

## Chapter 3

# Friendship Networks in Southwestern Ethiopia

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### Introduction

This chapter deals with friendship in a region where friendship is still a largely institutionalized practice and an important feature of social organization. It focuses more specifically on bond-friendships established across ethnic boundaries, drawing primarily on data collected by Tadesse among the Hor (also known as Arbore) from 1994 to 1996 and secondarily on a series of brief visits and research work he conducted among the Konso between 1984 and 2002. The Hor are agro-pastoralists whose language ‘belongs within a “Macro Somali” (now “Omo-Tana”) group [which is itself] a major division of Lowland East Cushitic’ (Hayward 2003: 317). They live in the South Omo Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People’s Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia. The Hor occupy the plains of the Rift Valley located at the northern end of Lake Chew Bahir (formerly called Lake Stephanie) and in proximity to the Kenyan border. They number approximately 5,000 and constitute a much smaller group than the Konso who are largely farmers and reside in highlands situated northeast of Hor country.

Some useful data is currently available that illustrates the existence of a complex network of relationships covering this extensive landscape of southwestern Ethiopia. The works of Almagor (1978), Sobania (1991), Gebre (1997), Girke (2010) and Sagawa (2010), to mention just a few, indicate how forms of bond-friendship abound in southwestern Ethiopia. Examination of some of the contexts in which these networks have sustained within and beyond the territory of particular groups merits some characterization. In much of the area covered by such friendship networks the state is distant, if not totally absent from the daily lives of people in the region. In Hor country, for example, only a police station mainly with a road-block function and a small school exist outside the limits of Hor villages (*dir*) that testify to the presence of the state. Hor indigenous structures of governance remain intact to this day, benefiting local and regional needs and filling the gap one naturally assumes to be covered by the state and other commercial and financial institutions as is the case in the West. This chapter is

not about the absence of these institutions but rather about the existence of other kinds of local institutions that are layered at different levels and widths, connecting different cultures and people. These institutions coexist with state institutions and in some cases institutions of the state need them for their own benefit of reaching the wider public through them. In Konso, state presence is more pronounced. In that area, thriving institutions of traditional governance exist side by side with institutions of the state (with visible presence) in the district town rather than in rural villages, where only a few schools mark state presence. This intactness of traditional governance structures and remoteness of the state in the region are factors contributing to the persistence of the kind of friendship networks that are at the centre of this contribution. These networks of bond-friendship established across ethnic boundaries are also a preferred form of institution since they are sensitive to specific needs of each member group and people. They operate within a framework of seniority that is common to various ethnic groups and serves both as an organizing principle and a dynamic for moving forward socially and culturally. In this framework, certain group members are entitled to prerogatives that support the continuation of ties of interethnic bond-friendship and work towards strengthening their relevance and usefulness for the people in the region. Unlike relations with state representatives, such networks are accessible, satisfy the needs of partners to the friendship and are trusted. Where there is betrayal of trust each partner knows where to go and which bell to ring to reclaim lost trust or to redress harm caused by loss of trust. Most of all, friendships follow lines of relatedness and acquaintance which make things easier, less bureaucratic, stress-free and full of adventure.

In the following sections, we will show that interethnic bond-friendships are still important channels for the circulation of wealth between various groups occupying different and contrasting ecological zones in southwestern Ethiopia. As practised today in the research area, these bond-friendships and the networks associated with them show many similarities with those described for other regions or other times.<sup>1</sup> In his now classic article entitled 'Feasts, Famines and Friends: Nineteenth Century Exchange and Ethnicity in the Eastern Lake Turkana Region', Sobania (1991) illustrates how trade routes and intrasocietal bond-partnerships of gift giving and exchange – i.e., interethnic bond-friendships – weaved together in the nineteenth century and how this weaving related to the needs of communities that were constantly adapting to changing circumstances, maintaining flexibility of identity and residence. Sobania sees two pathways of bond-friendship that begin in Konso and Bachada Hamar reaching eastern Lake Turkana north to south. Our contribution builds on Sobania's work and focuses on networks of friendship that cover Sobania's pathways as well as the wider region between western Omo extending to the Boran-Somali border area and to Boditi in the north (Wolaita territory). This chapter adds that it is not only the routes and traders that matter but a number of institutions that facilitate move-

ment through landscapes and traditional routes bringing ideas, knowledge, gifts and valuables of secular and religious value to people in other lands.

While dealing with interethnic bond-friendships, we will give insight into the kind of gifts exchanged between bond-friends and into some of the activities shared by friends during visits. Then we will illustrate how seriously such friendships are taken by both individuals and the communities to which bond-friends belong. Furthermore, we will point to the importance of interethnic bond-friendships as a source of mutual assistance in times of hardship. After giving examples from data collected among the Hor, we will focus on the friendship networks of Konso craft-workers and traders locally known as *hauda*.

