‘Face’ and the person

‘Face’ in the theory of politeness

The concept of ‘face’ has come to play an important role in politeness theory. Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987), for example, have chosen it as the central notion for their study of universals in language usage and politeness phenomena. They have paraphrased ‘face’ as the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself (1978). However, obviously they prefer ‘face’ to ‘public self-image’, for throughout their text they almost exclusively use the term ‘face’, only occasionally mentioning ‘public self-image’.

Brown and Levinson (1978: 66) say that they have derived the notion of ‘face’ from Ervin Goffman and “from the English folk term which ties face up with notions of being embarrassed or humiliated, or ‘losing face’”. In the process of their analysis they have come to distinguish between negative face and positive face, which they have defined as follows:

(a) Negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distinction i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition.

(b) Positive face: the positive consistent self-image or ‘personality’ (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants.

That is, negative face and positive face may be expressed as wants. Negative face: the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions be unimpeded by others. Positive face: the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others.

In the 1987 reissue of their work, the authors have stressed the abstractness of these definitions. They say that central to their theory is a "highly abstract notion of 'face' which consists of two specific kinds of desires ('face wants') attributed by interactants to one another; the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions (negative face), and the desire (in some respects) to be approved of (positive face)" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 13). I think the emphasis on abstractness here is misleading. Firstly, the definitions of 'face' given above are hardly abstract but, on the contrary, very concrete. People want to be respected (unimpeded) and loved (approved of). Secondly, by stressing abstractness, Brown and Levinson run the risk of forgetting that 'face' is, after all, not an 'etic' but an 'emic' category and should be studied as such.

'Face' is "a metaphor we live by", as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) would say. It allows us, actors and observers alike, to grasp some essentials of politeness phenomena. It evokes the danger inherent in social interaction, the possibility of threat and assault on one's social standing or personal integrity and, above all, it reminds us of the fact that social vulnerability is mutual. As Brown and Levinson (1978: 66) have pointed out, everyone has face and "everyone's face depends on everyone else's being maintained, and since people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened, and if defending their own, to threaten other's faces, it is in general in every participant's best interest to maintain each other's face".

The insight into this kind of reciprocal interest and the co-operation which it generates lie at the heart of Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness and have inspired their brilliant analysis of the strategies by which various forms of face-threatening acts (FTAs) can be performed. However, abstractness has played little role in this. Rather, the authors have used the metaphor of 'face' to think through the dialectics of politeness and then have transformed this metaphor into a series of subsequent ones. This helped them to define positive and

negative face, that is, metaphors of action (claim), of legal and spatial domains (territory, preserve), of appearance (image) and of evaluation (appreciation, approval).

Brown and Levinson do not characterize their analyses as consisting of a transformation or extension of a powerful initial "root metaphor" (Turner 1975). Rather they stress, as I have said, that their notion of face is highly abstract. Also, when they ask the question of how different cultural notions of face can be studied, they think first and foremost of the different ways in which FTAs may be performed, and how the para-meters and variables within their scheme of politeness strategies may be differently utilized in different cultures. They ask, "what the exact limits are to personal territories, and what the publicly relevant content of personality consists in" (1978: 66-67), and "how confrontations or shamings are managed, how people gossip... how they clear their name from disparage-ment, and how face regard (and sanctions for face disregard) are incorporated in religious and political systems" (1987: 14). Their discussion of interactional ethos is also along these lines. They note that in some societies the ethos of interaction is friendly, warm and easy going, while in others it is distant, stiff and irksome. In some societies people are allowed, even encouraged, to show off and brag, while in others they must be deferential and modest, and so on. The task of cross-cultural studies of politeness is, as Brown and Levinson have convincingly shown, to describe and explain such cultural variations in the performance of FTAs.

Yet, there is also another and closely related task. Brown and Levinson (1987: 14) have mentioned it in some very suggestive lines. They have said, for example, that "notions of face naturally link up to some of the most fundamental cultural ideas about the social person," and they have called for "more in the way of ethnographic descriptions of the way in which people articulate face notions."

