressed (Bekalu 2017; Fisher and Meressa 2019; Tatek 2020). Only one month after I had ended my fieldwork, in August 2021, new conflicts broke out. Groupings affiliated with the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and others who followed similar political orientations clashed with allied groups claiming indigenous status in Benishangul Gumuz and with forces deployed by the central government.[470] These incidents resulted in destroyed property, blocked roads, and loss of lives.

As I am writing these lines, the citizens of Begi have begun rebuilding their town and the farmers are cultivating their land again. The roads are open, yet not safe. Considering the enormous political upheavals that have taken place over the last generation, it may be difficult to predict what the future holds for local people in this area. As this thesis has discussed, the social category of Mao affects, in diverse ways, the lived realities of Qasim, Jiregna, Zara, Hadi, Malika, Sude, Tamima, Fayise, Yakob, and all the others whose stories are mentioned in this thesis. The label Mao has been influenced by the shifting hierarchies in the Begi area. Future transformations may again change it, and with it, the lives of these individuals.

[470] Ethiopia Peace Observatory, *West and Kellem Wollega*, 04.2021; *EPO Weekly: 25 June-1 July 2022*, 07.07.2022; Addis Standard, *More than 150 reported killed in "new massacre" in west Oromia*, 05.07.2022. The violence devastated the towns, the inhabitant's homes, and their agricultural produce and took hundreds of lives.

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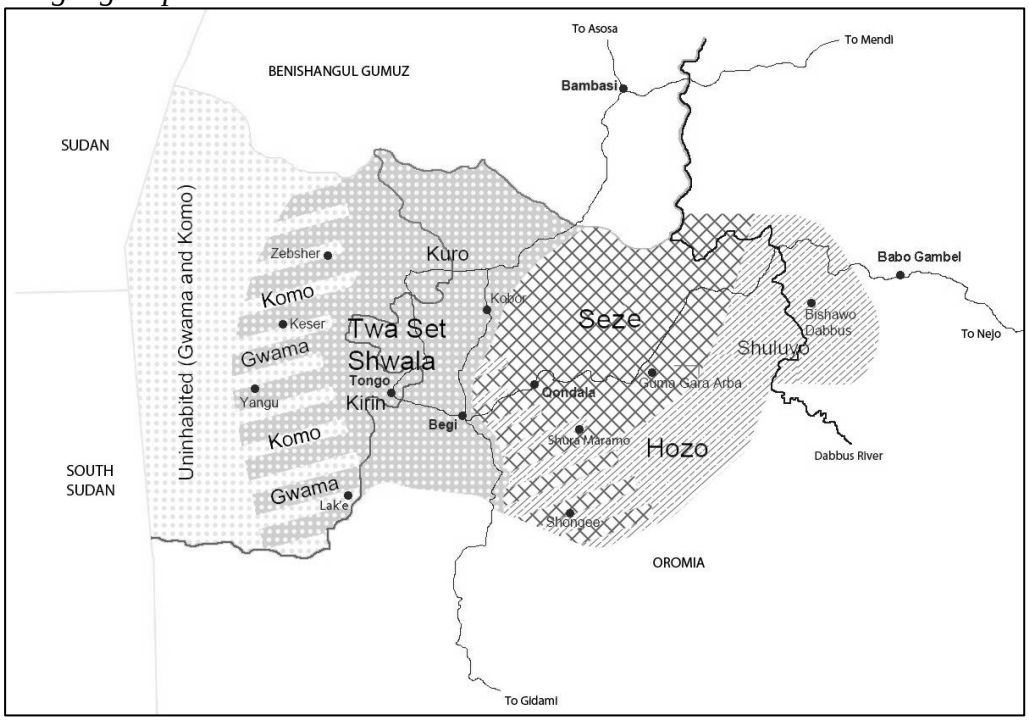
APPENDICES

Appendix A – Maps and Figures

Figure 1:
Map of the area

Figure 2:
Languages spoken in the area



Dotted areas show Koman-speaking communities (light background, Komo / dark background, Gwama); striped areas show Omotic-speaking communities (squared, Seze / striped, Hozo). Taken from Küspert (2015: 22), edited for grayscale printing by Amanuel Buli.

Figure 3:
Main sites of the fieldwork

1) Mao Komo Special *Wäräda*; 2) Begi *Wäräda*; 3) Kondala *Wäräda* and Kondala diaspora in Asosa

