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Author(s): Susanne Epple

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**Harmful practice or ritualised guidance?
Reflections on physical punishment as part of socialization among
the Bashada of Southern Ethiopia**

SUSANNE EPPLE

INTRODUCTION

In many parts of the western world the common view on physical punishment as a means of child rearing is that it is harmful, assuming not only that it brings physical pain but that it can also cause psychological damage to the child. In other cultural contexts, however, physical punishment may have quite different implications, and even be considered to contribute to a child's strength and self-esteem. Among the Bashada of Southern Ethiopia, and also among some of their close neighbours, physical force in the form of whipping is not only exerted on children, but also on adults in different social and ritual contexts. The whipping follows clear rules of how it should be applied, by whom and under which conditions. Generally, it is seen as a means to guide juniors to follow the "right path", to reintegrate individual wrong-doers (i.e. "those who have left the right path") back into society and to re-establish peace and harmony among all. Hereby the whipped are protected from harming themselves and others, and the community is saved from general sufferings, such as epidemic diseases or failing harvests - possible effects of disharmony in the society.

By explaining the cultural context of whipping in Bashada, this paper aims – without wanting to advocate application of physical force during child socialisation – at a deeper understanding of a cultural practice that may seem outdated and cruel if looked at from a distant and western perspective.

WESTERN AND NON-WESTERN VIEWS ON PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT

Corporal or physical punishment has existed in western countries in different forms: as judicial corporal punishment as part of criminal sentences, in schools to discipline children by the hands of their teachers or school administrators, and as parental or domestic punishment in the families. The protection of children has become a major focus in human rights debates and international child rights have been formulated by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. In article 19.1 of the Convention (1989) different forms of harmful actions against children have been listed and it has been recommended that governments can interfere when necessary:

“States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child”¹.

The 54 articles of the convention constitute binding international law and have been signed by all UN member states except Somalia and the United States. Its implementation is monitored by the Committee on the Right of the Child (CRC). In Article 11 of its General Comment on the convention, the CRC has defined corporal or physical punishment as:

“any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light. Most involves hitting (...) children, with the hand or with an implement – whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc. or forced ingestion (for example, washing children’s mouths out with soap or forcing them to swallow hot spices). In the view of the Committee, corporal punishment is invariably degrading. In addition, there are other non-physical forms of punishment which are also cruel and degrading and thus incompatible with the Convention. These include, for example, punishment which belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats, threatens, scares or ridicules the child”².

¹ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.html>, accessed on 1.12.2012

² http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/hrlaw/crc_session.html, accessed on 1.12.2012.

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In 2001 the CRC launched the “Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children”. The Initiative calls on all governments to declare their opposition to corporal punishment of children, as it “breaches their fundamental human rights to respect for human dignity and physical integrity”³.

The international movement against corporal punishment has led in the last decades to the banning of corporal punishment in schools and care institutions in more than 100 countries and more than 150 countries have forbidden it as a punishment for a crime committed by a child (Renteln, 2010, pp. 272 f.). Though corporal punishment continues to exist in domestic contexts, it is more and more morally disapproved and even legally prohibited in many western countries⁴.

The UN convention of child rights has been criticised by some non-western scholars of being euro-centric. Indian Sociologist Vasanthi Raman (2000) for example states that the international discourse on child's rights and also the drafting of the convention are highly influenced by European history and the related changing European concepts of childhood⁵. Even if African and Asian countries were involved in the design of the Convention, Raman states, eurocentric perspectives and key concepts of what it means to be a child what a good childhood should look like are presently being imposed onto the rest of the world, as the convention ignores that fact that experiences of children in non-western countries can

³ See http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/hrlaw/human_rights.html, accessed on 1.12.2012.

⁴ Physical punishment in all contexts has fully been abolished and children protected by law in 33 mostly European countries (http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/progress/prohib_states.html, accessed on 1.12.2012).

⁵ See, for example, in the program for the “Awareness campaign against physical punishment of children in their families” by UNICEF and SAVE THE CHILDREN the view on the assumed effects of physical punishment on children, including lowering their self-esteem, teaching them poor self-control, promoting negative expectations of themselves, teaching them to be victims etc. (see http://www.unicef.org/lac/spbarbados/Implementation/CP/Global/Educate_donthit_SaveManual.pdf; accessed on 1.12.2012).

be very different from those of children growing up in western countries⁶ (Raman, 2000, p. 4056). As international agencies and NGOs working in developing countries have adopted the European “vision of childhood as the ‘correct’ childhood”, Raman claims (*ibid.*, p. 4064), their activities to improve children’s lives in third world countries mean to impose European values and models over others. “The consequences are that northern privilege is inscribed in international policies for children, and children and families who fail to conform to those models are either stigmatised or rendered invisible” (Burman, 1996, pp. 45-47, in Raman, 2000, p. 4064).

Stigma can also be faced by migrants to the western world. Alison Dundes Renteln (2010) discusses legal implications of corporal punishment of children by migrant parents in the US and shows how the misinterpretation of alien cultural practices has led to criminalisation of the parents. He lists cases where children were separated from their families or where parents were imprisoned for expression love to their child in a way seen as abusive (Afghan father kissing his baby son’s penis as sign of affection), or for applying traditional medical practices that left bruises on a child’s skin (Renteln, 2010, pp. 9 f.). Physical disciplining that seemed bizarre (making a child kneel on rice) or left bruises (hitting hand of child with the back of a knife the child was playing with) led to labelling of parents as mentally disturbed by social workers (former), parents be imprisoned for alleged child abuse and children being removed from families (latter. Renteln, 2010, pp. 258 ff.). Examples given are from migrant families but also from Canadian families who allegedly applied formerly accepted ways of disciplining (spanking in public, *ibid.*, p. 265).

THE STUDY OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN NON-WESTERN SOCIETIES

The majority of non-anthropological texts found on physical punishment discuss the issue in the light of child rights, perceiving it at least to some extent as a form of abuse. It has been a topic in some

⁶ She states for example that children’s worlds in non-western countries are not separated from that of adults and reciprocity between the generations is more balanced. There also cannot be a clear line drawn between activities of play and work (Raman, 2000, p. 4056).

anthropological literatures, though in many monographs ideas related to child punishment are only mentioned briefly in a paragraph or two (Last, 2000). In her book on childhood studies in anthropology, Montgomery (2009) has shown the prevalence of child punishment (physical and non-physical) in different cultural contexts. Outlining the different explanations found worldwide for physical punishment she stresses that it needs to be considered as something “cultural”. Among local explanations found by different anthropologists are: 1) physical punishment is a way of teaching children proper behaviour without which children “grow lazy and discontent” (*Papel of Guinea-Bissau*, Einarsdottir, 2000, in Montgomery (ed.), 2009, p. 160); 2) teaching children what is right and wrong behaviour (among Kung: Shostak, 1983; in Taiwan: Wolf, 1972, *ibid.*, pp. 160 f.); 3) a way to learn how to endure pain and control one’s reaction to pain (among Yanomami: Chagnon, 1968; among Akwe-Shavante: Maybury-Lewis, 1974, *ibid.*, p. 160; in Tonga: Kavapalu, 1993, *ibid.*, p. 163). Common everywhere seems to be that the kind and intensity of physical punishment is not random, but culturally defined and responsibly applied according to the age of a child, i.e. when it is considered strong enough to endure it (specifically mentioned about the Chagga: Raum, 1940; in Tonga: Morton, 1996; among the Ngoni: Read, 1968, *ibid.*, p. 161).