However, they have never spelt out clearly what a truly cross-cultural analysis of variations of the metaphor 'face' would look like. The face is a very significant part of the human body. As such it is part of a universal analogical repertoire, which can be used for metaphorical production in all cultures. How is this repertoire actualized? Do all cultures use 'face' as a metaphor, or is 'face' not universal? What are the cultural variations of face metaphors? Which features of the face are stressed when people think and speak of 'face', and what do the varieties of 'face' tell us about the cultures and societies in which they occur? Surely, these are interesting questions and must be part of any cross-cultural study of politeness. Furthermore, if there are differences, even striking differences, in the ways in which people conceptualize 'face', will these differences not illuminate a common ground? Will a comparative study of 'face' not enhance our understanding of politeness phenomena in a similar way as our folk term 'face' first inspired Brown and Levinson? The more metaphorical meanings of 'face' we know, the better we will be equipped to think about a general theory of politeness.

The coercive power of 'face'

I will present a specific cultural variation of 'face', that is, the Hamar concept of *woti* below. But before I do so, let me say a few things about the way I understand our own metaphor of 'face'.

I think that the evocative power of 'loss of face' derives from a clever exploitation of conceptual part-whole relationships. The first is a synecdoche: a significant part of a person, that is, the face with which one faces others (or which one hides from others) is taken to represent the whole person, that is, the whole character, social standing, moral values, etc. Then, in turn, a single act or single acts are used as an index where metonymically an effect stands for a cause. A bad deed, it is said, reflects a bad person; a bad result reflects a bad cause. Or,

to see the same thing synecdochically, a bad part (morally bad act) represents a bad whole (bad person). Thus, when people warn each other not to risk loss of face by doing this or the other, they say implicitly that there will be people who track back the path of the synecdoche contained in the notion of 'face'. The unspoken argument is: if you do not do what is publicly expected of you, then you will lose your face and will be declared bad *in toto*. This totalizing effect seems to be the central motive of the metaphor 'loss of face'.

Also, if 'face' is a supreme value and everyone in the social hierarchy has 'face' and is forced to 'save face', then this must necessarily strengthen the status quo. Thus 'face' acts in favour of existing social inequalities. It binds people to their different domains in the social hierarchy. All those who would perhaps like more freedom, fewer impositions, more opportunities to be admired and held in esteem by others are restricted by 'face' and are inhibited from aspiring to anything lying outside the confines of their narrow and conventionally defined realm of action.

'Face', then, is a coercive social concept and indirectly speaks of social chains. Because you have 'face', you always have to be afraid of losing it. This feature of 'fear of loss' is shared with a number of other terms used to express the social worthiness of a person. But interestingly, one does not have a 'sense of face' nor does one compete for 'face' as one does for honour and also for 'name', fame, regard, esteem or respect. This comes out most clearly in the fact that one does not qualify anyone's 'face' as being 'great', 'high', 'rich', etc. One cannot accumulate and compete for it. There are many more facets to 'face' that need to be explored. But here I want to mention only one more feature that plays a significant role in our understanding of 'face'. When we speak of 'face', we envisage the central part of the face. We see especially the mouth and the eyes, which are so prone to reveal a person's inner feelings, often even against one's own will. For us, 'face' is closely associated with the self,

with inner feelings, emotions and desires, and with cultural notions of sin, guilt and shame.

The Hamar

The Hamar of southern Ethiopia are the southernmost group of Omotic speaking peoples (see Bender 1976). They number between fifteen to twenty thousand people and practice a mixed economy based on pastoralism (goats, sheep, cattle), agriculture (sorghum, maize, various beans etc.), apiculture, gathering, hunting and raiding. Settlements are dispersed, and their location is usually chosen as a compromise between the need to be near the fields (slash and burn cultivations in the bush), near a waterhole, and near good and healthy pasture.

Within a settlement area there will be a number of homesteads, varying considerably in number (from less than ten to more than thirty), but each homestead always follows the same layout and consists of a cattle kraal, goat enclosure and one or more houses, which belong to the married women, who, with their husbands, jointly own the herds.

The homestead is often inhabited by a widowed mother and some of her sons and their wives, or by a group of siblings under the ritual authority of the oldest brother. Descent is patrilineal, but lineages are shallow. There are twenty-four clans, which again are divided in two moieties (see Lydall and Strecker 1979b). Also, their territory is divided by one basic division, one part of the country being under the ritual authority of a man from the clan Gatta and the other under a man from the clan Worla. Each half of the territory is again split into segments, which have, however, no single ritual functionary responsible for them as a whole.

