

Craftworkers, Hunters and Slave Descendants in Ethiopia

New perspectives on the dynamics of social categories

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Introduction

The distinctive and often low status of occupation and descent-based groups is a world-wide phenomenon, still found particularly in South Asia and many parts of Africa.¹ Different disciplines, such as history, social anthropology and political science, have studied the scope, underlying causes, local explanations and justifications for the social exclusion many such groups experience. More recently, their lived experience as well as the dynamics around the boundaries between the social categories have become of interest, partly because members of such groups have begun to speak out. In some countries, such as India or Nigeria, concerned activist groups have addressed social exclusion based on occupation or descent and have recently begun to draw national and international attention to the issue.²

In Ethiopia, the present and previous governments have made many efforts to establish equality and integration of excluded groups. Today, churches run numerous awareness-raising programmes and some national and international NGOs and activist groups are also active in the country (Freeman and Pankhurst 2001).³ Yet, as many studies show, marginalization continues to exist. Some authors (for example, Aalen 2011, 2012; Tronvoll and Hagmann 2012) even report that due to the high value given to local values and cultural practices in the context of ethnic federalism, marginalization of craft workers, hunters and slave descendants has been revitalized.

For a long time, the vast literature on Ethiopian occupation and descent-based groups emphasized their marginalization. Many early publications described their origin, history and livelihood as well as the scope and kind of their marginalization, and often compared them with Indian castes. More recently, researchers have begun to look at the flexibility of social categories and the redefinition of social boundaries between dominant herders and farmers and submissive craft workers, hunters and slave descendants.

This paper examines the existing literature with a special focus on the dynamics around the boundaries between dominant majorities and different status groups.

1 According to Pinto (2001: 2817, 2002: 3988), there are more than 260 million people (most of them Dalits – untouchables – from India) suffering from descent and occupation-based exclusion in the world.

2 See for example, the Asia Dalit Forum, an activist group fighting for equal treatment and chances for Indian Dalits and similar groups in other countries (<http://asiadalitrightsforum.org/interventions.php>).

3 See for example the work of KMG Ethiopia in Kembatta (also: Kambata), which fights for gender equality, and end to FGM (female genital mutilation), and the empowerment of the locally marginalized 'Fuga' (craftworkers) (<http://kmgethiopia.org>).

Occupation and Descent-Based Status Groups in Ethiopia

Common to all occupation and descent-based groups is their distinctive, often disadvantaged position, which is ascribed by birth and passed on through generations. Usually, it is locally justified by a state of pollutedness (physical or ritual) believed to cause disease and misfortune for others and that is, in some cases, transmittable to others through close contact.

In Ethiopia, occupational groups (mostly potters, tanners, weavers, blacksmiths, woodworkers, certain musicians), hunters (and descendants of hunters), slave descendants, ethnic splinters and some special clans find themselves living under similar conditions. Living either as part of a society with inner differentiation or close to a dominant group (mostly farmers or, in some cases, pastoralists or agro-pastoralists), they are found in stratified as well as rather egalitarian societies in almost all parts of Ethiopia. Usually excluded from the activities of the dominant sections of the society, often disadvantaged, and sometimes discriminated against, such groups have been referred to in the literature with terms such as 'avoided castes', 'pariah', 'outcasts', 'depressed classes' or 'marginalized groups'.⁴ However, there exists a great variation in the kinds of relationship these groups entertain with the dominant sections of society, as well as with each other.

Perceived Characteristics

Occupational groups (craftworkers, hunters), slave descendants and similar groups are usually perceived as being fundamentally different from the mainstream society. While craftworkers, hunters and certain musicians often play an ambiguous role – with both negative and positive attributes – the status of slave descendants is marked solely by notions of inferiority.

Among the shared alleged negative characteristics of occupational groups and slave descendants are physical and/or ritual impurity, an unsocial and disloyal character and, in some cases, racial difference to the majority. In Ethiopia – and elsewhere – these attributes are explained and justified mainly by: (1) polluting professions or activities and/or the handling of impure materials;⁵ (2) mythical origins such as descent from unions between humans and animals; (3) loss of pure human status through ancestors' improper or immoral behaviour or through an ancestral curse; and (4) loss of proper human status through becoming a slave.

⁴ The term 'caste' used to be commonly employed in the literature on Ethiopia. But it has also been debated for several reasons, including the fact that the term caste implies more parallels between the Ethiopian context and the Indian caste system than some authors believe exist (for the discussion on the term see Todd 1977; Amborn 1990; Pankhurst 1999). Some authors have opted for more neutral terms, such as 'status groups' (Amborn 1990), 'hereditary status groups' (Ellison 2006) or 'cultural strata' (Braukämper 2014).

⁵ Crafts are often considered as impure activities as they imply contact with impure materials and substances, such as dead animals and animal skins, or the handling of dangerous materials, such as fire and metal. Hunters touch and consume the allegedly impure meat of wild game and are generally associated with the wilderness, rather than with culture. In many cases, craftworkers, hunters and members of special clans are given responsibility for social duties such as circumcision, washing and burying the dead, digging graves and the like, which contributes to their pollutedness.