## General Information about the Hor

The Hor depend primarily on sorghum cultivation and animal husbandry for their livelihood, and secondarily on trading, fishing and hunting. They are patrilineal and practise clan exogamy. They are organized by age in a system that notably works by placing a generation in power for a definite period of time, and have four major villages, each with their own age organization and ritual leaders. These leaders who are referred to as *qawots* hold hereditary positions and come from bracelet-wearing clans, i.e., from clans that are all mystically powerful but not all to the same degree. The most powerful among these leaders are those who act as senior and junior *qawots* and claim to have influence over the natural order of the region. This claim is widely accepted by members of neighbouring groups who, like ordinary Hor, bring them prescribed ritual gifts acknowledging their power. Elders of the ruling generation complement the power of the *qawots* and manage animals, distribute fields and organize calendarical activities, including life-marking events such as initiations.

Although the villages of the Hor are politically autonomous, there is a strong sense of unity between them all that notably becomes manifest in case of conflict with surrounding groups. The latter are categorized as having sweet blood or bad blood. The Hor say they go to war or raid animals from the first category of neighbours and avoid any conflict or shedding blood of members of the second category of surrounding groups. Paradoxically, however, the Hor have friendship networks with both categories of neighbours. Yet, it appears that their sweet-blooded enemies have been changing over the years from the Samburu to Maale and to Boran in the early 1990s.

The Hor have been a self-administering autonomous community managing their affairs without external interference. Whenever external threats appeared, they had managed to evade threat by moving villages, settling in remoter parts of their country and even abandoning their territories only to reappear when threats diminished, hence making it difficult for outsiders to track them. With the nation-state and development coming ever closer to their lives, their earlier

strategy of evasion may not be well suited. Although they are not officially acknowledged as contributing to the national economy, their contribution to the regional economy has been immense. Like many other people living in pastoral and rural areas in Ethiopia, they are not well integrated into the cash economy, but – and as will become clear later in this chapter – they supply many of their neighbours with sorghum and livestock and, in exchange, receive various essential items from neighbouring groups. In practice, they have also been sending their animals to the north along the footpaths for many years now and have long received products from the north that they need for their subsistence.

### **A Partial Overview of Institutionalized Friendships in Hor Country**

Forms of institutionalized friendship are still widespread in southwestern Ethiopia, especially in South Omo. In this area, these forms of friendship include variants differing from one another in the extent to which they entail obligations and commitment between partners. With regard to male friendships, for example, the Hor distinguish between *miso*,<sup>2</sup> *abujal*, *baami* and *jal*. The term *miso* is usually used to describe friendships started in childhood, when boys have reached the age of herding young stock. While sharing such activities, children often hunt small animals such as birds and lizards. If they like one another, they may agree to bite the ears of one of the animals they have killed and thereby enter into a formalized friendship with partners referred to as *miso*. Such friendships have a dyadic structure and link young boys who are considered to be witnesses of each other's valour as killers. Their relationships are hoped to later resemble to a relationship between initiated men who have gone to battle together and in which a warrior helps a friend who has killed an enemy to achieve a 'man killer' status by severing the genitals of the killed enemy. However, as friendships formed at a young age, *miso* friendships are primarily associated with ties that are not particularly binding. Given this, they can be contrasted to those between *abujal*. The latter kind of friendship is established in adolescence and usually links a group of four to twelve older boys who are affiliated to the same age-set. Its formalization begins when one of them slaughters a big he-goat, habitually stolen from the herd of a mother's brother. They then make strips of the stomach fat (*mor*) of the goat and wear them around their neck and also rub the stomach content (*ur*) on their bodies. They roast the meat on an open fire and divide it according to their order of seniority. These procedures are repeated from time to time until the other members of the friendship group have each taken turn in killing an animal. Once the killing of the goat is reciprocated, their friendships are fully instituted and the partners start to address each other as *abujal*. Those who are in such relationships may refuse to flog friends when seniors impose a punishment of flogging on one of them. These friendships, however, are generally asserted to involve a lesser degree of mutual commitment than the friendships between partners referred

to as *baami*.<sup>3</sup> The friends designated by that term often have maintained a very privileged relationship with one another since childhood and are hence reputed for having regularly drunk milk from the same calabash during that period.<sup>4</sup> They frequently dine together after marriage and avenge each other's death if one is killed by an outside enemy. They are best friends and considered to be closer than brothers or other people related by blood. They exchange gifts, but not with the clear expectation of return gifts, as is the case between friends who call each other *jal* and whose friendship is referred to as *jala*.

In Hor country, the term *jala* denotes a bond-friendship initiated by men, the establishment and the maintenance of which formally require 'seeing the hand of the other', i.e., the receiving of gifts, and 'showing the other person one's own hands', i.e., the giving of gifts.<sup>5</sup> This variant of institutionalized friendship is contracted with members of out-groups. It encompasses relationships infused with trust and generosity that are particularly enduring and link families together over time. Such relationships are in some cases 'inherited' from father to son or transferred from husband to widow after the death of one of the original partners.