Although the Hamar practice a mixed economy, they do not rely on all the different resources in the same way. Most important for their survival are the goats, and they themselves stress that goat husbandry is the backbone of their economy: *Kuli edi zani ne*, people with goats are like ropes or leather

straps; their life is well secured, it will not snap". The management of goats inhibits the formation of large corporate social groups and encourages individualism with much spatial mobility. Goat herds always fluctuate in size and, above all, allow a quick build up. One does not need the cooperation of different age groups and generations as one does to build up herds of cattle or camels. The management of goats is more efficiently carried out by small and largely independent units, which perhaps in crisis lend each other support, but do not have to cooperate continuously over any length of time. The individualism of goat herding is deeply ingrained in Hamar culture and has led to a very thorough rejection of authority. True, the Hamar *donza*, that is, the married men who are the basic agents of Hamar politics, have delegated some responsibilities of decision making to individuals. First, there is the hereditary office of the two *bitta*, who are ritually responsible for the health, safety and general well-being of the Hamar. Then there are the *gudili*, who look after the well-being of the fields, the *kogo*, who bless the homesteads, the *jilo*, who magically lead dangerous enterprises like raiding or hunting, and there are the *ayo*, who have been elected to speak in public for their respective territorial segments. But the Hamar watch these men carefully, and the closer an office is to any truly political activity, the more the *donza* are ready to check their ambition for power.

Terms referring to the persona

If one wants to understand the Hamar concept of 'face', it is best to look at the wider semantic field of which it is a part. There are several Hamar terms that refer to the persona. I outline them here, before turning to 'face' itself.

Barjo ('good fortune')

In Hamar, the most important aspect of the persona is its *barjo*. *Barjo* may be defined as a concept of continuous creation. According to the Hamar, creation goes on continuously in the

world, and human beings have an active part to play in it. Every living being needs *barjo* to exist and achieve its natural state of well-being. Even such phenomena as clouds, rain, the stars, etc. need to have their *barjo* to appear in a regular and ordered way.

People can actively engage in producing and augmenting the *barjo* of people, animals, plants, the soil, the seasons, etc., by calling *barjo*. Here is an abridged version of such a *barjo aela*:

Eh-eh! The herds are carrying sickness
May the sickness go beyond Labur, may it go,
Cattle owners you have enemies,
May the Korre who looks at our cattle, die, die,
May his heart get speared, get speared,
Eh-eh! My herds which are at Mello,
May my herds come lowing, come,
May the girls blow the flutes, blow,
May the women dance, dance
May the men rest, rest
(Lydall and Strecker 1979b: 14-15).

Both men and women have *barjo*, but only the *donza* call *barjo* in the emphatic and stylized way of the example given above. Women call *barjo* in a quiet and unobtrusive way, for example, by sweeping the entrance to their goat enclosure and by putting on a belt that is decorated with cowry shells. As one old woman once told me, she causes others to be well (have *barjo*) simply by wishing them well; she does not need any words for this.

The Hamar elders, on the other hand, stress that they need to meet and chant together in order to call forth *barjo*. They carry their own *barjo* with them wherever they go, and whenever it seems necessary to cause well-being, they get together and call *barjo*. Often they delegate the leading part of the chanting to men who act in a specific office, for example, as *gudili* (guardian of the fields), *kogo* (guardian of the fires of the homesteads) or *bitta* (guardian of all of Hamar country). When older and

younger brothers are present, it is always the older one who leads the chanting.

By means of the *barjo aela* the elders try to exercise control over each other and especially over women and children. It is the old who call *barjo* for the young, and it is the men who call *barjo* for the women, not vice versa. But having said this, one needs to stress that the concept of *barjo* and the practices associated with it lack any competitive or aggressive element. People never do anything great and outrageous to achieve *barjo*, nor do they boast about their *barjo*. In fact, the concept is of such a kind that the greater anyone's *barjo* is, the more that person will be harmonious, non-aggressive, non-competitive and non-problematic. Anyone who has great *barjo* will be able to act well, will not collide with others and will be agreeable in the eyes of others and his (or her) own.