Figure 4:
Dispute over Begi between 1991 and 1995

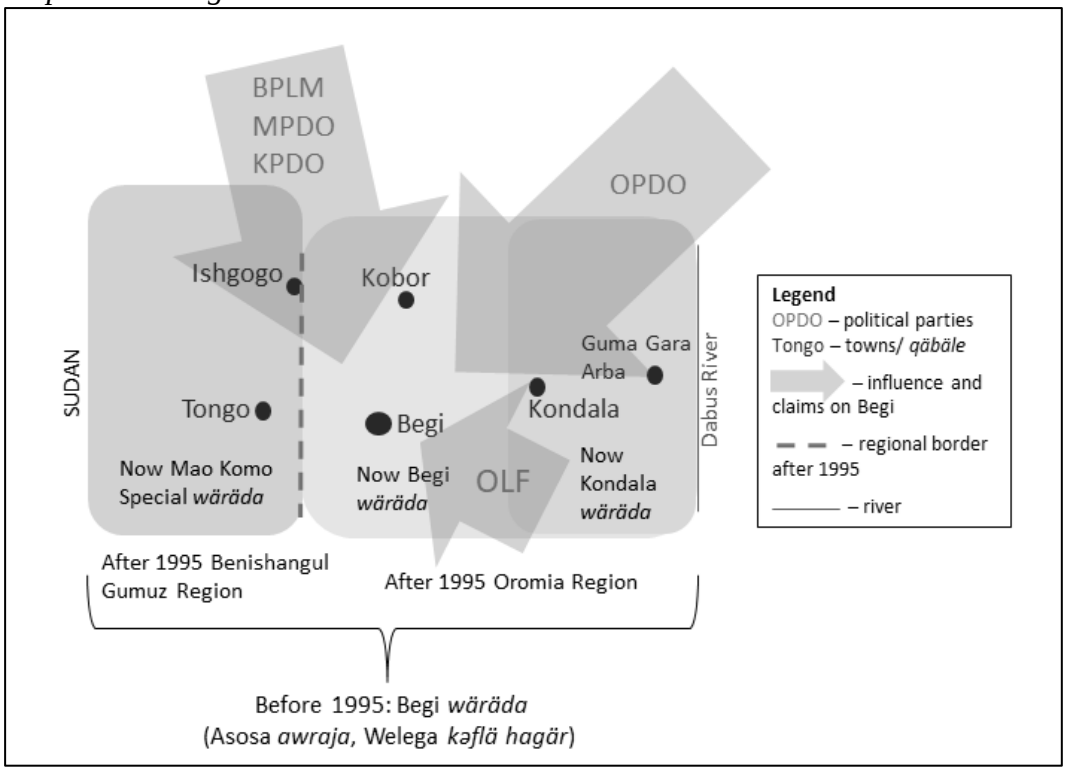


Illustration of the transition from the Derg to the federal government and the dispute over Begi.

Appendix B – Tables

Table 1:
List of interviewees for this study

Interview number[471]	**Town or *wäräda***	**Date**	**Male/ female**	**Number of people**
0004	Begi	29.06.2020	m	1
0005	Begi	30.06.2020	m	1
0008	Kondala	01.07.2020	m	2
0010	Begi	03.07.2020	f	1
0011	Begi	03.07.2020	m	1
0013	Begi	04.07.2020	m	1
0015	Begi/ Kondala	05.07.2020; 17-18.02.2021	m	2
0016	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	07.07.2020; 19.02.2021	m	1
0017	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	07.07.2020	m	1
0021	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	08.07.2020	m	1
0023	Asosa	10.07.2020; 7.-8.10.2020	m	2
0024	Asosa	10.07.2020; 07.10.2020	m	1
0025	Begi	11.07.2020	m	1
0026	Begi *wäräda*	11.07.2020; 6.12.2020	m	2
0027	Begi *wäräda*	12.07.2020; 16.04.2021	m	1
0028	Tongo	14.07.2020; 27-29.09.2020; 12.02.2021	m/f	2
0029	Tongo	14.07.2020	m	1
0030	Tongo	15.07.2020	m	1

[471] This list uses the original numbers I gave to my interviews and conversations. With some interlocutors, I ended up having just an informal conversation and no formal interview. Others withdrew their consent. These numbers have been omitted in the list.

0031	Begi *wäräda*	17-19.07.2020; 28.09.2020; 20.05.2021	m	1
0032	Begi *wäräda*	19.07.2020; 28.09.2020	f	2
0033	Begi *wäräda*	19.07.2020	m	2
0034	Begi *wäräda*	19.07.2020; 29.09.2020	f	1
0036	Begi *wäräda*	21.07.2020	f	1
0037	Begi *wäräda*	22.07.2020	m	1
0038	Begi *wäräda*	22.07.2020	f	1
0039	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	24.07.2020	m	2
0041	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	24.07.2020	f	2
0042	Tongo	26.07.2020; 26.09.2020	m	1
0043	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	28.07.2020	m	1
0044	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	29.07.2020; 30.07.2020	m	1
0045	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	29.07.2020; 20.-22.02.2021	m	1
0046	Asosa	31.07.2020; 07.10.2020	m	1
0047	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	03.08.2020	m	1
0048	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	04.08.2020	m	1
0049	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	05.08.2020	f	1
0051	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	05.08.2020	m	1
0052	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	06.08.2020	m	1
0053	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	07.08.2020	m	1
0054	Tongo	25.08.2020	m	1

0055	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	26.08.2020	m/f	2
0056	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	26.08.2020	f	1
0057	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	27.08.2020; 17.06.2021	m/f	2
0058	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	28.08.2020	m	1
0059	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	28.08.2020	m	1
0060	Tongo	30.08.2020	f	2
0062	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	31.08.2020; 16.05.2021	m	1
0063	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	31.08.2020	f	1
0064	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	01.09.2020; 20.02.2021	f	1
0067	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	02.09.2020	m	1
0068	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	03.09.2020	m	1
0069	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	03.09.2020	m	1
0071	Kondala/ Asosa	05.09.2020; 07.10.2020	m	1
0072	Kondala/ Asosa	05.09.2020; 29.09.2020; 19.04.2021; 24;06.2021; 24.02.2022	m	1
0073	Begi	07.09.2020	m	1
0074	Kondala	08.09.2020; 12.11.2020; 26.06.2021	m	1
0075	Kondala	09.09.2020; 03.03.2021	m	1
0076	Kondala	09.09.2020; 03.03.2021	m	1
0077	Begi	25.09.2020	m	1
0078	Begi *wäräda*	26.09.2020	m	1