*Jala* friendships established across ethnic boundaries are considered to have a strong binding character and it is often stressed that they should persist even when the groups of the men involved in such relationships are at war with each other. As will become clear later in this chapter, they indeed show a remarkable capacity to survive episodes of violent conflict between groups. In practice, they are so binding that they do not culminate in marriage in the next generation (see also Thubauville 2010). In the latter respect they do not just differ from best friendships between *baami*, but also from friendships that have not been entered into ritually, especially those having evolved into good and close friendships. However, institutionalized best friendships can also be the prelude for matrimonial unions between the friends themselves, provided that these friends are of different sex and belong to marriageable clans.<sup>6</sup> As noted earlier, among the Hor, marriage is notably regulated by clan exogamy, a rule that is now devaluated as 'backwards' by members of some evangelical or born-again churches. These churches, which have proliferated in Ethiopia since the 1990s, provide new avenues for friendships in the research area.

### **Interethnic Friendships of the *Jala* Type and Their Routes**

As noted above, *jala* friendships are institutionalized friendships established across ethnic boundaries. Such bond-friendships are kept alive and strengthened by mutual visits and by using old caravan routes away from the 'modern' roads controlled by police officials. To a great extent the latter roads are avoided because of the tendency of officials to confiscate part of the goods one travels with and to elevate bribes as a precondition for being able to pass without much difficulty

the numerous checkpoints they control. But the preference for old caravan routes is also reinforced by the recognition of the growing strength of an organization of craft-workers and traders, the centre of which is located in Konso (Purqud'a). This organization, which is known as *fuld'o* in Konso and has grown more powerful since the fall of the military regime of the Derg (1991), has a branch in Tabya, the administrative centre in Hor country. There it is called *fund'o* and has a Konso ritual leader at its head to whom a rather large number of groups show allegiance in his capacity as major local representative of an organization reputed for keeping the region going. In practice, the *fuld'ofund'o* certainly plays an important role in ensuring safe movements of goods and persons throughout the region. It ensures that a certain code of conduct is observed while using old caravan routes. According to this code, traders who travel together – and the bond-friends who are part of their travelling team – should support and help each other on journeys along these routes. They are obliged to participate together in the search of lost animals and not to continue with their journey until the searching team finds the lost animals. Those who fail to fulfil such obligations are fined by the *fuld'ofund'o* which also acts as a guarantor of compensation payment to traders in the case that the latter have been robbed by bandits operating on old caravan routes. This compensation is expected to be paid by the group on the territory of which the goods have been stolen and failure to comply with this expectation would cause the *fuld'ofund'o* to withdraw all assistance to the group in question. Furthermore, all trade with members of this group would be banned.<sup>7</sup>

The establishment of a *fund'o* branch in Hor attests to the geographical significance of that country for regional trading activities.<sup>8</sup> This significance is also partly reflected in the fact that people of various origins show allegiance to the Hor ritual leaders who belong to mystically powerful clans and assume the function of senior and junior *qawot*. These two *qawots* are not just ritual leaders of special importance for the Hor who believe that they have strong power to bring rain and fertility over their land, people and animals as well as victory over enemies. They are also held in high regard by members of other groups who recognize their spiritual power and therefore largely solicit their services at the regional level. Among these services are the prayers and blessings they perform for traders and bond-friends planning a joint trip outside Hor country. Such prayers and blessings are believed to be especially potent in guaranteeing a safe journey. In practice, there is no doubt that the *qawots* work complementarily to the *fund'o* in ensuring safe travel on old caravan routes and thus in facilitating the operation of *jala* friendships established across ethnic boundaries.

The portions of old caravan routes used in connection with *jala* friendships are all the more various since the Hor have bond-friends in a large number of groups, including the Konso, the Tsamako, the Wata, the Dassanetch, the Hamar, the Boran, the Karo and the Nyangatom. These groups cover much of the large area that lies between Somalia and South Sudan. As is well known, relations be-

tween these groups are not always peaceful and some groups tend to have more relations of simultaneous enmity with their neighbours than other groups. Over the last decades, the Hor have ceased to have more than two enemies at the same time. This development has allowed them to make more effective use of their networks of bond-friends than in the past.

### **Exchange of Goods between *Jal* Bond-Friends**

Interethnic bond-friendships are pathways through which the Hor obtain goods and tools that are essential for their food production and the performance of their rituals. Among the ritual items that the Hor receive from bond-friends are coffee and honey. Coffee is the medium through which blessings and prayers are made possible. Honey, in its brewed form, is used for initiation ceremonies, supplications of pardon and cleansing ceremonies. Both items are also used for marriage agreements and for bride-wealth payments. Coffee can be bought in local markets but at prices that most Hor cannot afford easily. The same is true for honey which the Hor notably get from bond-friends of Hamar ethnicity, together with tobacco, tobacco seasoning, baking pans, knives, headrests and cotton blankets. These friends obtain goats, heifers and sorghum from the Hor.<sup>9</sup> From their Konso bond-friends the Hor require and receive unhusked coffee beans, tobacco, cotton blankets and sorghum – especially if the Konso harvest was good and the Hor have suffered from drought. The Konso, in return, are given donkeys, small stock, heifers, cows and oxen. They also receive ostrich feathers, game skins, giraffe tails and ivory, which the Hor may get from across the Kenyan border – or perhaps from hunting expeditions with their Hamar bond-friends in Karo land in the Mago National Park. The Dassanetch need and obtain cowhides for roofing their houses, donkeys, tobacco seasoning, ostrich feathers, ammunition and cloths from their Hor friends.