In “Child Abuse and Neglect, Cross-Cultural Perspectives” (Korbin, 1981), child rearing practices of nine different non-western societies are described. Many of these seem abusive and harmful to the children according to contemporary western thinking, but as local context and indigenous explanations are provided, the reader is to some extent enabled to understand the reasons and functions behind. It also becomes clear that parents who would refuse, for example to let their child undergo a painful initiation rite, would be considered as “denying the child a place as an adult in that culture” (*ibid.*, p. 4). The book also provides some indigenous views on western child rearing practices (such as letting children sleep alone in a room, feeding children at fixed times of the day or sending them to school at the age of six), which appear “bizarre, exotic, damaging to child welfare” to non-western people (Korbin, 1981, p. 4; Langness, in Korbin, 1981, p. 30).

THE SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA

To address the specific situation of African children, the “African charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child” (ACRWC) was ratified in 1990 and then entered into force in November 1999 in order to address the specific needs of African children⁷. The CRC and the ACRWC have been ratified by the Ethiopian government and the federal constitution revised to harmonise it with the ideas of child protection (Goel, 2009, p. 144).

While corporal punishment in schools and care institutions has been prohibited by the Ethiopian constitution of 1995 and judicial corporal punishment abolished by the criminal code of the 2005, domestic physical punishment remains legal and, according to a recent study of Save the Children (2005) seems to be very common in most parts of Ethiopia (*ibid.*, p. 145).

Not many anthropological studies on traditional child rearing practices in Ethiopia can be found, and on the issue of physical punishment even less. Some interesting qualitative studies on the concept of child and childhood and children’s lives and socialisation in towns and countryside have been published in an edited volume by Poluha (2007), and Gebre (2010a, 2010b). The latter focuses mainly on vulnerable children affected by trafficking, child labor, living on the streets, or living in poverty in rural and urban contexts⁸.

IMPLICATIONS OF PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT IN BASHADA

The Bashada are a small group of about 2000-3000 members living in South Omo Zone in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia. As agro-pastoralists, they herd cattle, sheep and goats, cultivate sorghum and maize, a limited amount of beans, peas and peppers, as well as some vegetables and fruits that have recently been introduced from the outside⁹. Bashada society is patrilineal and without

⁷ S. for example Article 16: “Protection Against Child Abuse and Torture”; Article 20 on “Parental Responsibilities”, and Article 21 on “Harmful Social and Cultural Practices.

⁸ An earlier version of this paper is the only one in the mentioned volumes that deals with children and child rearing in a “traditional” society.

⁹ Their closest neighbours are the Hamar and Banna with whom the Bashada share the

any central political leadership. Their ritual leader (*bitta*) is responsible for ritually ensuring the well-being of the people, the livestock and the country in general. Like many East African pastoralists the Bashada have an age-system into which all males at a certain age are initiated and females are associated to their husbands' age-set¹⁰. The age-sets specifically regulate relationships among males by clearly defining who is senior or junior to whom. More generally, it influences the daily lives of all, male and female, young and old, as social relationships are defined through kinship, neighbourhood and also through direct or indirect affiliation to a certain age-set. Age-mates, i.e. members of the same age-set may, for example, give orders to their juniors, demand respectful behaviour and expect preferential treatment during public festivities. Age-mates are made responsible for each others' behaviour, and also of those of junior age-sets whom they control and sanction in different ways, such as by advising, scolding, physical sanctioning, cursing, and temporary exclusion or ostracism. Relations within male and female peer groups of children or adolescents as well as among women of the same locality follow a more general principle of seniority, and similar strategies of resolving interpersonal and group conflicts are applied. Among these, physical sanctioning in the form of whipping with a special whipping wand is very common and seen as a positive and necessary measure to keep social relations intact or re-establish relations in case of disturbance. As severed relationships are thought to bring about metaphysical disorder that may lead to misfortunes such as warfare, sickness, shortage of rainfall, or crop failure that affect the entire society, avoidance and solving of conflicts is thus crucial not only to the parties involved but to the whole society. The necessary respectful behaviour between juniors and seniors and daily cooperation and support between relatives and neighbours represent some of the core values in Bashada which are taught to children from early age on with the *micere* (whipping wand). As will be shown below, its effect

same language and most cultural practices, and freely intermarry. Many aspects of child raising tradition of the Bashada discussed below therefore apply also to the Hamar and Banna.

¹⁰ S. Epple, 2006 on more detailed information on how women are integrated into the age-system.

and meaning goes far beyond the idea of physical punishment and intimidation.

MEANING AND USAGE OF THE WHIPPING WAND IN BASHADA

Whipping with the whipping wand is a common event in Bashada and it can happen to anyone who has a senior: for disrespectful behaviour or doing something wrong children are whipped by their parents or senior siblings, wives by their husbands, and men by their age-mates or classificatory older brothers (members of senior age-sets). Males and females, who are allegedly engaged in activities believed to threaten the reputation of the community, can also be whipped: men by their age-mates or seniors; women by women of the neighbourhood; and adolescents by their peers. The whipping expresses authority and seniority of the whipper, but also affection, responsibility and care for the whipped, who is believed to be helped to do better in the future¹¹.

Ideally, one should only be whipped with a *micere*, a branch of the *baraza*-tree (*grewia mollis*). The Bashada believe that this tree stands for *barjo* (good fortune), and its branches and leaves are used in different ritual contexts. Strecker (2010) explained that the meaning of the *micere* among the Hamar (the same is true for Bashada) derives from its usage in goat herding. Herding boys use the whipping wand to direct the goats to the bush, water holes, and then back home. Without guidance the goats would disperse in all directions and get lost. Likewise, people are believed to need guidance and be looked after (*gisha*), as they would like goats go into all directions, get lost and be harmed. To be beaten with the *micere* is therefore comparable with guiding goats into the right direction: the intention is to make sure that the person stays on the right behavioural path. Since feeding the goats well increases the production of milk, Strecker explained further, the *micere* has become a symbol of well-being, abundance, and fertility, and its positive metaphorical expression is found

¹¹ Whipping as an expression of affection takes different forms. During the night dances the men and boys use the *micere* to flirt with girls; during male initiation, the classificatory sisters of the initiate let themselves whipped to display their affection for him and demonstrate their courage (Epple, 2010a).

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in many rituals such as initiation, funeral, and transference of loan cattle.