Among the alleged positive or special characteristics of craftworkers and hunters are special powers and abilities to bless, to curse and to heal. In many societies, craftworkers and hunters were afforded indispensable roles related to the 'social reproduction of the dominant society' (Pankhurst 2001: 2): as assistants or key persons during life-cycle events, such as initiation rituals, circumcisions, births or funerals (Pankhurst 2001: 1–2). Some of these activities are locally considered as dangerous or polluting.

In some societies, hunters have been used as mediators in conflict resolution among the dominant sections of society, and as assistants of the ritual king. As such, they had to execute those who were condemned to death, act as the king's guardians and protect the sacred fire and the king's insignia, bury him when he died and initiate a new one (Haberland 1962, 1964). Craftworkers were also important as producers of goods necessary for daily life as well as for ritual purposes. Slaves played an important economic role in many societies, yet they were not accorded any respect for this and there are no reports of slave descendants having any ritual or social responsibilities (Epple 2018).

Representation in the Early Literature

Craftworkers, hunters and slave descendants were mentioned in very early publications on Ethiopia (Cerulli 1922, Pankhurst 1961), but those written by members of the Frobenius Institute provide the first detailed overview.

The Frobenius Institute organized four expeditions to Southern Ethiopia in 1934–35, 1950–52 and 1954–56. These resulted in the publication of four large volumes (Jensen 1936, 1959; Straube 1963; Haberland 1963)⁶ that gave detailed descriptions of the history and culture of many of the groups they had visited, many of which were internally highly differentiated. Extra chapters or subchapters were dedicated to the description of marginalized subgroups,⁷ including occupational groups, hunters and slave descendants, as well as special clans. There was a focus on providing a description of their alleged origins, their livelihood activities, their ambiguous roles and duties and their relationship with dominant sections of the societies in or near which they lived. Eike Haberland later went into more detail and published articles and books on the extraordinary relationship between 'pariah groups' and 'sacred kings' (Haberland 1964) as well as on hunters and special castes (Haberland 1962), slavery in Woleyta (Haberland 1992), and the highly stratified society of the Dizi people (Haberland 1984, 1993). His student Werner Lange wrote about divine kingship and the special position of bards in Kaffa (Lange 1976, 1979/80).

In the decades after the Frobenius's expeditions, many monographs on Ethiopian societies with marginalized subgroups appeared (see Shack 1966; Teclehaimanot 2003 on the *fuga* in Gurage; Hallpike 1972 on *xauda* in Konso; Huntingford 1955 on Manjo in Kaffa; Gamst 1979 on Wayto in Amhara; Quirin 1979 on Beta Israel in Amhara

6 There are also unpublished manuscripts at the Frobenius Institute describing some of these groups in detail. See for example the material on the Sidama, Woleyta and Gede'o, which has recently been reviewed by Ambaye (2017), Data (2017) and Getachew (2017).

7 Some of the names used in the older literature for ethnic groups are designations by other groups and/or names nowadays considered as outdated or derogatory. In this article, therefore, I have decided to use the currently acceptable names.

in Tigray). These detailed accounts showed how differentiated and stratified internally many Ethiopian societies are, and they emphasized the existing marginalization and strict social boundaries between minorities and majorities. However, a close inspection of the material provides some indications that the boundaries between these categories were not as rigid as is often assumed.

Internal Differentiation and Stratifications

‘Assimilated’ members of society

Various Oromo groups (such as Borana, Arsi, Guji) and also some non-Oromo groups (Gede’o and Yem) differentiate their population into ‘real/original’ and ‘assimilated’ members (Haberland EH70: 18ff; Straube 1963: 305ff; Haberland 1963: 127). Intermarriage between original and assimilated members of society was reportedly originally forbidden and assimilated members were also not allowed to take any public office. According to Haberland (1963: 129), this differentiation had already either been overcome or at least become less important in some places. Various Oromo groups allowed intermarriage in the 1950s, for example, but still restricted participation in the Gada-system.

Craftworkers

Rules of endogamy and avoidance between farmers and craftworkers, as well as between different craftworkers and towards hunters and slave descendants, exist in many Ethiopian societies (Jensen 1959; Haberland 1963; Freeman and Pankhurst 2001). Avoidance includes commensality, close physical contact (especially sexual intercourse), as well as entering each other’s houses and touching each other’s objects (especially food containers, dishes and tools). Most authors emphasize the prohibitions set by the majority. However, the avoidance can work both ways: craftworkers do not necessarily allow farmers to enter their compounds and touch their work tools. Most commonly known in the literature on craftworkers are the *hadicho* in Woleyta (Aalen 2011), the *manni* in Ari (Jensen 1959; Schulz-Weidner 1959; Straube 1963), the *manna* among some groups neighbouring the Ari (see Straube 1963 on Amarro; Behailu and Data 2003 on Dawro; Dereje 2001 on Oyda) and the *hauda* in Konso (Hallpike 1968; Amborn 1990; Watson 2006).

Hunters, descendants of hunters

Close interaction with hunters is often avoided as they are considered to be impure, often due to their consumption of wild game and other ‘unclean’ meat.⁸ Among the well-known hunter groups are the *fuga* in Gurage (Shack 1966; Teclehaimanot 2003), the *Weyto* in Amhara, the *Manjo* in Kaffa (Huntingford 1955; Gezagnh 2003), and the *Wata* in Borana (Haberland 1963) and among other Oromo groups. In some former kingdoms, hunters had certain responsibilities considered as impure (for example, washing corpses and digging graves). They also performed ritual and social services for the mainstream society or the king/ritual leaders; for example, as assistants in rites of pas-

⁸ Meat is considered impure if it either comes from impure animals (typically hippopotamus and other wild game), from dead animals or from animals that are slaughtered in a way considered as polluting. The latter is especially relevant in Orthodox Christianity and Islam.

sage, performers of purifying rituals (Haberland 1962, 1964) and mediators in conflict resolution (Gemeda 2016).