Now, if the Hamar concept of the persona is grounded in the concept of *barjo*, then it is interesting to view *barjo* from the viewpoint of politeness theory. If every adult member of Hamar society claims *barjo* for himself, and if the Hamar are concerned to call *barjo* for each other, does this not mean that they are constantly attending to their negative and positive "face wants" (as defined by Brown and Levinson)?

Their desire to be unimpeded by others (negative face) is expressed in terms of *barjo*. Often I have heard people say to each other, *"issa barjon saesan gara"* (Don't spoil my good fortune).

To claim *barjo* for oneself is the supreme expression of a Hamar's want for freedom of action, or more precisely, for the potential to act or simply exist freely. The calling of *barjo* for others is, on the other hand, a most emphatic form of positive politeness. Those who get blessed are positively attended to and assured of their intrinsic social value.

Nabi ('name')

The Hamar concept of *nabi* closely resembles our literal and figurative use of the term 'name'. Like 'face', the metaphor

'name' acts by exploiting a part-whole relationship (see my analysis of 'face' above). The name is an intrinsic part of a person, and the social worthiness of a person accumulates in the name. To have a good name is like being a good person; to have a bad name is like being a bad person. In this way 'name' in our own culture and *nabi* in the culture of the Hamar can be used for coercive rhetoric, which is very much like the rhetoric of 'face' and honour. If you do not behave properly, you run the risk of losing your good name.

'Name' already acquires some coercive force by the simple fact that by giving a name to someone, one usually implies the recognition of her or his social value. Naming is equivalent to valuing! People are given names in order to be or become socially valuable.

Typically, in Hamar, people are given several names during the course of their life cycle, each name signifying some specific aspect of their persona. Also, the giving of a new name is always associated with blessing. You are blessed to become worthy and great like a big mountain, like Mount Bala, as the Hamar say. This blessing is an emphatic act of positive politeness, but it is also coercive in that a person is named and given a value precisely to enter the social domain and aspire to social worthiness. The name is given in order that the owner may guard, keep and enhance it and fulfil all the social expectations that are connected with it.

Michere ('whipping wand')

In the same way as the Hamar may say, "Don't spoil my *barjo*" or "Don't spoil my name", they also say, "Don't spoil my whipping wand".

The whipping wand is the most significant tool for herding in Hamar. It is long, light and flexible and ideally suited to act as an extension of the arm of the herdsman, or, more often, the herding boy or girl. "At the nose of the whipping wand there is butter," goes the saying, and indeed in the long run, no survival

would be possible if the Hamar did not manage to use their whips well. You can herd cattle and camels with sticks, but for small livestock you need the whipping wand, especially for the goats who tend to spread as each goat wanders off to satisfy its individual taste. Sheep are easier to handle because they tend to stay together in a close group, but goats need constant attention. The art of herding, then, involves the voice (all sorts of hissing, whistling, shouting, singing), gestures (especially with the arms) and the whipping wand, which is used not only as an extension of the arm but also as an extension of the voice, because one can produce a variety of sharp noises with the whip and can use it to hit the ground, leaves, grass, branches, and thus attract the attention of the goats and lead them in the desired direction.

As goats provide the backbone of the Hamar economy (see above), and as the whipping wand is the most important tool for herding the goats, it is understandable that the use of the whipping wand has, to some extent, been ritualized, and has been metaphorically exploited to speak of the social wants of the person.

The ritualization already begins in such small acts as when a father hands a new whipping wand to his son in the morning. He usually does this after some accident has happened, for example, a goat may have been lost or eaten by a hyena. After such ill luck, the father hands a new whipping wand to the herding boy, who then uses it throughout the day, and in the evening, when the whole herd has entered the homestead safely, places it over the gateway of the goat enclosure. As time goes by, many dry old whips accumulate here and grow into a big bundle, which is evidence of the problems of looking after the herd and how those problems were overcome. Further forms of ritualization are found in the rites of passage into manhood (Lydall and Strecker 1979b: 76, 83) and in the burial rites (ibid: 41, 57).