While whipping brings well-being, slapping with the hand (*ch'aa*) is considered a harmful and dangerous action. This is because, when angered, ancestor spirits are believed to slap their descendants to inflict sickness (Lydall, 1994, p. 206). Also, though whipping may cause momentary pain and injury, according to the Bashada, it releases hidden anger, bad feelings and grudges that might otherwise turn into curses that bring more serious harm, such as accidents, sickness and even death. Therefore, whipping stands not only for disciplining, but also for saving a wrong-doer from being seriously harmed. As will be demonstrated below, whipping often goes together with verbal advice (*kelima*) and also scolding (*watshima*) to make sure that a wrong-doer improves in the future.

THE NATURE OF CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS

“The inside of this house...
It was built for humans it has been said.
A human who stabs its father's buttock
Shall come down into this house's inside...
Shall come down...
Shall come down...
Someone who insults his father shall come down,
Someone who insults his mother shall come down,
Someone not to herd the goats shall come down,
Someone not to herd his father's cattle shall come down.
Let him walk like a baboon,
Let a baboon come down from the central pole...
The one who is already in the [mother's] inside shall come down...
Someone who does things wrong shall come down,
Someone who goes to war,
Who spoils the girls,
Who makes his father suffer and pay for everything,
Someone who does like that shall come down...”

(neighbours' blessing of a pregnant woman during coffee drinking)

Every morning neighbours come together to have coffee, and they initiate the day by blessing the host, her husband and children, the animals, and the homestead in general. The above quoted blessing represents a special blessing for a young woman who has either not given birth yet, or

has only given birth to girls¹². The blessing contains positive and negative attributes the child to be born should have. Among the positive attributes is the wish that the child should ‘walk like a baboon’, i.e. easily and without any worry¹³. Secondly, it is mentioned that the child (obviously, in this case, a boy) should herd its father’s animals, i.e. become a help to his family and a capable and responsible member of Bashada society. All the other parts of the blessing contain things that a child might do wrong, such as insulting parents and other seniors, going to war (breaking the peace), and spoiling girls (impregnating them) and hereby subjecting his father to pay compensation for that.

Especially the parts of the blessing that mention the negative aspects of the child convey a lot about the Bashada concept of children and childhood. They show that wrong-doing and misbehaviour are expected parts of their natural behaviour.

“We say *Nasi sa woilem k’oley!* ‘Children have no heart’, that means that children do not think about the future. They do not think about anything, they do not care for tomorrow, but simply want to play and eat” (Maldo, September 2000)¹⁴.

Children are unreasonable, lack the ability to think about the future like adults, and lead momentary lives, it is only by socialisation, i.e. by the guidance and protection of their seniors that they learn about culturally appropriate behaviour. Though children take over responsibilities in the household, on the fields and during cattle herding at early age, they are thought to continue misbehaving as they grow into adolescents and young

¹² When a young bride moves to her first house to live with her husband, she is expected to give a special invitation to the elders from the neighbourhood. They will arrive very early in the morning, before sunrise, in order to bless and hereby include the young woman into the community. When the coffee is served, the most senior elder initiates by taking a sip of the coffee and spraying it over the woman and the inside of the house. Then he begins the verbal blessing. The last words of each utterance are echoed by the other people present in order to support and reinforce the blessing.

¹³ Baboons are often mentioned in blessings. Strecker (1979, pp. 5 ff., 208) explained that “The baboon walks with natural ease and does not easily hurt himself. Also, he is said to have strange capacity for knowing what is happening far away. He knows instinctively and, therefore, is safe.”

¹⁴ At the time of the interview Maldo was a young married man.

adults. The expression *Kissi nasi ne!* "He is a child" can often be heard used also for adults who have done wrong, to some extent explaining and forgiving deficiencies in knowledge and sensibility of behaviour - even if they are physically sanctioned. As the deficiencies are expected parts of children's, and also adolescents and young adults behaviour, they do not carry the sole responsibility for it, their seniors are partly also made responsible and the sanctioning may be applied to them as well (see below).

The Bashada generally desire to have many children. One of the reasons is that a large family means to have a large social network. Sons usually live close to their parents, so to have many male descendants means to establish a big homestead and a powerful family. Daughters move out after marriage, but as bridewealth is given to their original families over many years, usually strong relations develop between affinal relatives. As marriage partners can be chosen also from some of the neighbouring groups (preferably Hamar and Banna), through marriage the social network of a family can grow over a large territory.

In the household, children are highly appreciated from early age on, as the help of children of all ages is indispensable in everyday life. As soon as small children can walk, they start running errands for their parents or grandparents. Girls from the age of about five help their mothers fetch water, grind sorghum and prepare food, while boys begin herding, watering and milking goats and cattle. Children of both sexes look after their younger siblings and protect their parents' fields from animals. As leaving fields to monkeys and birds or abandoning goats in the bush means putting everyone's basic sustenance at risk, children have to learn early to obey their parents and reliably do what is considered their tasks. This education begins at about the age of three or four, when a child has established strong emotional bonds with his parents and siblings.

EARLY SOCIALISATION

In their first years, the strongest relationship children establish is with their mothers, a bond especially rooted in the fact that children are breastfed until the mother becomes pregnant again, usually after 2-3 years. During this time, children receive as much tender attention as they wish.

The mother and also elder siblings commonly express their affection towards the youngest child through intensive physical contact, such as cuddling, kissing and carrying the child around. Physical contact between father and children is limited: he almost never holds a newborn baby and when he consoles his older child, he does this by wiping away its tears, instead of holding it¹⁵. The father mainly expresses his affection by making sure that the child is fed well and cared for properly by its mother.

Once the mother is pregnant again, the toddler has to learn to respect its parents and as soon as the new baby is born, the older child is weaned and physical contact between him and the mother is drastically reduced. The child is no longer cuddled and carried by the mother, and when he cries, he is comforted by repeatedly being offered food. If a child goes on crying, the mother will eventually scold him, and maybe offer food again, but she will not hold it anymore¹⁶. It is also now, at the age of three or four, that children make their first acquaintance with the whipping wand, usually by their mothers' hands. While the smallest children are given way to their will most of the time, those who have a younger sibling must not refuse to do what the mother has told them, lest they be beaten on their legs with a small stick or whipping wand. If a mother has no stick at hand, she will tell her older children to bring one from outside: *Micere ora bea!* "Bring a whipping wand from over there!". To hear the mother say that is often enough for a stubborn child to give in quickly, provided he has been whipped before. If he still does not obey, a *micere* is brought and the child is beaten, scolded, and sometimes chased out of the house, often under the

¹⁵ The main reason why physical contact between a father and his children is limited is that if the emotional bond between a father and his children is too strong, people say, that the father would miss his children too much when away with the cattle or on a hunting or raiding trip. Lydall reported the same for the relationship between Hamar men and children (1993, p. 23). S. the same article for her experiences with her own children growing up in Hamar, especially for her notes on the first months in a baby's life on breastfeeding and on beating as a means of education.

¹⁶ It is important to console a small child, as crying is said to negatively affect babies and use up their strength. Too much crying can also endanger the whole homestead, as it can turn to an evil power the child has over its relatives. It is compared to the *ch'aakamo*, 'evil power', people are said to have and use this power to affect others whom they envy. *Ch'aakamo* seems to be a similar concept as the evil eye in other societies.

great laughter of the other children who are around. It must be mentioned that in the cases I observed the beating of a small child remained fairly harmless, rather being a warning than a really painful beating.