Slave descendants

Slavery was officially abolished in 1942 under Haile Selassie,⁹ but slave identity continues to be passed on to the next generation or through close contact. Descendants of slaves continue to be distinguished from those descended from the freeborn. Intermarriage with farmers and craftworkers is often prohibited and close contact avoided.¹⁰ There is little literature on slaves (Haberland on Woleyta 1992) and even less on slave descendants (see Olmstead 1973 on Gamo; Boshu 2013, 2018 on Ganta; and Kiya 2018 on the Raya Qobo highlands, Amhara).

Special clans/members of religious group

Other groups distinct and excluded from the mainstream society include the Beta Israel (also Falasha) the Ethiopian Jewish community despised for its religious beliefs (Haberland 1962; Quirin 1979) and believed to have the evil eye; splinters of other groups, such as the Kumpal Agaw, believed to be afflicted by an ancestral curse (Desalegn 2018); and special clans or subgroups, such as the *bajje* people living among the Hamar who are considered to be impure but responsible for rites of passage among the majority (Epple 2010)¹¹.

Internal Dynamics and Culture Immanent Mechanisms for Change

In the Frobenius Institute's publications, the impossibility of moving out of the status group one was born into is repeatedly mentioned. Yet, a closer reading of the available descriptions reveals that options for change did and do exist for both individuals and subgroups. In the following, examples from the early literature will be presented and partly complemented by more recent work of other researchers.

Marriage and adoption

The prohibition on intermarriage is one of the strongest and most persistent rules separating occupational groups, slave descendants and farmers from each other. Yet, there are

9 The attempt to eliminate slavery began in 1923 when Emperor Haile Selassie was asked to abolish slavery as a precondition for admittance to the League of the Nations (Smidt 2010). In 1936, during the Italian occupation, a proclamation of the general liberation of all slaves was issued (Braukämper 2014:79), yet authors claim that slavery continued in parts of the country. After the Italian occupation, the Emperor issued a new proclamation (in 1942) abolishing any form of slave trade and the legal institution of slavery itself.

10 The most prominent example of this is found among the Woleyta people, whose slaves at times consisted of around 30 per cent of the total Woleyta population and who were differentiated into numerous subcategories (Haberland 1992).

11 The *bajje* constitute a special group who is said to have come from Ari. They live in small families in Hamar and Banna and do not perform their rituals or intermarry with them. Yet, they perform a key rite of passage for young married couples as well as some cleansing rituals for women who have had a miscarriage or abortion. As such, they are venerated and despised at the same time.

reports of exceptions being made under certain conditions or for certain sections of a society. In societies where virginity is a precondition for marriage, for example, girls who lost their virginity have been married off to men from a lower status group. This was the case for Guji-Oromo girls, who were given to the neighbouring Bayso or Boroda people or to the Wata, a group of hunters with whom intermarriage was otherwise unthinkable (Haberland 1963: 328). Widowed or divorced women have also been allowed to choose a new husband from the Wata (Haberland 1963: 135).

In some societies, such as among the Konso (Ellison 2006; Amborn 1990), the strict prohibition on marrying artisans applies only to first or second born sons, who are usually responsible for rituals; subsequent sons are more free to marry across status boundaries. Among the Dirassa, intermarriage is, for some, encouraged: members of the priests' lineage prefer craftworkers as marriage partners, as they are said to have 'good and light blood' (Amborn 1990: 295).

Previously strict prohibitions have also reportedly softened between different craftworkers, hunters and slave descendants: between the Wata hunters and Borana blacksmiths (Haberland 1963: 135); and between the southern Guji and slaves who were bought from Burji or Amarro (Haberland 1963: 348). The reasons why these prohibitions were given up have yet to be explored.

Economic status can play a major role, as recent studies on Konso have shown. Here, the wealth achieved by many craftworkers recently has turned them into attractive marriage partners (Belete 2012; Ellison 2006; Kansite 2017).

Adoption, especially common among Oromo groups, is a way of integrating strangers fully into society. In Arsi, slaves could be adopted by the family that owned them (Haberland 1963: 131). The same has been shown to be true for the Alabdu-Guji people, although the rights of adopted slaves to assume any political office were regulated and restricted (Haberland 1963: 294).¹²

Changing or adopting secondary occupations

Many authors observe that, under certain circumstances, craftworkers, hunters and even farmers change profession or adopt a secondary occupation as a way of adapting to changes in the economic or natural environment (Amborn 1990; also Watson 2006). For example, in times of drought or when population pressure became too high, farmers tended to adopt additional activities, often craftwork. Jensen (1936: 104) mentioned the case of Darassa farmers who engaged in blacksmithing to earn extra income. More recently, farmers in Konso have been seen to engage in craftwork in order to supplement their income (Ellison 2006; Belete 2012). However, as Amborn (2009: 118) has remarked, this is not always in the interests of the craftworkers, as it means that they lose full control over the industry, forcing them to develop certain mechanisms for controlling the integration of farmers into their associations. Likewise, there are examples of hunters who turned to craftwork when wild game became scarce or hunting was persecuted. Straube (1963: 41) mentioned the *Bandu* hunters living among the Sheko, who became potters along with some of the dominant farmers' women.