0079	Begi	27.09.2020	m	1
0080	Begi *wäräda*	28.09.2020; 10.06.2021	m	2
0081	Begi *wäräda*	28.09.2020	m	1
0082	Begi	02.10.2020; 17.02.2021	m	1
0083	Tongo	03.10.2020	m	1
0084	Tongo	03.10.2020	m	1
0085	Tongo	04.10.2020	m	1
0086	Tongo	05.10.2020	m	1
0087	Tongo	05.10.2020	f	1
0088	Tongo	06.10.2020; 15.05.2021	m	1
0089	Tongo	06.10.2020	m	1
0090	Asosa	12.11.2020	m	1
0091	Asosa	12.11.2020	f	1
0092	Asosa	13.11.2020	m	1
0094	Kondala	18.11.2020	m	2
0096	Kondala	21.11.2020	m	2
0097	Kondala	21.11.2020	m	2
0098	Tongo	28.11.2020	m	1
0099	Tongo	28.11.2020; 13.02.2021	m	1
0100	Tongo	29.11.2020; 02.12.2020	m	1
0101	Tongo	02.12.2020; 17.05.2021	m	1
0102	Tongo	02.12.2020; 19.02.2021; 17.05.2021	f	1
0103	Tongo	03.12.2020	m	1
0104	Tongo	04.12.2020	m	1
0105	Tongo	05.12.2020	m	1
0106	Tongo	05.12.2020	m	1
0107	Tongo	05.12.2020	m	1
0108	Kondala *wäräda*	07.12.2020	m	1
0109	Kondala *wäräda*	07.12.2020	m	1

0110	Kondala *wäräda*	07.12.2020	f	1
0111	Asosa	09.12.2020; 26.05.2021	m	1
0112	Asosa	09.12.2020	m	1
0113	Asosa	10.12.2020	m	1
0114	Asosa	11.12.2020	m	1
0115	Asosa	11.12.2020	m	1
0116	Bambasi	06.02.2021; 24.02.2021	m	1
0117	Bambasi	06.02.2021	m	1
0119	Asosa	07.02.2021	f	1
0120	Asosa	09.02.2021	m	1
0121	Asosa	09.02.2021	m	1
0122	Asosa	10.02.2021	f	1
0123	Asosa	10.02.2021	m	1
0125	Tongo	12.02.2021	m	1
0126	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	13.02.2021	f	1
0131	Tongo	14.02.2021	m	1
0132	Tongo	14.02.2021; 09.06.2021	m	1
0134	Tongo	14.02.2021; 20.02.2021	m	1
0135	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	15.02.2021; 22.02.2021	m	2
0136	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	15.02.2021	m	1
0137	Begi/Kondala *wäräda*	16.02.2021; 24.08.2020	m	1
0140	Begi *wäräda*	17.02.2021	m	2
0141	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	19.02.2021	m	1
0142	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	20.02.2021	m	1
0144	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	21.02.2021	f	1
0145	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	21.02.2021	f	2

0147	Asosa	24.02.2021	m	3
0148	Asosa	24.02.2021	m	1
0149	Asosa	24.02.2021	m	1
0150	Asosa	26.02.2021	m	1
0151	Asosa	26.02.2021	m	2
0152	Asosa	28.02.2021	m	1
0153	Asosa	28.02.2021	m	1
0154	Asosa	28.02.2021	f	1
0155	Asosa	28.02.2021; 20.06.2021	m/f	2
0157	Kondala *wäräda*	03.03.2021	m	1
0158	Asosa	13.04.2021	m	1
0159	Asosa	13.04.2021	m	1
0160	Asosa	13.04.2021	m	1
0161	Asosa	14.04.2021	m	1
0162	Asosa	14.04.2021	m	1
0163	Asosa	15.04.2021	m	1
0164	Asosa	15.04.2021	m	1
0165	Asosa	16.04.2021	m	1
0166	Asosa	17.04.2021	f	1
0167	Asosa	18.04.2021	m	1
0168	Asosa	19.04.2021	m	1
0169	Digitally	21.04.2021	m	1
0170	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	15.05.2021; 16.05.2021	f	1
0171	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	16.05.2021	m	1
0172	Mao Komo special *wäräda*	17.05.2021	m/f	3
0173	Begi *wäräda*	19.05.2021	m	2
0174	Begi *wäräda*	19.05.2021	m/f	2
0175	Bambasi	22.05.2021	f	1
0176	Asosa	23.05.2021	f	1
0177	Asosa	25.05.2021	m	1
0178	Asosa	25.05.2021	M	1

0179	Asosa	27.05.2021	m	1
0180	Asosa	27.05.2021	f	1
0181	Kondala *wäräda*	12.06.2021	m	1
0182	Kondala *wäräda*	13.06.2021	m	1
0183	Kondala *wäräda*	13.06.2021	m	1
0184	Begi *wäräda*	14.06.2021	m	1
0185	Kondala *wäräda*	16.06.2021	m	1
0186	Kondala *wäräda*	16.06.2021	m	1
0187	Begi *wäräda*	17.06.2021	m	1
0188	Begi *wäräda*	18.06.2021	f	1
0189	Asosa	20.06.2021	m	1
0190	Asosa	21.06.2021	m	1
0191	Asosa	21.06.2021	f	2
				185

Table 2:
Statistics of interviewees

Number of interviewees	**185**
Total number of interviews (follow-up interviews with the same person is only counted as one interview)[472]	157
Of the 185, participants interviewed once	148
Of the 185, participants interviewed twice	26
Of the 185, participants interviewed three times or more	11