While children of three or four years are mainly whipped on their legs, older children who have already taken over some responsibility are whipped on their backs, usually when they have spoilt something. When I observed a boy of about 8 or 9 years being severely whipped by his father for having played with his friends instead of herding the goats (some of which got lost in the bush), I was explained later, that the whipping was not only meant to punish the boy and warn him to take care of his animals properly, but also to give him the more general lesson to respect his and other senior people's words:

“The use of the *micere* is our way of teaching. ‘Go with the goats!’ you tell your son, and if he does not do it, you beat him and send him off. If he loses a goat you beat him and say: “Go and search for it!”, so he goes and finds it. That is a clever child. If your son grows up without you, the father, having whipped him, without his age-mates having beaten him, it is bad. Later, when he does something wrong and then you want to whip him, he does not fear the whipping wand. If you do not beat your child, it will become arrogant and does not know respect for anyone” (Maldo, September 2000).

As the statement above shows, the Bashada say that boys who are not whipped at young age will later completely lack respect for their seniors. This may mean, as I was told by different people, that later these boys would not even hesitate to kill their own father or any other senior in a conflict and thus become a real danger to the whole group. The whipping of children has therefore to be seen as a way of individual disciplining, but also teaching them respect for seniors, a respect that is partly rooted in the fear and respect for the *micere*. This fear should ideally be kept alive until one has become adult and mature, and finally too old to be whipped¹⁷.

¹⁷ This fear children are supposed to develop towards the *micere* is called *bokind'a* (in Hamar: *oshimb'a*), a term that can be translated as “a feeling of respect, shyness, embarrassment and fear of (the seniors) powers.” (Poissonnier, 2000, p. 132). *Bokind'a*, besides its implications in child-education, is also of central meaning in many other relationships. Some of these are asymmetric, such as between parents and children, and

Children express their respect for seniors by behaving very shyly or by not talking at all in the presence of adults. It is common to see children sent to a neighbor's house to invite him for coffee stand at the entry of the house for minutes, silently looking to the ground until finally addressed by someone. Only being asked several times why he or she has come will a child usually respond in a low voice that one can hardly hear. Such children have already made acquaintance with the whipping wand, so they avoid looking at and talking to adults out of respect and fear to be whipped again. When I first observed this kind of behavior I was very irritated as it seemed to be extremely submissive and as if the children were kind of disturbed and very intimidated. However, I could see the same children play and behave completely freely in other situations, and over the years I have seen many Bashada children grow up and become self-conscious and strong personalities.

Why does the whipping in Bashada not create submissive characters as believed by many western scholars? I believe this has to do with several facts. One reason might be that children in Bashada generally enjoy a lot of freedom and spend much time rather unobserved by adults either playing freely or fulfilling their household duties in the company of their peers. When children are whipped this is never without reason and only delivered by entitled seniors or, as I will explain later, by their peers. Children who feel they have been punished unfairly have the right to protest and will usually do so. The following example can demonstrate this:

“Mäga, a girl of about 7 years, lived with her elder sister in order to help her in the household and with the newborn child. Most of the time, she did well what was expected of her, and she felt comfortable in her sister's home, but there was a time when she did not feel she was properly treated by her sister and her sister's husband.

When one day she was beaten for having forgotten something, she decided to leave: she walked all the way back to her parents' house (about 2 hours walking distance). From there she returned only after

others symmetric, such as between hunting-mates or bond-friends. Often, people use the term *pimb'a*, to fear, as a synonym for *bokind'a*, as it is by fearing to be whipped that children learn to respect their seniors.

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several days, when her sister's husband came, asked her to return and promised to treat her better in future. The fact that Māga had left her sister's house was well accepted by everyone in the family and seen as a legitimate expression of disagreement with the way she was treated in her sister's house" (from fieldnotes, 1999).

The use of the whip always sanctions a specific wrong-doing and teaches respect, but this does not mean that children are expected to have a generally submissive attitude towards adults. They are rather encouraged to stand in for their own interests and they may use the whipping wand themselves to do so. When, for example, children quarrel with each other, parents or elder siblings make sure that the smaller child defends itself, by taking a *micere* and beating back in case it has been hurt by a bigger child. Hereby children learn that the use of *micere* is not a privilege for adults, a fact that may make it easier to accept when they are whipped themselves. Finally, besides whipping, the means of Bashada child rearing serve to guide and motivate the children in rather encouraging ways to develop culturally appropriate behaviour. These will be described in the following.

GIVING ORDERS, SCOLDING AND ADVISING

Parents often instruct their children verbally, though usually without much explanation. The most common way is to repeatedly *gia* (lit.: "to tell", also: "to give an instruction" or "to explain"). Such instructions are usually quite short, but often repeated several times, even when a child is already carrying out what it has been told. *Sherkana oo inna tio yea!* "Go and bring me coffee-bowls from over there!" a mother might order her little daughter, and while the girl is bringing the bowls, the mother keeps on saying, *Ora bea-ta!* "Bring it here!" Often, orders are combined with approval. When a girl is pouring hot water into the sorghum beer of guests, the adults around might say, *Kaa! Agate kaa! Anza disi wadima!* "Pour it! Pour it there! Work like a real girl!" To say "Do it like a real girl!", or to thank the girl by saying *Koro anya ne!* "That one is a (real good) girl!" here serves as a compliment makes the girl feel that what she is doing is observed and also positively acknowledged. The orders and instructions thus serve as a motivation and affirmation of the social roles a child is expected to grow into. Orders also make a child aware of its manifold

social relationships, such as when a child is sent to its father's sister: *Amisha-xal yea inna yir tio!* "Go and get me something from your elder sister!".

Sometimes, instructions or orders are given in a harsh tone or even combined with insults. This is called *goara*, a term that can be translated as "to yell at" or "to give an instruction in a strict tone". An impatient father may reprimand his daughter who is acting slowly, *Ya, ch'auli, äben appadimasey?! "You, white one (here: 'useless'), won't you open (spread) the cow hides!?"* When people *goara* without any obvious cause, i.e. when the one who is addressed has not shown any reluctance to work or obey, they usually want to demonstrate and reaffirm their senior status in front of others. I often observed men use a strict tone towards their wives or children when guests were around, so as to emphasise or demonstrate their concern that the guests are treated well and served food and coffee quickly. Typical relationships in which the *goara* is used are those between parents and children, senior and junior siblings, husband and wife, and members of senior and junior age-sets.