The whipping wand, however, is not only a tool to herd animals; it is also a tool to control people. Typically, boys and young men shift their attention away from the goats and cattle when they come to the homesteads, the fields and the water holes, where they meet girls with whom they flirt. Then they express their liking for the girls not so much in sweet words but in mock assaults in which they use the whipping wands in their gestures of attack. Later, when they have married, men sometimes use their whips in earnest in order to subdue their wives. Men use the whip towards women but not vice versa, except during the harvest celebrations when women mockingly whip men. The degree to which its use is based on provocation comes out most clearly in the ritual of manhood, where the girls (possible future wives) provoke the initiates (their possible future husbands) to whip them in public (see Gardner 1972; Leach 1976: 48; Lydall and Strecker 1979b: 45, Lydall 1994).

Men also use the whip on other men. This begins as early as childhood when older brothers often threaten or actually hit their younger brothers with the whips, which they are constantly carrying. Later in life, youths may sometimes be severely whipped by their 'older brothers' (men senior to them) as a punishment for some offence like thieving or going on a raid without the consent of the elders. The elders (*donza*), however, are never whipped, but punished by other means, for example, by the fine of an animal.

This asymmetry in the use of the whip is ritually expressed in an institution called 'whipping wand' (*michere*). Every year, shortly after the crops in the fields have ripened and the young men have, as the Hamar say, become so well fed that they question the authority of their seniors, the 'older brothers' get together, equip themselves with bundles of fresh whipping wands and chase after the most provocative youths in order to beat them. After they have caught them (some of them) and have given them a real or token beating, the men are served food and drink in the fields by the women (some of them the

proud mothers of the delinquents), and there is much talk, feasting and fun where the general authority of the senior men is asserted. In older days, when the Hamar age-set organization was still functioning, ritual whipping of young men also occurred at the formation of each new age-set.

In a sense we can speak here of the expression of negative face wants, that is, the want to be unimpeded by others (see above). Note that here the one who has been threatened defends himself by using an off-record strategy which hides his personal interest behind a metaphor. Here the metaphor of *michere*, in other contexts the notion of *barjo*, and, as I will show below, in still other situations, the metaphors of a*pho* ('word'), *dumai* ('big toe') and *woti* ('forehead') are used to speak indirectly about one's claim to be unimpeded by others.

Apho ('word')

In order to show how the notion of *barjo*, the institutionalized whipping and the Hamar concept of the word (*apho*) all tie up in one single social practice, let me quote the following two statements:

> Now it is time for the herds to leave for the distant grazing area. The elders hold a meeting where they bring their whips and whip the young men: "What are you doing here, lazy fellows, go and herd the cattle. Look the Korre are coming, the Galeba are coming. Go and look after the herds." So they whip them and then they call *barjo* and hand a whip to the spokesman of the new age group: "Take it, herd the cattle with it and when any man talks badly or works badly hit him with this whip." The new spokesman is an intelligent youth who can talk well (Lydall and Strecker 1979b: 124-25).

> So the fellow draws forth service. Such a man is an *ayo*. If those who go don't kill the giraffe, the buffalo, the lion, the ostrich, the leopard, but if they meet the enemy and one of them dies, it will be said: "His word is bad, his command is bad. Stop him." And he will

be stopped from taking command. Someone else will be selected to take his place (Op. Cit.: 109)

The two texts show how in Hamar the word and the whip are given to exercise authority, but both your whip and word will only be accepted by others if they lead to good fortune. Only a person with great and strong *barjo* can be a leader (*ayo*). If his *barjo* is weak, then his word will cause bad luck for those who listen to it. One can often hear in Hamar the statement, "*apho barjo tau"* (The word is *barjo*). The Latin proverb *nomen est omen* comes to mind, and the almost universal belief in the magical power of words. The word is always a very critical extension of the persona, and it inescapably affects both the speaker and the world around her/him.

The ultimate expression of this mode of thinking is the Hamar *barjo aela*, which I have described above. Here the human voice is used to invoke well-being. In a continuous process of giving and receiving *barjo*, people bless each other by means of their inherent power of speech. As speech is such an intrinsic part of people's social and moral being, it also lends itself for the production of metaphors that refer to the social and moral side of a person. When the Hamar say "*apho issa saesan gara"* (Don't spoil my word), they do not mean this literally but think of much more complex meanings like, "don't spoil the good influence which my words usually have on the world", "don't interfere with my will", "don't attack my *persona*."