What bond-friends of one group require from bond-friends in other groups depends largely on what is available among them to meet their needs. As the Hor consider it a taboo to grow coffee, to keep bees, to make clay pots and to engage in metal work, they seek to obtain coffee, honey, pots and metal goods from bond-friends belonging to groups that produce such items or have themselves friends in those groups. Characteristic for the prohibitions of production mentioned above is that they actually provide an important basis for interethnic interactions and for the contracting of bond-friendships across ethnic boundaries.

However, the very fact that Hor are very keen to receive certain items from bond-friends in other groups may also be linked to the fact that these items cannot be found in their local markets in the amount needed or may not be available at all. As already reported elsewhere, Tadesse cannot recall having ever seen any knife, axe, hoe blade or clay pot on the markets held in Hor country (Tadesse 2000). Knives are tools of production that are essential for irrigation work, for

clearing the bush, for harvesting sorghum and for building houses and animal enclosures. Pots are used for cooking and making coffee. Among the Hor, all these items are first accessed through channels of interethnic bond-friendships, before being secondarily dispersed through society via other lines of connection. Accordingly, the Hor depend very much on bond-friends to perpetuate themselves as a group.

In the Hor community, it is therefore often stressed that it is good to have bond-friends in as many places as possible. This ideal is more successfully achieved, in practice, by wealthy and locally influential men than by other Hor men. Those who are particularly able to have a large number of friends in different out-groups are actually the members of the generation in power who have been appointed as leaders of the age organization, their predecessors, and men who have become spokespersons of their respective settlements by mere competence. Many such people boast about the size of their friendship networks and about the amount of gifts between themselves and each of their twenty-something friends.<sup>10</sup>

More ordinary Hor may have up to three bond-friends across ethnic boundaries. The very poor, however, rarely have *jala* friendships, although they also strive to establish such ties with out-group members and share the view that formalized interethnic friendships are *important investments in the future*. Indeed, one characteristic of *jala* friendships is that their maintenance requires great displays of generosity. Part of that generosity, manifested in hospitality and in the offering of gifts, can seem costly and difficult to afford, when one is particularly weak economically.

Poor Hor mostly report of bond-friendships within their own group, i.e., about friendships through which they are more prone to receive agricultural and pastoral products than exotic items such as coffee and honey. Among them, these items are largely obtained through links of kinship with men having bond-friendships across ethnic boundaries. Such friendships are also important for those who do not have any such relationship on their own because they can enable them to travel safely to neighbouring territories. This state of affairs is at least facilitated by two facts. First, men who have bond-friends in other groups often visit these friends accompanied by friends, kin, spouses or other women. Second, visiting bond-friends and their accompanying team are all entitled to full protection of the host community while in the territory of that community.

Visits to bond-friends are often announced in advance, but it is usually upon arrival that the visiting friend specifies what kinds of items he needs and tells his host when he plans to go back with these items. Before he leaves, the things he requires may be ready for him to take. If times are bad, he will be told to come back at some other time. If the visiting bond-friend is trying to use his stay for selling firearms and ammunition, but is unsuccessful to do as planned, he may leave them with the host partner for him to look after or to convert into livestock.



As suggested above, visits may serve as occasions for guests to trade with members of the host community. In practice, bond-friendships allow to bypass barriers to trade resulting from intergroup conflict. In such circumstances, friendships with members of groups that are not involved in the conflict can be mobilized in order to buy or sell items in the territory of current enemies. For example, if a Boran wants to sell his rifle or ammunition in Hamar country, but is unable to go there because the Hamar are fighting, he may ask a Hor man to help him to achieve his goal. The Hor man will then visit a Hamar bond-friend and make use of his rights to free lodging and to food and security when he travels within the bounds of the territory of his bond-friend's group to sell the above-mentioned items as requested by his Boran friend. He will also use the contacts of his Hamar bond-friend to bargain the sale of these items for a reasonable price.

In practice, however, visits to and from bond-friends involve much more than just exchanging and trading goods with members of out-groups. This point will be dealt with in more detail in the next section. For the moment, we would like to stress that visits are social events marked by great displays of hospitality and conviviality. In Hor country, guests are welcome at the liminal time of dusk – the time when cattle are brought home and the time when it is neither hot nor cold. It is the time assigned for coffee and evening prayers. It is time for rest and peaceful conversation. During this time, noise and disorderly behaviour are avoided.