Besides the daily short instructions, children are rarely given actual verbal explanations. It is only during special occasions that children are taught about traditions in lengthy explanations, called *kelima*. These are not given spontaneously, but usually have a specific reason behind, such as a preceding conflict, misunderstanding or wrongdoing of the child, and they often contain a reference to past events or to an idealised past. Often, the *kelima* is given in a rather private sphere, such as in the cattle kraal, slightly apart from others. A *kelima* situation may develop in the early morning before people go to work or embark on travelling or other activities, or towards the end of a coffee session. The instruction given by a father might contain detailed instructions to his son on how he should go about defending their herds against enemies, how to collect debts from such and such a family, how to go on a trading expedition, or how to prepare a certain ritual¹⁸. *Kelima* is also given after a child, adolescent or

¹⁸ The *kelima* also plays a central role at public gatherings or work parties, when conflicts are resolved or compensation paid to the community by a wrong-doer. Here, elders take the opportunity to teach what is right and wrong and often, a *kelima* is given after someone has been whipped. Members of adjacent age-sets who are responsible for each others'

adult has been whipped. Then it can be seen as an explanation and advice on how to avoid wrong behaviour in the future.

Like the whipping with the *micere*, the *kelima* is seen as crucial to the successful upbringing of a child. A child who neglects what it has been told, the Bashada say, will fail to become a successful member of its society.

THE ROLE OF THE ELDER BROTHER IN CHILD REARING

Siblings, boys and girls together, spend a lot of time playing with each other around the homestead. The older ones, usually not the immediate but the second next seniors, carry around their baby siblings, all children are constantly reminded by their parents to look after the younger ones. The older a child gets, the more it takes an active part in the actual education of his or her junior siblings. The *ishim* (“elder brother”) plays the most important role in teaching a child respect (besides the parents), especially by using the whipping wand. When a small child does not obey, it is the *ishim* who is called to intimidate and whip it. In 1998 for the first time I witnessed the strong authority of the *ishim*:

“One day foreigners came to Gunne, the village of my research. They did some filming, and in return distributed medicines among the people. A little boy of about three years age was to get malaria tablets. He came with his older sister, but when it was his turn, he refused to swallow the bitter medicine. Neither nice words nor threats helped. Some people suggested calling his elder brother. ‘When Haila comes, he will swallow the medicine!’, they said.

I wondered why and how the good words of his elder brother would make the boy swallow the medicine, but really, when Haila came he placed himself in front of his little brother and lifted up his right arm, without saying a word. Immediately, the boy accepted the medicine and swallowed it all. The elder sister later explained to me that Haila had threatened his little brother with an invisible whipping wand. Obviously, the child had experienced the *micere* used against him before and therefore immediately obeyed” (from fieldnotes, 4th of July 1998).

Later, I often observed how whenever the little boy did not listen to his

behaviour also advise each other in a similar way.

mother, she made him obey by threatening that his elder brother would come. Just mentioning the elder brother's name was usually enough to make him listen without having to use a whipping wand¹⁹.

Besides the biological older brother, there exist several kinds of classificatory elder brothers in Bashada. In a very general sense, the term *ishim* is used for all males senior to ego (except for those who are age-mates with one's father or senior to one's father). Within the age-organisation the term *ishim* is used for the members of the senior next age-set. All *ishim* act in a similarly dominant way towards their junior siblings and share a responsibility for them.

One variation of the classificatory *ishim* can be seen as a kind of exaggerated form or essence of the *ishim*'s role: the *kami ishim*, who is the son of one's mother's elder sisters. Literally translated the term means "ear senior brother" and refers to the child's ears the *k'ami ishim* pinches whenever he sees it. A *k'ami ishim*'s main and only task is to teach a child respect for its seniors by scaring and intimidating it and whenever he comes to the house of his *k'ami kana* ("ear junior brother"), he takes a little stick and threatens to beat the child, by holding the stick up high like a whipping wand. If the child does not show any fear, he will whip it until it begins to cry and runs away. When a *k'ami ishim* sees a small child drink at its mother's breast he will say in a threatening tone, "What?! Are you still drinking at your mother's breast? Leave it! Leave it!" If the child does not let go of the mother's breast, the *k'ami ishim* threatens to whip the child until it stops drinking. A bigger child who sees its *k'ami ishim* from afar is expected to greet him calling "*Ado*", and bigger children by "*Ishim*" or "*Ishimo!*" (all three are terms of address for an "elder brother"), knowing that if it fails to greet loud enough, the *k'ami ishim* will come over and whip it. Most children know their *k'ami ishim* very well and it is

¹⁹ A *misha* (elder sister) may take on a similar role and behave in the same way as an elder brother does. However, I have the impression that the educative role of the *misha* is less propagated than that of the *ishim*, though, which may have to do with the fact that the influence sisters have on their younger siblings is temporary: they marry out and leave their families in their late teens, whereas boys marry much later and usually build their own houses next to that of their parents, so that even as adults they can keep a watching eye on their younger siblings.

enough to mention his name to make them obey²⁰.

When children grow up they become senior to their own younger sibling and they start disciplining them with the *micere* in the same way. This is considered as a kind of indirect compensation for their own experiences. The relationship between a child and his or her *k'ami ishim* also changes from a asymmetrical fearful relationship into a provocative joking relationship which includes the *k'ami ishim's* wife:

“If he (the *k'ami ishim*) says: ‘Little animal over there, youuu! You will die by my hand!’ you will joke with him in return: ‘Your wife: it is me who will fuck her! You have become old by now! I will later have sex with your wife!’ Boys like Gaito (about 10 years old) have already started joking like that (...). Even when the husband is around, the boy will say such things: ‘You, wife! Prepare coffee! Your husband, while he is sitting here I will fuck you and then leave.’ or ‘You little animal! Won’t you spread a cowhide for me! Today I will not leave without having sex with you!’ The husband sits there and keeps quiet. Then the wife will swear at the boy: ‘You, *ch'auli*, [lit.: ‘white one’, here: ‘dirty, useless’]!” (Maldo, March 2002).

To insult the *k'ami ishim's* wife is seen as taking direct compensation (*baza*) for the whipping a child had to endure during early childhood. Especially when the *k'ami ishim's* wife is still a bride, she may suffer from such harassments, as her husband’s *k'ami kana* (“ear younger brother”) is entitled to order her around, insult her, whip her and do anything to make her life hard. After the bridal time, however, their relationship turns into the above mentioned joking relationship in which sexual allusions are frequent²¹.

SOCIALISATION WITHIN PEER GROUPS AND AGE-SETS

Boys and girls until the age of about twelve are under the care and control of their natal families, i.e. parents or grandparents and senior

²⁰ The female equivalent is the *k'ami misha*, ‘ear elder sister’. She acts in the same way as a *k'ami ishim*, but, like the role of the *misha*, the role of the *k'ami misha* is not much talked about, and her role is less ritualised.

²¹ Adolescent girls obviously do not insult their *k'ami ishim's* wife in the same way, but they also do not have to fear the *k'ami ishim* any more, once they have become adolescents.

siblings. While a girl's life does not change much until she gets married and moves in with her husband, a boy's life changes drastically when he grows up, as his peer-group gains more and more influence on him²².

Male peer-groups

The close bonds between male peers have been mentioned and even picked out as a central theme by many anthropologists who wrote about societies with age-organisation. These bonds are not merely based on sympathetic feelings, but also linked to high mutual expectations and duties. Age-mates in these groups are expected to adhere to 'the ethos of equality' (Almagor, 1978), which comprises communal eating, drinking, cooperation and the like. At the same time age-mates are responsible for each others' behaviour, have to settle conflicts among them and must sanction and discipline wrong-doers within their age-set (Baxter and Almagor, 1978, p. 15).