Gender	
Male	145
Female	40
Total	185

Age	
18-29	46
30-49	73
50-69	41
70+	25
Total	185

Mother tongue	
Gwama	51
Seze	36
Hozo/ Shuluyo	28
Bambasi Mao	5
Komo	3
Oromo	56
Other	6
Total	185

Religion	
Muslim	137
Christian	44
Traditional only	4
Total	185

Education	
No formal education	51
Primary (1-4)	41
Secondary (5-10)	30
High school/college (10+)	63
Total	185

Birthplace	
Kondala *Wäräda*	74
Mao Komo sp. *Wäräda*	64
Begi *Wäräda*	31
Other locations	16
Total	185

Occupation (m/f)	
Farmer	95
Government official/ politician	29
Student	17
Urban day labourer	16
Religious leader/ church employee	14
Teacher	4
Urban housewife (female)	4
Scholar	1
Other	5
Total	185

[472] This is a lower number than number of interviewees because some participants were interviewed together.

Table 3:
Timeline of political events in the Begi area relevant to the crisis in the early 1990s

E.C.	**G.C.**	
until 1966	until 1974	Begi *Wäräda* (incl. Kondala and Tongo) is administered by a governor under the supervision of *däjazmač* Abdulrahim Khojele. Several landlords control the land, one of them is Harun Soso.
1966	1974	The Derg overthrows the Emperor; landlords and *qorro* lose their land, including Harun Soso who goes into opposition.
21.10.1969	28.06.1977	Harun Soso and his followers capture Begi town for several days.
until 1982	until 1990	Growth of ethnic-based resistance movements.
1982	1990	The OLF and other political movements enter the country from Sudan via Kurmuk.
20.09.1983	28.05.1991	The downfall of the Derg.
1983-1986	1991-1994	The transitional government organises the country into regions, but no consensus on the Benishangul Gumuz–Oromia border.
1984	1992	Mao People's Democratic Organisation (MPDO) is established.
1984	1992	The OLF exits the transitional government.
1983-1987	1991-1995	Unrest because of political disagreements between the Benishangul government, the OLF, and the OPDO.
06.09.1984	14.05.1992	First *wäräda* and *qäbäle* elections in the Benishangul Gumuz Regional State, but Begi did not participate due to unrest.
1984-1987	1994-1995	Begi *Wäräda* is administered by the Sector for Regional Affairs (*yäkələloč guday zärf*) to calm down the population.
18.12.1986	24.08.1994	Meeting between the two regions, but no agreement on the border. A neutral research committee is established.
04.04.1987	13.12.1994	Based on the recommendation of the neutral committee, PM Tamrat Layne decides to give all 88 *qäbäle* in Begi to Benishangul Gumuz but this is later revoked.
25.10.1987	02.07.1995	Referendum between Oromia and Benishangul: Begi town becomes part of Oromia. Approx. 1/3 of the *qäbäle* of the former Beg *Wäräda* become part of Benishangul Gumuz.
1988	1996	Mao Komo Special *Wäräda* is established with Tongo as its capital. Begi becomes a *wäräda* under Western Welega Zone in Gimbi.
1992	2000	Parts of Shigogo Godashola *qäbäle* move from Oromia to Benishangul Gumuz under the name Ishgogo.
1997	2005	Kondala becomes an independent *wäräda* within Oromia in the same Zone as Begi (Western Welega, Gimbi).

Table 4:
Languages of Benishangul Gumuz Regional State

Berta	25 %
Amharic	22 %
Gumuz	21 %
Oromo	14 %
Shinasha	8 %
Mao (Gwama and Bambasi Mao)	2 %
Komo	1 %
Tigray	1 %
Other	7 %

Languages spoken in Benishangul Gumuz Regional State in percentage of population (BoFED, 2017: 4). Languages recognised as indigenous are highlighted in grey.

Table 5:
Marriage partners identified as Mao or Oromo

Married men	**Number**	**%**	**Married women**	**Number**	**%**
Mao men married to Mao women only	45	62%	Mao women married to Mao men	24	96%
Mao men married to Oromo women[473]	28	38%	Mao women married to Oromo men	1	4%
Total	73		Total	25	
"Black Oromo" women among the Oromo wives	5				

The figures refer to my interlocutors who identified as Mao, who were married and whose spouse's ethnicity is known to me.

[473] Some of these men had also married one or several Mao women.

Table 6:
*Size of land controlled by one family**

	All informants		**Only Mao informants**	
	No	%	No	%
More than 10 ha	3	5	2	4
5-10 ha	10	15	5	9
2-4 ha	21	32	19	33
1 ha or less	26	40	26	46
Landless	5	8	5	9
Total	65	100	57	100

*The figures relate to the sample of my interlocutors

Table 7:
*Labour done by farmers**

	All informants		**Only Mao informants**		**Mao informants from Kondala/ Dabus area**	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Day labouring	19	29	19	33	14	56
Unequal labour relationships (e.g. *dereba*)	24	37	24	43	16	64
Mutualist labour agreements	13	20	10	18	2	8
Only for self	22	34	14	25	3	12
Total	65**	120***	57	118	23	140

*The figures relate to the sample of my interlocutors
**The total is more than the number of people because one person may do several kinds of labour
***More than 100% because one person may do several kinds of labour