The atmosphere that reigns in the host's compound after the arrival of a visiting friend is comparable to an atmosphere of festivities where there is plenty to eat and drink and a lot of time to rest. If the situation in the land of the host is good, a goat will be slaughtered. Honey wine will be brewed and served generously together with food. To be sure, hosts take great pains in ensuring that friends are well catered for during visits. But visits to bond-friends are not simply occasions for guests to spend leisurely days of eating, drinking and chatting with their hosts. They are occasions for forming closer ties with one's counterpart. The closer the ties, the higher the probability that friends will treat one another as almost kin and offer one another a part of the bride-wealth they receive from the marriage of their daughters. The closer the ties, the greater the probability that the friendship will be passed on from one generation to the next generation.<sup>11</sup>

However, visits are often arranged so as to be able to witness important events in the life of one's partner and his family. In practice, bond-friends often attend weddings organized in one another's homestead. They may also go to weddings and ceremonies held in other places as they are entitled to move freely in the territory of their host's group and to take part in the social life of that group during visits. If a communal meeting is held during that period, they can attend it and be helped to find an appropriate sitting place in the public assembly. The same applies to the persons who have come together with the visiting friend as guests. But then if members of the host community go on a raid, they are not invited

to join the raid. This privilege is reserved for bond-friends who as ‘co-raiders’ are entitled to a fair share of any loot distributed according to the tradition of the host community.

As the above passage indicates, the activities in which bond-friends take part during visits can be numerous. On such occasions, friends may also work together on the fields of the host and thus get further opportunities to deepen their knowledge of one another as particular individuals and as out-group members. In practice, bond-friends are very familiar with the way how neighbourly groups do certain things. They are well acquainted with the customs of the groups from among which they take friends.

### ***Jala* Friendships and Some of their Further Meanings**

In the previous section we have already mentioned that *jala* friends rarely visit their counterparts on their own. They usually come together with other persons who, like them, are all entitled to full protection as guests of the host community during visits. In these instances, any offence against the friend – and those who accompany him – is considered as an offence against the host, punishable by flogging. The visited community must recognize and acknowledge him as a friend of one of its members. This principle is highly valued even though incidents occur, as can be illustrated by taking the case of a Hor man called Ello whose visit to a Boran bond-friend took an unexpected turn. After his arrival in Boran, his host asked him to go hunting with the host’s younger brother and to bring back game meat. Ello did as requested to please his bond-friend. On the way back from hunting, the bond-friend’s brother shot Ello from behind in the arm and Ello fell bleeding. Boran from a nearby settlement carried him to his bond-friend’s camp and from there he was carried to a clinic in the nearest town. The camp members paid for his treatment and fed him goat meat until he recovered. Later on, they held the younger brother of the host and, after handing him to the police, intervened to pay a compensation of a couple of bulls to Ello. They then accompanied him back to Hor country. This treatment of the wounded man, and the compensation the Boran gave him, pleased Hor elders and no revenge was taken.

However, special protection should be given to bond-friends in times of conflicts. This ideal was, for example, realized in October 1991, when Hor and Boran became involved in a conflict that would cost hundreds of lives. At the beginning of the conflict, there were a few Boran bond-friends in Hor villages who did not know what was going on. Hor hid them, protected them and sent them off with an escort only after the fighting had ended. They took charge of their property and looked after it so that it could be collected at a later date.

Since 1991, and despite the peace treaty of 2003 negotiated with the arbitration of the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Farm-Africa, group relations between Hor and Boran have remained strained. This treaty was the culmination

of a process in the course of which so many peace-making meetings were organized that it is difficult to recall them all. One of these meetings, however, is well documented in the literature on southwestern Ethiopia as it was notably supported by anthropologists and the Addis Ababa University. The meeting in question is that held in the Hor village of Gandaraba in March 1993 and described by Pankhurst in an article entitled 'A Peace Ceremony at Arbore' (2006).<sup>12</sup> Prior to this intergroup meeting, visits between Hor and Boran bond-friends had been suspended, as it is usually the case during serious conflicts between groups and in the wake of conflicts having cost many lives. Shortly after the peace-making ceremony of Gandaraba some Hor and Boran bond-friends began to visit one another again, but only some friendships could be reactivated in that way in 1993. The main reason for this is that most of the Boran sections that had participated in the fighting of 1991 had refused to attend the peace-making ceremony mentioned above. Consequently, the agreements made during that ceremony were not really binding. The very fact that these agreements had still not entered into force in 1994 did not prevent Baqalu, a Boran man from El Kunne in the northern part of Boran land, from following with his desire to meet again with his bond-friends in Hor country. The Hor friends of this Boran man, who belongs to a Boran section that had refused to take part to the peace-making ceremony in Gandaraba, included the late Arbla, a well-reputed Hor warrior who had become a wealthy man in Egude; Jarsa Ghino, a wealthy Hor man residing in Kulama; the late Iyya Bokao, ritual leader of the Tsamako then living in Kuile; and Hunna Arshal, the late junior *qawot* of Gandaraba.