In Bashada, I could observe how male peers cooperated and enjoyed spending their time together, but in most conversations among themselves and also during interviews with me, the social control peers exert on each other was very much emphasised. Especially adolescent boys expressed to me that they did not accept to be whipped by their senior male relatives any longer. Now, they explained, it was their peer-group who watched over them and controlled their behaviour, and this was to continue to be so also during their adulthood. As adults, it would be the members of their age-sets, as well as those belonging to the senior next age-set whom they consider as their direct *ishim* ("elder brothers").

Males discipline each other in various ways, ranging from giving advice to urging, scolding, threatening to whip, to actual whipping and even to the temporary exclusion from the peer-group's activities. Often, several of these measures are combined. Reasons for being sanctioned can range from disrespectful behaviour towards the own mother or father, or

²² This means that an older brother's influence on his younger brothers decreases when these grow up, but the relation towards his adolescent younger sisters remains close and one of dominance.

seniors in general, reluctance to work properly, engaging in love-affairs with betrothed girls and any other behaviour that is seen as inappropriate for a young man. When such behaviour is noticed and has been observed by senior men for a while, these will address the wrong-doers peers, as in the following example:

“Maybe you insulted someone senior to you after you drank sorghum-beer. Then the elders say, ‘That one, how can he dare to insult a senior person? Start the dances tomorrow early in the evening. Once the dances have started, he will come! When he comes, grab him and beat him! Otherwise (if he is not whipped) his peers will see what he has done and then, someone who has never insulted anyone before will also start to insult others! Grab him and beat him! Start the dances early!’” (Maldo, December 2003).

By Bashada conventions, a boy or a man may only be whipped by his own age-mates or immediate seniors (members of the senior next age-set). Those who belong to other senior age-sets may only give the initiative order to whip a wrong-doer by instructing his age-mates and direct seniors to get hold of him²³. The sanctioning is supposed to take place in public and it is very common to whip a wrong-doer during the night-dances when many young people come together.

During such an occasion, the young man will be grabbed by his peers and forced to lie down face to the ground. Then his arms and legs are bound in order to intimidate him and make him feel at the mercy of his age-mates and their immediate seniors. Each of his age-mates will beat him once with a whipping wand. Then, usually the whipping is stopped in order to reprove the wrong-doer. His age-mates will scold him for his bad behaviour and advise him (*kelima*) how to do better in future. During their advice, they remind the wrong-doer of the common activities of their age-group, stressing that he is part of them and should behave in the same way as they do. Hereby, they try to motivate him to return to their group, i.e. the ideals of their group-behaviour.

The age-mates’ sanctions are a combination of intimidation (through the binding and whipping) and advice (through the *kelima*). As it is

²³ In case the members of an age-set whip someone they are entitled to discipline, they may themselves get into trouble and be sanctioned by their immediate seniors.

actually the wrong-doer's friends who discipline him, the sanction has a double effect: not only the wrong-doer is disciplined and hopefully led back to the groups' ideals, but also his peers are reminded of the rules and cultural ideas they should adhere to. Therefore, while at first sight it may seem that solidarity within the peer-group is endangered, it is actually enhanced.

Peers are also made responsible for each other's behaviour in order to ensure each other's security, for example when a man has a prohibited love affair with a betrothed girl. In one case a young man had put himself in danger by entertaining a secret love-affair with a girl promised to another man, an action that may provoke the girl's future husband to try to kill his competitor. The senior brothers (members of the senior-next age-set) warned his peers to stop him from seeing the girl, reminding them of the dangers and telling them that their whole group would be affected in case the young man is killed by his lover's husband²⁴. Thus, his peers turned to him and strongly reprimanded him in order to save his life - and the integrity of their group.

Usually, the senior brothers' experience and advice is accepted by their juniors who know that it was not long ago that their seniors were themselves whipped for similar mistakes. Therefore, I was told, they understand that it is in their best interest to listen to their seniors. The idea that whipping symbolises guiding each other and preventing disaster among adolescents and young adults is already well accepted and thus sanctioning with the *micere* is seen as something positive, even when applied to friends and peers - and possibly therefore very effective²⁵. A man, who does wrong for the first time but has otherwise proved to be reliable, will not be whipped severely, as his deed will be considered a single slip-up. In such a case, his age-mates and senior brothers may only threaten and warn him: they get hold of and bind him, but then merely beat

²⁴ Such affairs are strictly kept secret from a girl's future husband because everybody knows that this situation is dangerous for both, the girl and her lover.

²⁵ Almagor (1978, p. 78) made the same observation among the Dassanetch, stating, "Such peer clique sanctions are usually much more effective among the young men than they are among senior age-groups. Youths fear the sanctions of their peers more than those of their elders."

the ground next to his body. The leaves of the whipping wands just about touch his back without hurting, but they serve as reminders of what may happen to him in future if he does wrong again. Sometimes, a wrong-doer who has a friend among his seniors is warned before he gets whipped. If he runs towards his friend and holds him before the others can catch him, the wrong-doer will not be beaten on that occasion, but another chance to improve. This, the Bashada believe, reinforces the wrong-doers regret and makes him understand that his friends want his best. Asking for mercy when someone is about to be whipped is seen as a sign of a wrong-doer's remorse, whereas if someone simply accepts to be beaten, this can be interpreted as arrogance. The logic behind this is that showing fear of the *micere* is interpreted as respect and fear for the age-mates and other men and thus is a sign that the wrong-doer accepts them to guide his behaviour.

Sanctioning a wrong-doer may be delayed for weeks or even months, until a good opportunity has come, such as the night dances or a public ceremony or festivity, when many people come together. As Bashada is a small face-to-face society, there is no place to escape for a wrong-doer. Therefore, as I was told, any wrong-doer who is aware of his own misbehaviour fears the punishment to come and hopes that it will take place soon. This feeling of insecurity when it will actually take place is part of the educational process, and I was often told that it makes a sanction even more effective²⁶.

The whipping is not only believed to effectively guide young men back to the right behaviour and thereby preventing greater disasters, it also helps avoid real anger and grudges among people, which, when felt by seniors, local community, or members of a man's age-set is said to easily turn into a curse. Such a curse can cause severe sickness or accidents, people say, and even lead to death if not removed in time. The superficial pain caused

²⁶ Husbands act similarly towards their wives. Men sometimes beat their wives to punish them, but often they do not do this immediately, but rather wait for several days or even weeks. When they finally beat their wives, they do it without any explanation. The effect of the delay is that the woman is continuously afraid of the things to come and cares even more to please her husband. In the same way, to be beaten without any explanation and at unexpected times makes a wife or a wrong-doer reflect even more on his or her own behavior.

by the whipping wand is considered comparably harmless and trivial when compared to the outcome of silent grudges.