Table 8:
*Control of land over time**

	Self-identifies as Mao	**Self-identifies as Oromo**	**Total**	**Comment**
Controlled land** under all three governments	3	4	7	Among the Mao, those who have remained prestigious have kept their land
Controlled land in imperial times but lost during Derg and did not regain	3		3	
Controlled land in imperial times, kept the land during the Derg and lost it after 1991	5		5	All are rural Mao in Oromia
Controlled land in imperial times, lost during the Derg and regained after 1991	2	1	3	Farmers who went to Sudan to fight with Harun Soso
Did not control land in imperial times, got under the Derg and kept it after 1991	1	2	3	
Did not control land in imperial times, got during the Derg and lost it again after 1991	3		3	Migrants from Oromia to BG where they got land again
Did not control land in imperial times, did not get during the Derg but got after 1991	1		1	Alleged slave descendant
Did not control land under any of the governments	3		3	All are rural Mao in Oromia
			28***	

*The figures relate to the sample of my interlocutors
**Size of land varies, but average may be around 2 ha
*** Among the 67 informants in the statistic of control over land above, I only know the land situation *over time* of 28 families since this requires information of the situation over more than half a century. Most of the figures relate to self-reported stories as not all could be verified.

Table 9:
Occupations of members of the Mao diaspora from Oromia in Asosa

Occupation	**Number**	**Percentage**
Day labourer	26	41
Student	20	32
Fixed employment	4	6
Housewife (sometimes working)	6	10
Farmer	5	8
Unknown	2	3
Total	63	100

Appendix C – Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Research project title: Transformation of Hierarchies in Western Ethiopia. The case of the Mao
Researcher: Sophie Küspert-Rakotondrainy, PhD Student at the University of Birmingham, UK

The purpose of this research is to investigate historical and recent social changes in the area around Begi and Kondala in Western Ethiopia. I will look at the social and political organisation of people in this district, how they are grouped together into social, linguistic, and ethnic groups and what their relationships are. I am interested in how people make sense of who they are, their language, traditions, and identity. It will use churches and schools as cases to look at the socialisation of young people from different backgrounds.

The product will be a thesis for the degree of PhD in African Studies and Anthropology at the University of Birmingham, UK. Within this process, the findings may also be used for different presentations at conferences and academic journal papers.

I would like to ask consent from you to have an interview. You can choose the language of the interview. If the language is not English or Amharic, I would like to use my interpreter who is with me. I may also ask to use a voice recorder, but you can refuse if you do not feel comfortable with it. You can also refuse to answer any questions, and you may end the interview at any time. You can choose the time and location for the interview.

You may choose if you want to remain anonymous. If you choose that, no one will be able to recognise your identity in any published material. Your name or any other information that will expose who you are will not be made known to anyone except me, my supervisors, and the translator. None of us will share information about you to anyone else.

If you have second thoughts related to participation in the research after having completed the interview, you may contact me to withdraw at any time within two months after the completion of the interview. I will then immediately delete all information about you (sound files and written notes).

The data used in the project, such as recordings and written files, will be stored in a secure location at the University of Birmingham for 10 years. After 10 years they will be deleted.

I cannot promise that the study will help you personally, but the information from the study will help to increase the understanding of the situation in Western Ethiopia.

I am an independent researcher and do not have any relationships to political organisations in Ethiopia or outside of Ethiopia.

Sophie Küspert-Rakotondrainy
Addis Ababa
[redacted]

You can contact me at any time, either by phone or by asking for a meeting in person.

የተሳታፊ መረጃ ወረቀት

የምርምር ፕሮጀክት ርዕስ- በምዕራብ ኢትዮጵያ የሄራኪዎስ ሽግግር ፡፡ የማኦ ጉዳይ

ተመራማሪ- ሶፊ ኩስፐርት-ራኩቱንድራይኒ፣ ዩኬ በዩናይትድ ኪንግደም የቢሚንግም ዩኒቨርሲቲ የፒ.ዲ.

የዚህ ምርምር ዓላማ በምዕራብ ኢትዮጵያ በቤጊ እና በቆንዳላ አካባቢ አካባቢ ታሪካዊ እና የቅርብ ጊዜ ማህበራዊ ለውጦችን ለመመርመር ነው። በዚህ ዲስትሪክት ውስጥ የሰዎችን ማህበራዊ እና ፖለቲካዊ ድርጅት ፣ በማህበራዊ ፣ በቋንቋ እና በጎሳ ቡድኖች እንዴት እንደ ተሰባሰቡ እና ግንኙነታቸው ምን እንደ ሆነ እመለከታለሁ ፡፡ ሰዎች ስለ ማንነታቸው ፣ ቋንቋቸው ፣ ባህላቸው እና ማንነታቸው ትርጉም እንደሚሰጡ ለማወቅ ፍላጎት አለኝ ፡፡ ከተለያዩ አስተዳደሮች የመጡ ወጣቶችን ማኅበረሰብ ለመመልከት እንደ አብያተ ክርስቲያናት እና ትምህርት ቤቶችን ይጠቀማል ፡፡

የመጨረሻው ምርት በዩኬ ውስጥ በበርሚንግም ዩኒቨርሲቲ በአፍሪካ ጥናቶች እና አንትሮፖሎጂ የፒ.ዲ.ዲ. ዲግ.ግ ዲግሪ ይሆናል ፡፡ በዚህ ሂደት ውስጥ ግኝቶቹ ለተለያዩ የዝግጅት አቀራረቦች በስብሰባዎች እና በትምህርታዊ መጽሔቶች ወረቀቶች ላይ ሊያገለግሉ ይችላሉ ፡፡