12 If someone was adopted by the *akako* ('original' Guji), that person's descendants could take over important ritual or political offices after five generations but adoption by the *dalata* ('assimilated' Guji) did not confer the same rights.

Craftworkers have also been seen to begin to farm or engage in a secondary craft when they experience a decline in economic opportunities. Most tanners in Southern Ethiopia, for example, became weavers when the Amhara occupants forbade leather clothing (Amborn 1990: 210). Such was the case among, for example, the Gede' o (Haberland EH 70).¹³ In Shangama (part of Ari) (Schulz-Weidner 1959: 139) and Konso (Hallpike 1968: 269) some craftworkers became farmers to earn extra income. In recent times, since tourism has increased the demand for local products (Belete 2012), craftworkers have achieved wealth and recognition (Ellison 2006: 212).

Craftworkers have their own cultural values and prohibitions, and they disapprove of people who want to give up the craft. According to Amborn (1990: 295), first-born sons in the Konso-Burji cluster are usually obliged to continue their father's craft. The further away an individual's descent is from the main lineage, the less strictly the rules are applied. For example, among the Dirassa, the rule of sticking to the family profession is less strictly applied to junior members of the family, who are allowed to give up their craft and farm while the senior members are supposed to continue the tradition. Likewise, junior sons of farmers sometimes become artisans (Amborn 1990: 296). However, an orientation towards farming often does not imply any change in status, and can also lead to envy and the renewed marginalization of producers, as Ellison (2006) observed among the Konso.

Loss and repurchase of status in the context of slavery

Slavery and the slave trade were widespread in Ethiopia and produced different forms of social differentiation in various societies. While slaves were often captured or purchased from other groups, some societies took slaves from within their own population.

Bosha (2013) has shown how free farmers among the Ganta became slaves to their own neighbours and relatives through sudden impoverishment. Their slave status, which was strongly associated with pollution and de-humanization, continues to be transferred through the generations and to others who came into close contact with them during their rites of passage.

In Woleyta, Haberland (1961: 162–164) reported,¹⁴ poor members of conquered groups became slaves, while rich and respected members were simply incorporated. Occasionally, members of richer families volunteered to become the king's slaves. The Woleyta king could also turn members of his own group into slaves if they transgressed norms or failed to perform ritual/religious duties. Poor and lazy farmers could also be made slaves of respected warriors if the king agreed.

Regaining free status was difficult or impossible in most cases, though redemption for some has been reported. A payment of seventeen oxen could free a slave among the

13 According to Amborn (1990: 128ff), efforts to prohibit leather clothes were made in the early twentieth century, but were only strictly enforced in many places in Southern Ethiopia after the Second World War. Nowadays, leather clothes are only common among the women of a few groups in South Omo.

14 The king could turn ordinary people but not craftworkers into slaves; craftworkers were considered to be too different to become slaves (Haberland 1961:162).

Zala¹⁵ (Schulz-Weidner 1959: 239), and slaves in Woleyta who had reached old age could replace themselves with a substitute slave (Haberland 1961: 168). As slave identity continues to be transferred to new generations in some places, redemption is still an issue today. Among the Ganta, slave descendants are still despised but can regain full free status through a costly and complex ritual (Bosha 2013, 2014). Slave descendants in Woleyta are also still despised and it is unclear if there is a way for them to undergo redemption (Akalework 2014).

Adaptation and distancing

A strong means by which groups can change their status seems to be cultural and linguistic adaptation. In some cases this has led to a real blurring of boundaries, in others to only a superficially closer relationship between dominant majority and marginalized groups.

The early literature already noted that some marginalized groups had adapted to the dominant majority to an extent that outsiders could hardly distinguish them. The adaptations observed ranged from copying jewellery, clothing and hairstyle, to the imitation of social practices and the adoption of the dominant language.

Jensen (1959: 62) reported that *manni* (craftworkers) who lived among Baka (part of Ari) farmers copied their marriage rules and classes. The Wata hunters adapted to the Borana dress code to the extent that Eike Haberland, who lived with a Wata family for several weeks, did not notice that they were not Borana (Haberland 1963: 13). Like other Wata groups living with Oromo people, they also completely adopted the language of the Borana. The outward adaptation has not, however, led to an integration of the two groups.

Slave descendants in the Rayya Qobbo highlands of Amhara region have outwardly fully adapted to the majority group and cannot be distinguished from them by outsiders. However, internally they continue to be considered as different, and intermarriage is still prohibited (Kiya 2018). The Manjo, former hunters, gave up their own language completely and speak a variation of the language of the dominant Kafa people (Leikola 2018). While social integration between Manjo and Kafa is very limited, the Manjo have developed a way of manipulating their social status through adapting their linguistic repertoires to different situations: they put effort into copying the Kafa way of speaking when they want to emphasize unity with them (for example, when they ask something of them), and distance themselves by speaking differently when they intend to demonstrate ethnic difference (for example, when they claim special rights as a discriminated minority) (Leikola 2018). The hippo-hunting Haro adapted their culture so profoundly to their dominant neighbours, the agropastoralist Bayso, that today the two groups not only cooperate on daily basis, but even allow intermarriage: most of the Haro abandoned the consumption of hippo meat – considered as polluting by the Bayso – introduced male and female circumcision and copied ritual institutions and offices from the Bayso (Epple and Braukmann 2018). They also increasingly use Bayso language in their daily conversations not only with the Bayso but also among themselves, and imitate Bayso behaviour in code-switching to Amharic (Savà 2018).