Among females

As long as a girl still lives in her mother's house, her parents and elder brothers will look after her. In case she does something wrong, it is they who may whip her, though adolescent girls are usually not whipped very often. Other than boys, girls are not made responsible for their peers' behaviour. They do not advise or sanction those among them who are lazy or behave disrespectfully towards seniors, as this task is with their elder brothers. However, girls do discipline each other in situations that concern and endanger the solidarity and the reputation of the peer-group. Then, they may gather and decide to whip the one among them who is found guilty, for example when a girl continuously gossips about other girls:

“When I was a girl, when one of us kept on gossiping about all the other girls, one day, the *zapp* would get hold of her during the dances. They would grab her. They have been talking to each other before, not to her, and they have all gathered. ‘Let’s cut whipping wands! All of you bring whipping wands!’.

[At night] the whipping wands have been brought and laid down at the dance place. ‘Today there is no men’s dance!’ they said and started their own, the girls’ dance. When she [the gossiping girl] arrived, they grabbed her, bound her and threw her down. ‘Lie down!’ they said and held her by the throat. And then [they whipped] with the whipping wands, with the whipping wands again, again, again, again, until one of them said, ‘Ay, stop that now!’ One of the girls was our *donza* (“elder”), she was the one who stopped the others. [Then she said to the girl], ‘Won’t you stop that way of yours?’ - ‘From now on I will stop it!’ - ‘Won’t you stop your gossiping?’ - ‘I have stopped now! I have paid your fine! From now on, I will not tell people’s gossip anymore! But is it only me who is telling gossip?’.

When she says so, they say, ‘It is only you! Only you! Only you are gossiping!’ - ‘Eeh eeh, if you say like that, I will stop from now on. Really, I was gossiping a lot. I stop now!’ she will say.” (Kerri, March 1999)²⁷.

²⁷ At the time of the interview, Kerri was a young married woman with one child.

The girl in the above example had talked about other girls who had secret boyfriends and hereby broke a rule of solidarity among females. Premarital relationships are prohibited but tolerated in Bashada as long as they are kept secret. This is important especially when a girl is already betrothed, as the future husbands will threaten or even try to kill the competitor when he finds out about him. To avoid such a conflict, fathers and brothers try to prevent premarital relationships of their daughters and sisters. Therefore, such relationships are strictly kept secret among peers, and to talk about a girl having a boyfriend or even being pregnant is a great affront. This is why the girls in the above mentioned case decided to stop anyone from gossiping with the severe measure of whipping the girl who had endangered others. The physical punishment during the dances can be seen as a punishment but at the same time a warning to others not to do the same. Physical punishment among girls also takes place on the way to the waterholes, to the market, or during work parties.

Exclusion from the peer-group is another way of sanctioning among girls. An example given to me was when a girl refrains from dancing properly. The night dances among the Bashada are, besides an occasion for young people to get together, an expression of social order and relationships and participants have to follow certain rules. One prescription is that girls may not leave the dances before they are over and all go home. Another one is that the girls should not pick their peers, but mainly the senior men to dance with, and they should hold them properly, i.e. dance closely to them. If a girl repeatedly only picks her peers, keeps senior men at distance when dancing with them or goes home early, the men may get upset and decide to whip the remaining girls during the dances, accusing them of not making sure that all of them dance properly. In case the girls are whipped repeatedly in one girl's stead, they may decide to exclude her from the peer-group's and the girls' activities. She is made a *d'abbi* "culprit"²⁸. From then on no girl will seek the company of the excluded

²⁸ The term *d'abbi* has been translated by Lydall and Strecker as "culprit", in the sense of "someone who is accused of doing something wrong and is thus obliged to pay a fine" (Lydall and Strecker 1979, p. 187). The same term is used for the compensation a culprit has to give: a wrongdoer has to "pay a fine" *d'abbi kasha*. The *zarsi* 'adults' community' can decide to "make someone a culprit" *dashpha*, which means that he or she is accused to

girl's anymore: all girls are stopped from talking or going to the waterholes or to collect firewood with her. The exclusion is also made visible and known to the public during the dances, where the culprit girl has to dance alone instead of dancing arm in arm with the others. After a while the social pressure will get so strong that the excluded girl will give in and ask for forgiveness. This has to be done with the help of a go-between, usually an elder from the village who has to appease the other girls and persuade them to accept the culprit girl's excuse.

COLLECTIVE WHIPPING, SOCIAL PEACE AND RITUAL BALANCE

In some years there is not enough rain, many people are sick, the harvests are poor or fail completely. Then, the Bashada look for causes and one of the causes identified for such misfortune can be that there is too much quarrel and conflict in the community. Conflicts often arise, they say, when people do not respect their seniors properly, therefore, the Bashada relate sometimes increasing misfortune to the fact that the youth is not whipped as much as in the past. During the time of my research, especially the rituals connected to the ritual naming of a new age-set,

have behaved against the interests and rules of the community, and must pay a fine for reconciliation. Depending on the severity of the misconduct or offence, the *d'abbi* may be excluded from public life, which means that a man may not partake in public rituals, meetings, and the dances, while women may not use the waterholes used by others, and one cannot eat and drink with others anymore. Usually, a man who is a *d'abbi* is re-integrated into the community after he has given an animal, such as a goat or a cow, which is consumed by the community during a special public meeting (*ashki*, or *katshi*). The slaughtering of these animals is called *d'abbi uka* "to stab the fine". The same expression is used when instead of an animal something else is paid. Women, for example are often asked to brew sorghum beer as a fine.

When children or adolescents exclude one of their peers, they use the same terminology as adults. They "make someone a culprit" *dashpha*. They stop talking to the *d'abbi*, exclude him or her from their activities, and re-include him or her once the *d'abbi* has given in, either being beaten, or by having paid a fine. These fines of adolescents may be something small, such as a bottle of honey wine on the market or a small amount of money. In these cases, too, the expression *Inta d'abbi yenna kashidine!* "I have paid you a fine!" is used, meaning that he/she has regretted his/her behaviour and given in, even if the fine has been small. In its most general sense, *Inta d'abbidine!* or *Inta d'abbi kashidine!* simply means "I have given in!"

which in the past was preceded by severe whipping of the initiates, were made responsible:

“Today, people have stopped listening to the words of the old ones, haven’t they? They don’t listen much anymore. In the past, when the (age-set) names were still given properly, when the people were still whipped by their elder brothers, (senior age-sets), yes, then they listened.

When the elder brothers said: ‘Run there and get me this!’ they went to get it for them. Now, when you say, ‘Go and get me this!’ they refuse and say, ‘I won’t get it, I don’t make it there!’ Then [the seniors say], ‘That boy over there...aaaay!’ When they say that, that means sickness, doesn’t it? In the past, when the age-sets were given proper names, there was not much sickness in the country” (Belaini, March 2001)²⁹.