ቃለመጠይቅ ለማድረግ ከእርስዎ ስምምነት መጠየቅ እፈልጋለሁ ፡፡ የቃለ መጠይቁን ቋንቋ መምረጥ ይችላሉ ፡፡ ቋንቋው እንግሊዝኛ ወይም አማርኛ ካልሆነ ከእኔ ጋር ያለኝን አስተርጓሚ መጠቀም እፈልጋለሁ። እኔ ደግሞ የድምፅ መቅጃ ለመጠቀም እጠይቃለሁ ፣ ነገር ግን በሱ ምቾት ካልተሰማዎት እምቢ ማለት ይችላሉ ፡፡ እንዲሁም ማንኛውንም ጥያቄ ለመመለስ እምቢ ማለት ይችላሉ ፣ እናም በቃለ መጠይቁ በማንኛውም ጊዜ ማቆም ይችላሉ ፡፡ ለቃለ መጠይቁ ጊዜ እና ቦታ መምረጥ ይችላሉ ፡፡

ማንነትዎ ሳይታወቅ ለመቆየት ከፈለጉ መምረጥ ይችላሉ ፡፡ ያንን ከመረጡ ማንም በማናቸውም የታተሙ ቁሳቁሶች ውስጥ ማንነትዎን ለይቶ ሊያውቅ አይችልም ፡፡ ማን እንደሆን የሚያጋልጥ ስምዎ ወይም ሌላ ማንኛውም መረጃ ከእኔ ፣ ከአለቃዎቼ እና ከተርጓሚው በስተቀር ለማንም እንዲታወቅ አይደረግም ፡፡ ማናችንም ብንሆን ስለእርስዎ ማንኛውንም መረጃ ለሌላ ለማንም አንሰጥም ፡፡

ቃለ-መጠይቁን ከጨረሱ በኋላ በምርምር ላይ ከመሳተፍ ጋር የተያያዙ ሁለተኛ ሀሳቦች ካሉዎት በቃለ መጠይቁ ከተጠናቀቁ በኋላ ባሉት ሁለት ወሮች ውስጥ በማንኛውም ጊዜ ለመውጣት እኔን ማነጋገር ይችላሉ ፡፡ ከዚያ በኋላ ስለእርስዎ ሁሉንም መረጃ (የድምፅ ፋይሎች እና የተፃፉ ማስታወሻዎች) ወዲያውኑ እሰርሳለሁ።

እንደ ቀረፃዎች እና የተፃፉ ፋይሎች ያሉ በፕሮጀክቱ ውስጥ ያገለገሉ ሁሉም መረጃዎች በበርሚንግሃም ዩኒቨርሲቲ ደህንነቱ በተጠበቀ ቦታ ለ ١٥ ዓመታት ይቀመጣሉ ፡፡ ከ ١٥ ዓመታት በኋላ ይሰረዛሉ ፡፡
ጥናቱ በግልዎ እንደሚረዳዎ ቃል አልገባም ፣ ነገር ግን ከጥናቱ የተገኘው መረጃ በምዕራብ ኢትዮጵያ ያለውን ሁኔታ የበለጠ ግንዛቤ ለማሳደግ ይረዳል ፡፡

እኔ ገለልተኛ ተመራማሪ ነኝ እናም በኢትዮጵያም ሆነ ከኢትዮጵያ ውጭ ካሉ የፖለቲካ ድርጅቶች ጋር ምንም ግንኙነት የለኝም ፡፡

በስልክም ሆነ በአካል በአካል በመገናኘት በማንኛውም ሰዓት እኔን ማነጋገር ይችላሉ፡፡

ሶፊ ኩስፐርት-ራኩቱንድራይኒ
ኣዲስ ኣበባ
[redacted]
[redacted]

Waraqaa yaada hirmaattotaa

Mataduree qorannichaa:- Dhimma karoora hojii jijjiirama Maa'oo kan Lixa Wallaggaa
Kan qorattu:- Sophie Küspert-Rakotondrainy, PhD barattuu kan University Birmingham, UK

Kaayyoon qorannoo kanas waa'ee seenaa fi walitti dhufeenya namoota naannoo Begii jiraatanii akkasumas geggeessitoota naannoo sanaa ilaalchisee ti. Waa'ee hundeefama gamtaa fi siyyaasa namoota naannoo kana jiraatanii irratt xiyyeefachuudhaan ilaaluun barbaada. Namoonni kun akkamitti akka isaan siyyaasaan afaaniin sanyiidhaan gurmaa'an akkasumas immoo walitti dhufeenya isaan qaban ilaalla.Namoonni kun eenyu akk isaan ta'an akka issanitti dhaga'amu akkassumass waa'ee eenyummaa, afaanii fi aadaa isaanii maal akka ta'e akka isaan beekan nan barbaada. Qorannoon kun mana sagadaa fi mana barumsaatti fayyadamuudhaan dargaggoota seenaa adda addaa qaban tokkoomsa.

Xumurr hojii kanaa waraqaa qorannoo / thesis /kan qorannoo Afriikaa fi Ximmaada Anthropology irratti University Birmingham Uktiif.wanti qu'annoo kana irratti argame walga'ii barumsaa fi barruulee irratti dhi'aachuu danda'a.

Gaafannoo tokko sii dhi'eessuuf ayyama kee si gaafachuun barbaada. Afaan ani ittiin si gaafadu filachuu dandeessa. Ingiliffa yookiis Amaariffa yoo ta'uudhaabaate nama naa hiikuttan fayyadama. Sagakee waraabduuttis nan fayyadama. Gaaffiin kun yoo sitti toluudhaabaate, deebisuu dhiisuu dandeessa. yeroo fi bakka gaafileen kun itti ta'us filachuu dandeessa. Yoo barbaaddes maqaan kee akka hin waamamne gochuu dandeessa.