15 Schulz-Weidner spells their name Sala. Today, they are not considered an independent group but are classified as part of the Gofa people.

In some cases, marginalized groups or sections of certain societies have tried to distance themselves from the dominant majority group – with differing success.¹⁶ The *hadicho* (craftworkers among the Sidama) recently formed their own district and founded their own political party, thereby developing their own political voice (Aalen 2000). The *fuldo* traders (and craftworkers) association in Konso has become so strong that it has contributed to a common identity as *xauda* (craftworkers) (Watson 2006: 82). Similar movements have been observed among the so-called *fuga* craftworkers who live scattered among the Gurage, Kambata and other groups. Under Italian rule they were recognized as a distinct group and were able to participate politically for a short period of time (Teclhaimanot 2003). The attempts of slave descendants (*ayle*) in Ganta to physically distance themselves from the dominant majority led to conflict between them and the farmers (*malla*) that went on until the *ayle* were convinced to reunite with the *malla* (Bosha 2018).

Increased internal differentiation

A side effect of cultural and linguistic adaptation can be increased differentiation within marginalized groups. Haberland (1963: 135) reported that in the 1950s only some of the Wata had adapted to Borana culture. Those who had changed referred to themselves as *warana*-Wata (lit.: spear-Wata), referring to the fact that they had abandoned their traditional weapons in favour of the Borana spear. Those who continued to hunt with bows and arrows called themselves *tiya*-Wata (lit.: arrow-Wata). The two Wata sub-groups stopped intermarrying, but the social boundaries between them and the Borana persisted. Schulz-Weidner (1959: 240) reported that Zala blacksmiths who had abandoned their craft in favour of farming were no longer allowed to marry those who continued smithing. Among the Konso, many members of the *fuldo* trade converted to Orthodox Christianity, which helped them find shelter and support among Christians when they travelled to other parts of the country. However, it also led to some fragmentation among the Konso, between those who became Protestants and those who continued to follow traditional beliefs (Watson 2006: 84)

Urban context as a place to hide one's identity

Urban contexts and places with ethnic mixing seem to offer better chances for the integration of marginalized people as personal identity and descent are much easier to cover there and such places allow individuals to distance themselves from the local context. Jensen (1936: 39) already indicated this in the 1930s. For slave descendants in the Rayya Qobbo highlands, for example, this was the only way they could hide and then change their status (Kiya 2018) and the same is true for the Manja in Kaffa Zone (Vaughan 2003: 279).

Legitimacy and self-perpetuation of marginalization

In general, the dominant majority resists the integration of the alleged impure. How-

¹⁶ In order to attain political rights, the Waata hunters of northern Kenya are trying to be acknowledged as an independent ethnic group (Aneesa 2000; Aneesa and Ali 2004). In Somalia, occupational groups have deliberately formed a new identity to increase their chances of being acknowledged as persecuted refugees (Hoehne 2014).

ever, there are some cases of minorities also resisting integration and some in which the minority itself actively contributes to the sustaining of social separation. We have already seen that the admission of farmers into the *fuldo* association of the Konso was not easily accepted and not welcomed by all (Amborn 2018). Meckelburg (2018) has also indicated that not only do the memories of their superiority survive in the minds of former slave masters, but also that the Mao and Komo themselves have deeply internalized the feelings of humiliation and marginalization they experienced in the past. Desalegn (2018) shows how, for centuries, the Kumpal's belief in an ancestral curse has contributed to their failure to overcome their precarious situation.

Recent Research: Changes through External Efforts

Much of the recent literature focuses on external measures taken to bring about change and more equality between farmers/herders and occupational groups and slave descendants, some of which were mentioned sporadically in the earlier literature. They broadly include: political intervention by the government; religious conversion; economic environment; and social factors.

Political intervention

Under various Ethiopian regimes, new laws and policies relating to land ownership, the rights of ethnic groups and individual citizens, to human rights and participation have had a clear impact on the status of minorities and hereditary status groups.

Many Southern Ethiopian groups lost their independence due to their incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire under Menelik II at the end of the nineteenth century. They had to reorganize their social structures because northern settlers were often placed at the top of local hierarchies and/or local kings and ritual leaders were employed as tax collectors and intermediaries between government and local population. While central government policy did not address the social differentiation directly, the depopulation that followed conquest in some areas, as well as high taxes and tributes, meant that farmers could not produce enough food for the whole population anymore. Thus, the strict division of labour between farmers and craftworkers could not be upheld and some craftworkers had to take up farming as either a side business or as their only business (Amborn 1990: 57).

Trade was intensified by the road building undertaken during the Italian occupation and later under Haile Selassie, and this posed new challenges for craftworkers. Scrap metal, for example, became more easily accessible, which resulted a decline in iron smelting, and new products from the north and from abroad began to compete with local goods (Pankhurst and Freeman 2001: 334). Emperor Haile Selassie's efforts to modernize Ethiopia, particularly through investment in modern education and the elimination of slavery in 1942, created new opportunities for many marginalized people. However, authors have stated that negative images and stereotypes about slave descendants continue to persist (see, for example, Aalen 2012; Akalework 2014; Bosha 2013, 2014; Meckelburg 2015).