Age-sets (and the connected ideas of seniority and juniority) are seen as central for the well-being of all Bashada, as they make it easy to identify everyone’s social position in relation to all other members of the society and thus everybody knows how to behave towards everybody else. The intimidation connected to the name-giving ritually expresses and reinforces these relations and expected behaviour. To abandon the whipping, people say, has resulted in disrespectful behaviour of the juniors and that has caused the anger of seniors towards them. While individual grudges can cause individual people’s sickness or bad luck, the accumulation of individual grudges curses, can cause sickness and misfortune come to Bashada and affect all. If that is believed to be the case, it may be decided that a general whipping is needed.

Micero: The rising whipping wand

When there is much sickness or misfortune in the community, instead of reprimanding single individuals for their misdeeds, young people may be whipped collectively, even without any special inducement³⁰. People then say that the whipping wand has to rise (*micere daaba*), in order to

²⁹ At the time of the interview, Belaini was a married man with three children.

³⁰ The same practice has been described for the Hamar (Lydall and Strecker, 1979, pp. 119 ff.)

whip all people up to a certain age. This ritual whipping is also called *micero*, or *banch'amo*, an idiophone describing the sound of the wands.

In 1995, during my second stay in Bashada many people were sick and several harvests had failed. Some two decades earlier, the *banch'amo* had been given up, when a young man from a clan with magical powers had ritually buried a whipping wand in the ground, as he and his age-mates found that the whipping had become too much. In 1995, the same man had become an elder, and in accord with the other elders decided to ritually take the *micere* out of the ground again. Hereby, the collective whipping was re-introduced in Bashada.

For that occasion, many fresh whipping wands had been cut and laid aside, and once the formerly buried *micere* had been symbolically dug out, the whipping began and the elder men turned to their juniors, whipped them and chased them away. On the same day, groups of men went around the different settlement areas and beat all youngsters. The beating was first done by the eldest men around, and then, after they had beaten their immediate juniors, the whipping wands were handed over to their juniors who were then allowed to whip their own juniors (for the background and a detailed description of the ritual s. Mohaupt, 1995, pp. 52 ff.). The whipping went on for several days, until, supposedly, all juniors had been reached. It is considered crucial that all cut whipping wands are used up, as only then can disease successfully be driven out of the country:

“When you whip a person, you don't put the *micere* down in the entrance of the kraal, like you do when you come home with your cattle. You throw it away. But you should not make a *micere* and then throw it away without whipping anybody. If you do this, disease will come and the cows will give no milk. Have you seen how the point breaks a little after having whipped? Only then can you throw it away. If the point is cracked off, disease will leave”.
(Dore Wadu in Mohaupt, 1995, p. 58)

Whipping of an age-group

Collective whipping of a whole age-group may be employed for the misdeed of only a few individuals, when these have committed a serious fault.

A few weeks before my arrival in Bashada in 1998, all girls and boys of

the *Nyramalay* age-group had been beaten on account of three boys who had raped a girl. She had been on her way home after an initiation ceremony, when the three rather drunken boys fell over her. As she started screaming and shouting, a relative came and defended her, but the three boys escaped and hid themselves in the *bitta's* ("ritual leader's") homestead.

When the elders heard of the incident, they started searching the boys, first in their mothers' houses and later in other places as well. As they could not find them, the men gathered and discussed what to do. They decided to go around again. This time, they entered all houses and grabbed those girls and boys who were of the same age as the three wrong-doers and beat them with whipping wands. When the three boys later were found, they were also beaten. Additionally they were fined to pay several goats to the elders as compensation. Next, the elders gathered again and called all peers of the wrong-doers, boys and girls. They ordered them to take off their T-shirts and beads and pile them up on the public meeting place. Then they beat them again.

Later, I was told why these measures were taken against the whole age-group. The girls were beaten because they had begun to wear modern dress, such as T-shirts, had adorned their skirts with too many beads and started to wash themselves with soap. As the additional adornment and the sweet smell of soap were said to contribute to making the boys crazy the girls should stop using these items. The boys were beaten as a warning not to follow the behaviour of the wrong-doers, their friends and peers. Generally, the young generation was seen to be endangered, as the markets in the little towns nearby (Dimeka and Turmi) were growing fast and the youth seemed to be impressed by the clothing and also the behaviour of the town people. The rape was therefore seen as a sign that the youth was heading towards the wrong direction, and to whip all of them was meant to warn and guide them back onto the right behavioural path.

CONCLUSIONS

I have tried to show the meanings that physical sanctioning of children (and also adults) in Bashada have and to what extent they differ to contemporary Western views. To fully understand the implications of

whipping in Bashada it was necessary to outline a wider cultural context. Generally, I have shown that whipping has many positive meanings, and though in the actual moment of physical sanctioning the wrong-doer is meant to be intimidated and taught respect, the usage of the whipping wand is meant to re-integrate and bless, rather than embarrass or exclude a wrong-doer.

Though beaten during childhood, children in Bashada grow into very strong personalities who can defend their individual interest against others. They are taught to respect their seniors, but at the same time encouraged to express their discontent when they feel treated unfairly. Children also know that by growing up they will eventually also be in the position to dominate and take care of juniors, a fact that may make it easier to accept the submission demanded at early age. Additionally, children are taught to use the whipping wand to defend themselves against other children, if necessary, so that *micere* itself is an instrument they may also use actively. Besides, whipping is one among several other means of child-raising. While whipping is meant to guide and control, and also bless individuals, in many other occasions of everyday life, children are acknowledged and supported by adults.

Finally, it should be stressed that whipping does not take place in the secrecy of private households where it could easily turn into uncontrolled abuse, but it is rather mostly done in public, i.e. in front of family members or neighbors. In Western societies child raising is a rather private enterprise and people hesitate to interfere if they notice any form of mistreatment, but in Bashada it is absolutely appropriate and even expected that when physical punishment gets too severe that neighbours interfere and stop the whipping person (this applies also to situations when a husband whips his wife). The same is true for public sanctioning, when the whipping can be ended at any time by an age-mate of the wrong-doer or any senior who has the impression that it was enough. Generally, the whipping should always be performed in a controlled way, i.e. it may leave bruises on the backs of the whipped, but is never meant to seriously injure.

HARMFUL PRACTICE OR RITUALISED GUIDANCE?

The wounds, if there are any, are usually superficial and heal quickly³¹. As mentioned above, whipping is rather seen as a warning and prevention of real damage which can be caused by curses and suppressed anger. Finally, another great difference from the Western culture is that whipping is culturally very well accepted, not only by those who whip, but also by those who are whipped. Therefore, there is no feeling of shame connected to whipping. In fact, no one I asked seemed embarrassed to talk about having been whipped in the past. Some men even expressed to me that they were glad to have been whipped when they were younger as otherwise they would have kept on behaving wrongly. As one can even be whipped during a collective whipping on behalf of a peer's misdeed, there is hardly anyone found in Bashada who had not been touched by a *micere*. Finally, the fact that individual and collective whipping is said to be contributing to the ritual well-being of the community makes clear that this kind of physical sanctioning has meanings and implications completely different from those of modern Western society.

³¹ In the case of ritual whipping of females during male initiation the girls and women actually aim at developing visible scars on their backs as testimonies of their strength, courage and also affection for the initiate (s. Lydall, 1994; Epple, 2010a).

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