Yoo barreefama kana irratti akka maqaan kee hin beekamne filatte eeny illee barreefama maxanfamu irratti eenyummaa kee beekuu hin danda'u.Maqaaaan kee yookiis odeeffanno kan biraa kan si saaxiluana hiikaa koo fi to'ataa koo ala nama kanbiraatti hin beeksifnu.Tokkoon keenya illee waa'ee kee nama kan biraatti hin dabarsinu.

Gaafannoo kana booda qorannoo kana irratti yaada Immaffaa yoo qabaatte dhiisuudhaaf erga qorannoon kun xumuramee ji'a lama keessatti yoo yaadi kee akka haqamu barbaadde na beeksisuu dandeessa. Anis achumaan dafee odeeffannoon karaa kee argadhe kan caaffataas ta'e kan sagalee waraabbii nan haqa.

Odeeffannoon projektii kanaa hundumtuu kan waraabamee fi kan barreeffame waggaa kudhaniif universitii Birmingham kaa'ama. Waggaa kudhan booda hundumtuu ni haqamu.

Qu'annoon kun eenyummaa kee agarsiisuuf ni gargaara jedhee waadaa siif hin galu, garuu qorannoon kun haala lixa Ithiopia dabalee hubachiisuuf ni gargaara.

Sophie Küspert-Rakotondrainy
Addis Ababa
[redacted]

Ani qorataa bilisaa kanan ta'ee fi dhaabbata siyyaasaa Ithiopia keessa jiranii fi kan alaa wajjin walitti dhufeenya hin qabu.

Yoo barbaaddan bilbilaanis ta'e qaamaan walga'iidhaaf na quunnamuu dandeessu.

Appendix D – Consent Form

Participant Interview Consent Form

I would like to invite you to take part in my research by participating in an interview with me. Please note that it is your right to know what the study is about and what will happen with the information you give me during the interview. Please read the Participant Information Sheet first, or have it read aloud for you.

I may ask to collect personal data from you, which will be treated confidentially. The following are topics I am interested in, and which I may want to discuss in the interview:

1- History of the Begi and Kondala woredas and neighbouring woredas
2- Mao people, ethnicity, language, and clans
3- Political situation and leadership in society
4- Marriage patterns
5- Schools and churches
6- Work relationships
7-Personal history or family genealogy

Participating in this study is voluntary. By signing this document, you agree to participate in an interview that will last approximately 1-2 hours, and may cover one or several of the above mentioned topics. However, you may refuse to answer any of the questions asked. If this time frame is not enough to cover what I would like to discuss with you, I may ask you to have another interview at another time. You can choose to accept or refuse any further interviews with me.

I understand that my participation in this interview is voluntary ☐

I accept the use of audio recording ☐

I have read (or heard) and understood the information in the Participant Information Sheet ☐

Name: _____ Date and place: _____

Signature: _____ or oral consent (tick) ☐ Signature interpreter: _____

Subsequent interviews with the same participant:

Date: _____ Signature: _____ or oral consent ☐ Signature interpreter: _____

Date: _____ Signature: _____ or oral consent ☐ Signature interpreter: _____

Date: _____ Signature: _____ or oral consent ☐ Signature interpreter: _____

Copy 1: To be given to the participant. Copy 2: To remain with the researcher.

የተሳታፊ ቃለ-መጠይቅ ስምምነት ቅጽ

ከእኔ ጋር ቃለ-መጠይቅ በማድረግ በምርምር ላይ እንድትሳተፉ ልጋብዝዎ እወዳለሁ ፡፡ እባክዎ ጥናቱ ስለምን እንደሆነና በቃለ መጠይቁ ጊዜ የሚሠጡኝ መረጃ ምን እንደሚሆን የማወቅ መብት እንዳሉዎት ይገንዘቡ፡፡እባክዎን በመጀመሪያ የተሳታፊ የመረጃ ቅጽን ያንብቡ ወይም ጮክ ተብሎ እንዲያነበብልዎ ያድርጉ ፡፡

የግል መረጃን ከእርስዎ ለመሰብሰብ እጠይቅ ይሆናል ፣ ይህም በሚስጥር የሚያዝ ይሆናል። የሚከተሉት እኔ የምፈልጋቸው እና በቃለ መጠይቁ ላይ ለመወያየት የምፈልጋቸው ርዕሰ ጉዳዮች ናቸው፡፡ ነገድ

1- የቤኒ ፣ ቆንዳላ እና አጎራባች ወረዳዎች ታሪክ
2- የማኦ ህዝብ ነገድ፣ ቋንቋ እና ጎሳዎች
3- በህብረተሰቡ ውስጥ የፖለቲካ ሁኔታ እና አመራር
4- የጋብቻ ዘይቤዎች
5- ትምህርት ቤቶች እና አድባራት
6- የሥራ ግንኙነቶች
7-የግል ታሪክ ወይም የቤተሰብ የዘር ሐረግ