Arbla was away on a visit to his Hamar bond-friend when Baqalu came to Hor country, accompanied by his Boran wife, a Wata woman, and a Boran man and his Hor wife who was originally from Murale, one of the Hor villages which together with Egude is located in the eastern territorial section of Hor country commonly referred to as Marle. Before reaching Hor territory, Baqalu sent a message from Wata Wando to announce his impending arrival and that of this travelling team, and asked for an escort as the group relations between the Hor and the Boran were still particularly tense at that time. Baqalu's team was brought in with the help of an escort just in case. He also brought a cow with him that had been kept at El Kunne (Boran country) and descended from a heifer that Arbla had left behind with Baqalu before the 1991 Boran-Hor fighting. When Baqalu arrived, Arbla's wives laid out a cowhide and served him coffee, milk and sorghum dumplings. They could not kill a goat for him, as this is a man's responsibility. His arrival was big news. Children and adults alike gathered around to see him and the Boran who accompanied him. Baqalu brought news to the Hor about developments in Boran country. Previously, the Hor had only received news about the northern Boran indirectly from Konso traders who travelled between Hor and Boran countries. But, as the Konso and the Boran were long-standing enemies, the news tended to be prejudiced.

Baqalu's news included information about Boran bond-friends of the Hor, about their health, their property, their families, etc. Baqalu also provided information about the conditions of water wells, pastures, cattle and crops in the northern part of Boran country he was coming from. Furthermore, he brought news about whether the members of the northern sections of the Boran and their representatives were meanwhile ready to enter the cattle gates of the Hor *qawots*, bringing animals for peace.

However, Baqalu's visit and that of his travelling team was greeted with suspicion. In the evening preceding their arrival, an urgent meeting was called in Marle. Young people at the meeting threatened to kill all the Boran visitors. Some communal curses were articulated against Boran. Arjan of Egude, a land distributor (*mura*) and official of the age organization of the Hor, stressed: 'People do not take their eyes off as they do their rubber sandals when they enter your house.' With this statement he was not encouraging hostility against the visitors, but was urging caution and vigilance. He was referring to the fact that the guests would use their eyes to ascertain the situation in Hor country and that Baqalu would report what he had seen and heard there to the Boran of El Kunne when he went back.

Although most Hor were wary of his visit, Baqalu was granted an escort to arrive safely in Hor country. In practice, many people felt that Baqalu had indeed the right to enjoy the privilege of being protected and entertained as a guest by his Hor counterparts in spite of the difficult group relations between Hor and Boran. But Arjan's suggestion that Baqalu should be given a clear impression of Hor vigilance was well accepted. This vigilance was ostentatiously displayed and witnessed by Baqalu who was welcome to report to his people that Hor youth were only to be seen heavily armed in Hor villages and in the surrounding bush.

As the case of Baqalu illustrates, reconciliation between groups is not a necessary requirement for being able to revisit bond-friends after violent intergroup conflicts. However, Baqalu was not the only Boran man who met again with his Hor bond-friends in Hor territory at a time when his section had still not officially shown any readiness to make peace with the Hor. Characteristic for most of the men from such sections who, like Baqalu, revisited their Hor friends as early as 1994 was that they had actually developed strong loyalty to their counterparts.<sup>13</sup> Such loyalties can transcend group affiliation and then be demonstrated through the passing of advance information about the ill intentions of one's own group against the group of one's partner. There were, for example, cases in 1991 in which Boran bond-friends alerted their Hor counterparts about Boran preparations to attack the Hor.

Another point that can be deduced from the recounting of Baqalu's visit is that stock-friendships are parts of *jala* friendships and do not constitute a friendship variant on their own in southwestern Ethiopia. But there, too, the practice of lending cattle to friends partly serves the function of reducing vulnerability in adverse climatic conditions. Pastoralists who disperse their herds internally

and externally can also better cope economically with the impact of losses due to livestock epidemics. Furthermore, loans of cattle reinforce friendship between the parties involved and make available resources evenly distributed in a wider landscape, enabling recipients to gain access to milk and butter as well as additional animals whenever the loaned animal calves. Most of all, they are long-term investments as they will trigger further reciprocity.

However, the significance of *jala* friendships also comes to the fore, for example, when the dry period is unusually long in the territory of the friend's group. In that case, bond-friends from the group living in a territory that is climatically better off will host their counterparts who come to their country with their families and pack animals to get grains. If these people are, for instance, Hamar who hardly possess livestock and have a good nurtured friendship with Hor bond-friends, they will normally stay for around a week, pack their animals and move back with loads of sorghum given by a Hor friend who generously hosts them. The Hamar who are wealthy will need fewer gifts of grains from their Hor bond-friends as they will themselves come with animals to sell and exchange for sorghum.

The very fact that gift exchange remains an important feature of *jala* friendships certainly helps to make the latter particularly suitable to risk-spreading in contexts where people live under ecologically volatile conditions as is the case for the Hor and many of their neighbours. Such friendships are undoubtedly still valuable and relevant for the Ethiopian situation, which is currently characterized by recurring famine. Today an important threat to their persistence and to the attributes which give them prominence is the attempt by some NGOs to appropriate peace-making from its traditional practitioners (*qawots*, etc.) and also to appropriate the very central feature of friendship, *rendering emergency assistance in times of need*. This threat, in turn, is accentuated by the fact that *jala* friendships are still largely based on relations of voluntary economic interdependence between members of different groups.