The socialist Derg regime (1974–1991) under Prime Minister Mengistu Haile Mariam promoted equal recognition and chances for all citizens (Donham 1999: 129f) through efforts to eliminate traditional belief systems and the unequal social structures responsible

for social exclusion. The 1975 land reform allowed craftworkers and slave descendants to produce their own food and thereby improve their social standing, although this did not lead to a redefinition of their status (Pankhurst and Freeman 2001: 342). The villagization programme forced marginalized groups and farmers to live side-by-side in cooperative villages. Education was made accessible for all and craftworkers, slave descendants and hunters were given political positions in local administrative offices and in farmers' cooperative organizations (Pankhurst and Freeman 2001: 335). The population was instructed to ignore social, ethnic, religious and other differences, discriminatory behaviour was forbidden and commensality in some cases even enforced at gunpoint (Yoshida 2018). Conversion to Orthodox Christianity was suggested to some marginalized groups as a way of improving relationships with the dominant majorities. Recent literature indicates that the imposition of these rules by the Derg did not bring the expected results everywhere, were only superficially achieved and were unsustainable. Indeed, treatment by the dominant sections of societies changed only superficially and, due to discrimination, many members of excluded groups discontinued their education, continued to be disadvantaged in employment and political participation, and were often given small, poor quality plots of land (Pankhurst and Freeman 2001: 335).

The new constitution of 1995 clearly banned discrimination against anyone based on social background. However, some authors claim that the situation of status groups has declined under the EPRDF (see for example Aalen 2011, Data 2012, Gezagh 2003, Vaughan 2003), as the introduction of ethnic federalism has helped revive cultural values and local traditions, including ideas about occupational groups and slave descendants.¹⁷ In the last twenty-five years, local authorities have been re-empowered and local hierarchies revived (Tronvoll and Hagmann 2012), while artisans and descendants of slaves 'continue to be excluded from the major arenas of social and political life' (Aalen 2011: 186). Moreover, with the downfall of the Derg, many of the privileges given to minorities were withdrawn, and some minorities groups were even forced to return land given to them under the land reform (Pankhurst and Freeman 2001: 336). As, according to Vaughan (2003: 277), prejudices are often shared by local administrators, civil servants, judges and police officers – who come from the locality in which they work – the structural disadvantage for minorities in some places is difficult to overcome.

To the outside, the integration of marginalized groups seems to have been achieved. But this makes it difficult for them to form a political movement and only a few examples of politically active minorities have been reported (see Yoshida 2013 on the Manjo in Kaffa). Besides, as Pankhurst and Freeman (2001: 336) state, 'since most of the marginalized minorities are dispersed social categories rather than localized ethnic groups, their concerns have hardly been considered in the new "ethnic" politics.' (see the example of the Mao and Komo, Meckelburg 2018).

While the recent literature emphasizes the revitalized marginalization of status groups under ethnic federalism, some positive changes have also been mentioned and deserve

¹⁷ Examples in the literature are Wolayta, where equal participation of all ethnic groups in national politics revived the marginalization of status groups (Aalen 2012); Dawro, where the result of the 2005 parliamentary elections was strongly influenced by the social status and clan membership of the candidates, rather than by their personal commitment (Data 2012); and Gamo where practices banned under the Derg were reinstated after 1991 (Freeman 2004).

more research. The constitution of 1995 guaranteed the right to equal treatment for all citizens of Ethiopia (Article 25) and thereby provided the possibility of using legal process to achieve more equality. Yoshida (2013) has shown how the Manjo hunters in Kaffa used legal procedures to demand separate or proportional political representation after their tense relationship with the Kaffa majority erupted into violent conflict (see also Vaughan 2003: 276ff). After organizing themselves into an artisan's association and beginning to own land, the Sidama artisans (*hadicho*) created their own self-administered district (called Dara) in 1992–93 and formed their own political party in 2000 (Aalen 2011: 136–7).

It seems, however, that there are structural problems and a lack awareness of legal procedures that have so far prevented marginalized groups from claiming more rights in relation to dominant majorities.

Religious conversion

The introduction and spread of new religions has led to both more integration and more marginalization of marginalized groups.

As Pankhurst and Freeman (2001: 344–345) have explained, through their strict food prohibitions, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church seems to have enforced marginalization of non-members, as consumers of impure food are considered to be polluted. On the other hand, the Protestant Church – which started spreading intensively in the 1950s – strongly propagates the equality of all human beings and actively promotes the integration of minorities. The fact that it presses its members to abandon traditional beliefs and practices involves the breaking down of cultural and social barriers. Some improvement in the relationship between minority and majority has been mentioned in relation to Dawro (Data 1997) and Wolayta (Berhanu 2001). Samuel's (2016, 2018) in-depth study on the Dawro has shown that conversion to Evangelical Christianity softened the social differentiation between the *malla* (dominant famers) and the Manja (a despised group of former hunters) in certain areas of life, even if it has not been completely overcome and the extent of change varies greatly in different parts of Dawro. In Banna, conversion to Protestantism has led to a blurring of social boundaries, which allows intermarriage with members of other ethnic groups as well as with the special group of the *bajje*, whose males marry endogamously and whose females can only be married as co-wives in Banna, Hamar and Bashada (Epple 2005). Around Protestant churches, share-cropping arrangements between farmers and hunters/craftworkers can be found and social interaction has increased (Pankhurst and Freeman 2001: 346).¹⁸