በዚህ ጥናት ውስጥ መሳተፍ በፈቃደኝነት ነው ፡፡ ይህንን ሰነድ በመፈረም በቃለ መጠይቁ መሳተፍ እንደሚፈልጉ ያረጋግጣሉ፡፡ ቃለ መጠይቁ በግምት ከ1-2 ሰዓታት ያህል የሚቆይ ሲሆን፣ ከላይ ከተዘረዘሩት ርዕሶች ውስጥ አንዱን ወይም ብዙዎችን ሊዳስስ ይችላል ፡፡ ሆኖም ፣ እርስዎ ለተጠየቁት ጥያቄዎች መልስ ያለመስጠት መብት አለዎት፡፡ እኔ የምፈልገውን ለመሸፈን ይህ የጊዜ ማእቀፍ በቂ ካልሆነ ከእርስዎ ጋር ለመወያየት በሌላ ጊዜ ሌላ ቃለ መጠይቅ እንዲያደርጉ እጠይቅዎይሆናል ፡፡ ተጨማሪ ቃለመጠይቅ ከእኔ ጋር ለማድረግ መቀበል ወይም ላለመቀበል ይችላሉ፡፡

በዚህ ቃለ መጠይቅ ላይ የእኔ መሳተፍ በፈቃደኝነት እንደሆነ ተረድቻለሁ ☐

የድምፅ ቀረፃን መጠቀምን እቀበላለሁ ☐

በተሳታፊ የመረጃ ቅጽ ውስጥ ያለውን መረጃ አንብቤያለሁ (ወይም ሰምቻለሁ) ☐

ስም _____ ቀን እና ቦታ _____

ፊርማ _____ ወይም የቃል ስምምነት (ምልክት)☐ የአስተርጓሚ ፊርማ _____

ቀጣይ ቃለ መጠይቅ ከተመሳሳይ ተሳታፊ ጋር

ቀን _____ ፊርማ_____ወይም የቃል ስምምነት ☐ የአስተርጓሚ ፊርማ_____

ቀን _____ ፊርማ_____ወይም የቃል ስምምነት ☐ የአስተርጓሚ ፊርማ_____

ቀን _____ ፊርማ_____ወይም የቃል ስምምነት ☐ የአስተርጓሚ ፊርማ_____

ቅጂ 1፡ ለተሳታፊው የሚሰጥ ነው። ቅጂ 2፡ ከተመራማሪው ጋር መቆየት።

Dhuunka waliigaltee hirmaattotaa

Anaa wajjin gaaffii gaafachuudhaan qorannoo koo irratti hirmaattuu akka taataniif isin afeeruun barbaada. Yeroon gaaffii kana gaafadhu qorannoon kun waa'ee maalii akka ta'ee fi yaadi isin anaaf kennitan maal akka ta'u gaafachuuf mirga guutuu qabdu.Maaloo waraqata yaada hirmaattotaa dubisaa, sagalee keessan ol fuudhaa dubbifadhaa.

Sodaa malee yaada mataa keessanii isin nan gaafadha. Kan armaan gad jiran mata duree ani beekuu barbaaduu dha. Akkasumas yroon isin gaafadhu akka sirriitti naa deebiftan nan barbaada.

1. Seenaa Begii fi waradoota naannoo isaa jiranii ti.
2.Namoota Maa'oo eenyummaa isaanii fi sanyii isaanii ti.
3. Siyaasa isaanii fi geggeessummaa issaan uummata gidduutti qaban.
4. Aadaa fuudhaa isaanii.
5. Manaa barumsaa fi mana sagadaa
6. Walitti dhufeena hojii.
7.Seenaa dhuunfaa isaanii fi maatii isaanii

Qorannoo kana keessatti hirmaacuun fedhaan ta'a. Gaaffii sa'atii 1 – 2tti turu kana mallatteessuudhaan itti walii galtu, Akkasumas gaaffii tokko yookiis baayyee isaa fixuun in danda'ama. Yoo barbaaddan gaaffiiwwan kana deebissuu dhiisuu dandeessu. Yeroon yoo nu ga'uu dhaabaate, yeroo kan biraa itti deebi'uu dandeenya. Yoo barbaaddan gaaffii kana fludhachuu yookiis diduu dandeesu.

Akka gaaffii kana irratti hirmaachuun fedhiidhaan ta'e nan hubadha ☐

Barbaachisa odioo waraabuu nan fudhadha ☐

Waraqaa hirmaattotaa irra isa jiru (dhaga'eera) dubbiseera, hubadheera ☐

Maqaa _____ Guyyaa fi bakka _____

Mallattoo _____ Walii galtee ☐ Mallattoo nama afaan hiikuu _____

Gaaffiiwwan itti fufiinsaa hirmaattota duraanii waliin:

Guyyaa_____ Mallattoo _____ yookiis waliigaltee jechaa ☐ Mallattoo nama afaan hiikuu___

Guyyaa_____ Mallattoo _____ yookiis waliigaltee jechaa ☐ Mallattoo nama afaan hiikuu___

Guyyaa_____ Mallattoo _____ yookiis waliigaltee jechaa ☐ Mallattoo nama afaan hiikuu___

Galagalchuu 1; Kun kan warra hirmaattotaaf kennamu. Galagalchuu2; Kun kan qorataa bratti hafu.

Appendix E – Pictures

Market in a village in the Mao Komo Special Wäräda

Women bringing firewood to the market in Kobor, Begi Wäräda

Market in Tongo town, Mao Komo Special Wäräda

Woman cooking beans, Kondala Wäräda

Road down to the lowland from Tongo, Mao Komo Special Wäräda

Road into the market of Kondala town

The Dabus River swamp area, Kondala Wäräda

Farming in the early rainy season, Begi Wäräda

Two women showing traditional clothing style of Mao (left) and Oromo (right), Mao Komo Special Wäräda*. The picture shows the identities of the women with permission.*