### ***Hauda* Craft-Workers and Traders of Konso and Friendship Networks**

Let us now move on to Konso, a society within which people have been historically divided into two occupational groups: *edanda* (farmers) and *hauda* (craft-workers and traders). It is true that the Konso used to be either *edanda* (majority) or *hauda* (minority) and that the members of each of these two categories had a different status in Konso, did not intermarry and had differential access rights to land in the past.<sup>14</sup> In recent times, however, differences between these two categories of people have become less pronounced. Since the land reform of 1975 the *hauda* have owned land and married farmer women. Today they assert their equality with the *edanda* who, for their part, have become increasingly involved in trade and weaving over the last three decades.

Within this society, however, the itinerant *hauda* craft-workers and traders still constitute the group that takes a lead in establishing bond-friendships across ethnic boundaries. For them, friendship is an interpersonal relationship that can have an enduring character or just die out because it has been made with a person who has not proven to be trustworthy. Once contracted with the right kind of person, it becomes a basis for expanding a friendship network in a new place and with people who are friends of the original person. Members of the *hauda* group take full advantage of the friendship networks of their partners in other communities and so do the partners. During visits in Konso, these partners, including those of Hor ethnicity, are provided with food and lodging and have the freedom to travel and to benefit from their stay in the foreign environment. They are also able to use the friendship network(s) of their *hauda* partners and the security it gives to them if they, for example, travel to Hamar, Dassanetch or to Boran country with their Hor friends. The very fact that the *hauda* are members of the *fuld'o* certainly improves the ability of their friends to travel safely through the region. Other social networks can be used for the same purpose, but those involving *jala* friendships with *hauda* are largely viewed as the most reliable because of the great ability of the *fuld'o* to enforce the observance of an ethos of amity between travelling companions.

The friendship networks of the *hauda* cover a very large area. To the west these networks stretch from Lake Turkana to Nyangatom territory (border to South Sudan). To the north they extend to the Shashamane (Oromia Region) and Wolaita districts (SNNP Region). To the east the region includes the towns and settlements along the Shashamane-Moyale road (border to northern Kenya). This network area that we just described is more widely visited by itinerant *hauda* Konso than by non-*hauda* Konso traders as the latter still have smaller networks of interethnic bond-friendship across the region. However, both categories of Konso traders share the tendency to visit the southern part of the network area more frequently than the northern part. *Hauda* and non-*hauda* Konso alike have taken residence in the network region delineated above for some time now. A majority of itinerant traders, however, move around traditional routes trading, staying with bond-friends and dealing with local branches of the *fuld'o*, bringing them messages from the main Konso *fuld'o* and taking back messages when they return to Konso. Outside their home territory there are Konso men and women of *hauda* and non-*hauda* origins who reside in towns such as Soyema (Burji territory), Agere Maryam (Guji territory), Yabelo, Tartalle, Mega (Boran territory) and in the Huri Hills of northern Kenya (Gabra territory) and serve as additional contacts among whom *hauda* coming from other places can rest during travel. Similarly in the southern area comprising Hor, Hamar and Dassanetch country there are *hauda* and non-*hauda* Konso residing in the capacity of school teachers, mission employees, civil servants and as workers for development projects. Trading activities are conducted by both residents and itinerants. Resident Konso

(usually three of them) join the local *fuld'o* as messengers (*kbelita*), but the executive committee is composed of a team of local leaders (Hor, Hamar, etc.) and persons whose livelihood is based on trading.

Links with resident Konso are connections used by the *hauda* to expand their networks of trade. Konso who are not *hauda* may trade and certainly invest in establishing bond-friendships with local out-group members. They, too, often take goods to Konso which they earn through such connections. The *hauda*, however, move around a lot with items of trade and gifts. Characteristic for the *hauda* is also that they more heavily rely on their bond-friendships in other groups to widen their networks of trade. If they plan to travel from Hor to Dassanetch country, for example, they will always ask a Hor bond-friend to accompany their caravan as a master of the terrain, interpreter and as someone who already has *jala* friendships with Dassanetch. This Hor friend will lead the *hauda* to the homesteads of his bond-friends where they will be hosted nicely and offer gifts to the friends of their Hor friend. The *hauda* will also use their stay in the homesteads of the bond-friends of the Hor man to trade on a barter basis with individuals residing in the same settlement as their hosts. In some cases, payment for the items acquired from *hauda* can be delayed. This practice is facilitated by the fact that the Konso and various other people of southwestern Ethiopia have adopted the *fuld'o* system of administering trade relations between trading partners and have connected it to the political system of each group, to the network of friendship and to trading partnerships.<sup>15</sup> An illustration might help to understand this better. If the local political systems of the groups inhabiting the region were to be viewed as a huge tree, the *fuld'o* or trading network would be like a creeper plant that successfully weaves itself onto this tree winding up through the trunk and branches reaching all parts of the tree. The friendship network, too, can be viewed as an additional weave onto this giant tree. All parts of the tree thus have three layers which are interwoven in such a way that each layer reinforces the other. While the political system, trade and friendship networks operate in the specific context of each locality, shared values and purposes guarantee the successful operation of the weave, illustrating the high permeability of boundaries between the groups that sometimes makes one wonder if they actually are different groups. The political system onto which the *fuld'o* network latches itself is valuable for assuring the smooth running of trade and exchange in the region and for clearing the paths from anything that threatens free movement of people, animals and goods. The weaving of these different lines indicates that this is a negotiated rather than imposed institution, one reason why it continues to sustain.