In some places conversion has not led to integration at all. In Ganta, for example, separate Protestant churches had to be built for slave descendants because farmers refused to share the same church (Bosha 2018), and in the highlands of Amhara, slave descendants can be members of the Orthodox Church but are still not allowed to serve in the Church (Kiya 2018). In Oyda (Dereje 2001: 177), the fundamental difference between farmers and craftworkers is even justified locally by reference to the Bible, in

18 It should be noted that all the studies I found looked at conversion to Orthodox and Protestant Christianity. I could not find any studies on how conversion to Islam has influenced the position of status groups in Ethiopia.

which it is stated that craftworkers were descendants of Cain, while Abel was the forefather of the farmers.

Another negative effect of conversion to Christianity is the loss of craftworkers' and hunters' special powers, ritual offices and social roles, which effectively gave them some importance in society. The Waata (hippo hunters from Lake Zeway) (Gemedda 2016), for example, used to play significant roles among the Arsi-Oromo in the reconciliation of conflicts, the adoption of children and the inclusion of war captives or other strangers into the society. They performed fertility rites, protected the community and its animals against misfortune and disease, and were feared for their power to curse. For their services the Waata were highly respected and remunerated with food. After converting to Christianity, the Arsi-Oromo no longer needed the social and religious services of the Waata. The same was reported for the Manjo, who – having lost their ritual responsibilities among the dominant Kaffa – have not found an alternative way to gain influence or participation (Yoshida 2018).

Economic environment

The economic empowerment of craftworkers and slave descendants has changed their relationship with the dominant sections of a society in some places.

When the South was incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire in the late nineteenth century, the high number of northern soldiers stationed in the South increased demand for some craftworkers' products. As the soldiers had a great need for textiles, many craftworkers and even farmers (for example, among the Konso and Burji) turned to weaving, although they faced some resistance from the original weavers (Amborn 2018). Half a century later, as we have seen, when Emperor Haile Selassie prohibited the wearing of leather clothing, many tanners became blacksmiths or weavers (Amborn 1990: 59f).

When Amhara settlers introduced the plough to the South at the end of the nineteenth century, this led to increased demand for ironware and blacksmiths experienced an economic upgrade. When ironware was needed for road construction during the Italian occupation, even farmers tried to become blacksmiths. The introduction of money motivated Konso farmers to engage in craftwork as a side business, as beer and meat had to be paid for in cash (Kansite 2017). The increase in tourism in the last two decades has driven demand for locally made products and blacksmiths, potters and weavers have begun making high profits, which have increased their social recognition significantly (Belete 2012) and motivated farmers to undertake craftwork as well (Ellison 2006).

When Konso farmers join the *fuldo* – a powerful craftworkers' association – they need the *xaudas'* consent and to perform certain rituals (Ellison 2006: 668). However, they can return to their former identity, so that the transformation is not absolute. Yet, as Ellison argues, the shifting of identities and occupations contributes to the reworking of social categories in Konso.

Ganta slave descendants have garnered respect by significantly increasing their wealth through cash cropping of bananas, although they have not changed their identity (Bosha 2012, 2013). Social boundaries between the hippo-hunting Haro and the agropastoralist Bayso have begun to blur partly because both groups began working together successfully in a fishing cooperative (Epple and Braukmann 2018).

Yet, as Pankhurst and Freeman (2001: 341f) note, while wealth is not a guarantee of better social recognition, poverty seems to always contribute to marginalization and exclusion.

Social factors

Through contact with other culture, ideologies have also changed. Amborn (1990) has written that, before Menelik's conquest of the South, social differentiation between craftworkers and farmers was based on a strict division of labour and therefore complementary rather than hierarchical (Amborn 1990: 390f). Together with their religion (Orthodox Christianity) the Amhara invaders imported the stereotype of the 'impure artisan' who has the evil eye and is polluting and dangerous.

Others, like the Manjo hunters living with a Kafa majority, experienced equitable treatment under the Italian government and, as military conscripts, under the Derg. This experience positively influenced their self-image and motivated them to fight for equal rights (Yoshida 2018). The *fuga* craftworkers of the Kambata have reportedly had a similar experience (Wolde-Selassie 2001).

In the case of the Bayso and Haro people, a kind of general 'identification with modernity' has contributed to an overcoming of the boundaries between these two small groups. Both groups have converted to Orthodox or Protestant Christianity and strive to adapt to the nearby 'town's culture', which is reflected in their changing material culture (clothing, architecture and household utensils) and eating preferences (Epple and Braukmann 2018), as well as in a growing preference for speaking Amharic (Sava 2018). The positive reception of locally made products by tourists also seems to have contributed to a positive self-image, as a recent study among the Konso has shown (Belete 2012).¹⁹

The efforts of succeeding governments and various NGOs to improve status differences through developing better techniques for craftworking had not led to any convincing success by the turn of the century (Pankhurst and Freeman 2001: 355–358), although in-depth research on more recent developments is needed here. Likewise, I could not find any detailed studies on the impact of modern education. One can assume that, as education enables economic empowerment, it may at least have an indirect effect. However, whether and how cultural stereotypes and relationships between different categories of people have been changed still needs to be explored.