## Conclusion

In this contribution, we have shown that interethnic bond-friendships are channels through which much property, knowledge and information is exchanged. As

we have indicated, such friendships are connections that are crucial for the Hor as much as they are to others in many ways as they give access to a great variety of essentials. Among the Hor and their neighbours, interethnic bond-friendships not only reinforce existing relations but also help build layers of other connections with people in other groups, paving the way to further expand one's friendship as well as one's trading network.

While discussing bond-friendships established across ethnic boundaries, we have pointed out that the operation of these friendships is facilitated by certain institutions and have given insight into the weaving of one structure of governance of the Hor – ritual leadership – with externally-oriented networks of friendship. Furthermore, we have underlined the significance of the weaving of the Konso system of administering trade relations between trading partners with networks of friendship with members of other groups. At the same time, we have demonstrated that interethnic friendships as practised by the Hor and Konso need to be comprehended within a broader regional context where institutions of various groups work in concert to guarantee continued co-operation and secure movement of essential goods through the reproduction of interdependence to maintain culture and society.

The networks we have focused on in this chapter are still intact, culturally appropriate and dependable sources of mutual assistance both in times of hardship and abundance. However, the institution that is central in this endeavour is currently facing challenges of unprecedented proportion as the region opens up for developments driven by global and Ethiopian institutions. This institution may appear to be collapsing, but like any other human institution it may evolve taking different shapes and will eventually help the groups meet newer challenges. This may also give rise to a new opportunity for forging on new dimensions of friendships to continue benefiting various people of the region. On the other hand, in the very unlikely event of its collapse this will probably have detrimental impacts on both the various groups that are involved in the networks and the landscapes that keep them.

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## Notes

1. See, for example, Santos-Granero (2007) and Killick (2010) for Amazonia.
2. *Miso* is initially a Hamar term.
3. The female equivalent of *baami* is *baamira*.
4. In practice, *baami* friendships often evolve from *misoship*.



5. *Jala* is a term that is widely used by Omotic and Cushitic-speaking groups in southwestern Ethiopia. Whether all the groups mentioned above actually employ it in the same way is a question that cannot be definitively answered given the current state of research on friendship in this region. But the empirical data collected by Tadesse seem to indicate that this term has at least similar meaning among the Hor, the Gamo, the Konso and the Boran.
6. The friendship constellations we refer to in this context are thus those in which one partner is called *baami* and the other *baamira*.
7. For more information about the *fund'o* (*fuld'o* in Konso), see Tadesse (1999, 2000) and Amborn (2009).
8. This significance is not new. It has been documented historically for the end of the nineteenth century by Waller (1985) and Sobania (1991) who note that the Hor acted as intermediaries in the trade between highlands communities and various groups living in the Lower Omo valley at the end of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, and as shown by Rein (1919: following 358), Hor country was the terminal point of a caravan route that connected ports of the Gulf of Aden to Addis Ababa and continued south until it reached Konso country and eventually Hor country. This route joined an east-west caravan route linking what was then Italian Somaliland with Boran country and eventually with Hor country and Lake Rudolf (now Lake Turkana). What is particularly striking is that the junction of the north-south and east-west routes is situated in the part of Hor country where major villages are located.
9. The Hamar regularly require sorghum from the Hor due to the fact that, contrary to the latter, they do not practise flood-retreat cultivation but rain-fed cultivation.
10. See Tadesse (1999: 261–305 and 302–5; 2000: 156–57) for a list of exchanges between a wealthy Hor man and his numerous friends in neighbouring groups and within his own group.
11. See Almagor (1978) for difficulties related to the 'inheritance' of bond-friendships among the agro-pastoral Dassanetch of southwestern Ethiopia.
12. For a documentation of this peace-making ceremony, see also Bassi (1993) and Strecker and Pankhurst (2004).
13. Meanwhile one can say that the Boran-Hor fighting has had little consequence for the persisting of *jala* friendships that had already existed between Hor and Boran before 1991. Mutual visits began to become more usual than described above by the end of 1996, but it is since 2000 that they have become completely re-routinized.
14. See Hallpike (1972) and Watson and Regassa (2001) for the Konso division of farmers/nonfarmers and the role this plays in regional trade.
15. There is also a *fuld'o* branch in Dassanetch country that can be approached by the Konso if they have issues that may arise as they trade with local people.