Summary and Suggestions for Future Research

I have shown that there are both external and internal factors and mechanisms that lead to more integration and an overcoming, softening or redefining of social boundaries between different hereditary status groups.

The most promising external factors, which also offer a level of sustainable change, seem to be related to the economic success of marginalized groups, which often results in an improved standard of living and – in many cases – better social recognition by the dominant sections of a society and better social standing. Where crafts have become an attractive

¹⁹ At the beginning of the millennium, the effects of tourism on the status of craftworkers and their products were not clearly visible (Pankhurst and Freeman 2001: 357–358).

alternative occupation for poor farmers, intermarriage between farmers and craftworkers, and even with slave descendants, has become possible.

Political intervention has had a strong influence in some areas, but has not always been sustainable. Providing opportunities that allow marginalized groups to improve their educational and economic circumstances seem to be benefitting an increasing number of individuals – especially in urban contexts – and might show greater success in time. The effects of enforced contact, cooperation and equal treatment, as well as the prohibition of discrimination often seem to be superficial and have only partially contributed to a blurring of social boundaries, if at all.

Contact with other ideologies locally has led to some changes in attitude and behaviour in the past and continues to do so today. However, awareness-raising programmes and knowledge about rights have so far encouraged only a few minorities to demand political participation, self-administration and equal treatment in the courts.

Religious conversion to Orthodox and Protestant Christianity has had different effects in different places. Generally, the dominant and often discriminatory behaviour of farmers towards certain hereditary status groups has diminished and social interactions become more sociable and cooperative. However, in some areas, converts to the same religion refuse to share the same church and different churches have had to be built for farmers, craftworkers and slaves. The effects of conversion to Islam have not yet been explored.

The success of internal efforts made by some marginalized groups depends greatly on their acceptance by the dominant sections of the society. Cultural, linguistic and religious adaptation to the majority have led to a partial merging of some marginalized and dominant groups, but integration has remained only superficial for others. Where a change in economic environment was met with local efforts to succeed economically, this has led to some successes. In a few places, status groups have deliberately emphasized their difference in order to achieve their goal of independence, while in others they have internalized their own marginalization to such an extent that it inhibits integration.

The above-mentioned arguments are based on existing research that is by no means exhaustive. Some data is scarce and not substantial enough to draw clear conclusions. Therefore, more research needs to be done to sustain the existing data and fill the gaps.

In my view, future studies must continue to follow Freeman and Pankhurst's suggestion and study the perspective of the marginalized status groups themselves. Although, the views of dominant majorities must also be included because no change can be achieved without their participation.

While contemporary research is focusing on challenges and difficulties, existing potential for change (both through internal mechanisms as well as external intervention) should not be ignored but rather studied and used as an asset.

The situation of craftworkers and hunters is being relatively well documented, other status groups – such as slave descendants, ethnic splinters and or special groups and clans – should be included in the research, as they share similar concerns and problems.

Regionally, most studies are focusing on the culturally very diverse South, but more research needs to be done in the northern, western and eastern parts of the country. Interdisciplinary research (for example, with gender studies, linguistics, political science, history) would provide additional perspectives on the lived experiences of hereditary status groups and how they negotiate their dynamic relationships with others.

I would recommend that the following topics be explored further:

- 1) *Culturally immanent mechanisms for status change*. Little has been done on this topic, and even less with specific focus. The results mentioned above could be used as a starting point for a new project that would consider culture as the source of and resource for, rather than as an obstacle to, change and more equality in Ethiopia. Boshá's study (2013, 2014, 2018), which shows how the legacy of slavery was successfully overcome by a directed application of the traditional *wozzo* ritual in Ganta, suggests that this could be a valuable approach. Through my own research, I have observed how, among the Bashada, the *bajje* people who are marginalized but also needed for their ritual expertise were at least partially integrated through the intervention of the local ritual leaders (Epple fieldnotes 1999).
- 2) *Differentiation of ideal and real behaviour*. Only Amborn (1990: 304) and Ellison (2006) have indicated, with their studies on the Konso, that there can be a great discrepancy between real and ideal behaviour towards craftworkers. Further research would help clarify if the same is true in other societies.
- 3) *Gender, marginalization and integration*. Few authors have touched the question of whether there are great differences in the marginalization of men and women of different status groups and whether attempts at integration have touched them differently.
- 4) *Sustainability of change*. Even though there are an increasing number of studies on the integration of status groups through external factors, the question of how sustainable they are still needs to be answered.
- 5) *Reasons for the lack of the use of legal measures by minorities*. Though the constitution grants equal treatment of all its citizens, few minorities have tried to explore and exploit legal options to reach their goals. Reasons for this could include a lack of knowledge, information or coordination, financial constraints, fear of negative repercussions by the majorities or others.
- 6) *Unpredictable and diverging effects of religious conversion*. The effects of religious conversion differ greatly not only among different groups, but even within the some group, as Samuel (2018) has shown for the Manja among the Dawro, where it led to a softening of social boundaries in some, but not all, parts. Other factors that may play a role, such as the attitude and efforts of individual priests or other influential people, should be explored. Research on the effects of conversion to Islam should also be done.

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