When the Hamar judge each other and assess their respective social values, they constantly refer to the sincerity or insincerity of a person's word, and to whether it is truthful or false. They say "*apho kissa tipha ne"* (His word is straight), or "*apho kissa koara ne"* (His word is bent). Typical attributes used for judgement are:

Positive:	**Negative:**
gon (true)	*budamo* (false)
daetsa (heavy)	*sholba* (light)

durphi (fat)	*gancha* (meagre)
kadji (cool)	*oidi* (hot)

As speaking is such a significant social activity, to speak truthfully is like being a good person, and to speak falsely is like being a bad person. No wonder then that in Hamar *apho* has been exploited for metaphoric production and has received a meaning which pertains to the whole person.

Dumai ('big toe')

It may sound odd that the Hamar consider the big toe and, by extension, the shin as important aspects of the persona. But a brief moment of reflection is enough to grasp the logic of this train of thought: the Hamar move constantly on foot through difficult terrain. When they go to their fields, when they follow their herds, when they go scouting or hunting or raiding, it is extremely important that they do not hurt their feet and legs. But there are many thorns, hard pieces of wood or sharp stones, on which people hurt themselves even if they are careful and experienced (see Strecker 1979a: 175). Therefore, people are very much aware of the importance of their feet and legs and the need to keep them safe from damage.

"May your path be free (of obstacles)" is one of the ways in which the Hamar wish each other well. Also, when they call *barjo*, they wish each other to move like baboons, for baboons move lightly and never hurt themselves as human beings do (see 1979a: 3). The big toe is thus, in practical terms, a very significant part of the body, and it makes sense that the Hamar have used it as a metaphor of a person's competence and freedom of action. But there is also more to it, an almost magical element, which is also present in the notion of *barjo* and in the metaphors of 'whipping wand' and 'word', but which comes out more clearly here. In order to demonstrate the thinking which is associated with the *dumai* ('shin' in general, 'big toe' in particular) let me quote directly from my notebook:

> Lalombe, Makonnen's older brother, tells me without me asking more than what the name for 'big toe' is: "The right big toe is very bad (that is, very good). It leads you to success, to success in raiding, in hunting and so on. Your right big toe is fat. If I go to visit a homestead and my big toe hits hard against an obstacle on the path, then I ask myself whether the homestead will be well. If I stumble with my left foot I will meet well-being, much food and good fortune. If I stumble with my right foot this will lead me to suffering, lack of food and misfortune. When I encounter such obvious bad luck or good luck I say to myself, isn't it the stumbling which has caused this affair?"

Lalombe does something here, which is typical for the Hamar: he not only speaks of a predictive sign but also of a cause for bad (or good) luck. When he stumbles on his way, he does not know whether the stumbling initiates anything. Only when he arrives at his destination and finds there that he is not welcome, or that there is simply nothing to eat and drink, or that people are sick or have died, does he say, "Things are bad here because I have stumbled".

What is happening here? I think Lalombe is playing a rhetorical game that helps him uphold the illusion of his power and competence. To be part of a situation where misfortune has occurred is always in some way damaging, even to the witness who may not be directly concerned. Therefore it makes sense to develop strategies that help one to escape or at least cover up one's helplessness. What Lalombe does is to exploit the ambiguity inherent in language. More precisely, he exploits the lack of deictic clarity that characterizes much of everyday speech. For a sentence to be deictically clear one needs an anchorage of space, time and actor action.

In "Isn't it the stumbling which brought about the affair?" there is an ambiguity about the relationship between time, action and place. This comes out most clearly when one visualizes the three domains involved in the sentence: the

person, the obstacle and the destination with its good or bad luck. It remains an open question whether the speaker is conceptually separating three domains or is thinking of two domains where either the hitting of the obstacle or the meeting good or bad luck are merged into one domain. Finally, he may not distinguish between any domains at all, thus merging time, space and action in an unspecified way.

The person, the obstacle and the house in these figures are both separate and related entities. Lalombe alludes to some necessary connection between all the three entities as soon as some significant lack of control has occurred. Stumbling is involuntary; it escapes one's control, and like the twitching of a part of the body often 'tells' something. And so does the prosperity and well-being of others towards whom one is heading. Will their house have coffee? If one goes somewhere and people are not prepared for one, if they lack something, which is essential to the visit, then both parties, the host and the guest, lose out. They allow some weakness to manifest itself. Not only does the host lose in social standing, but so does the guest who wrongly assumed that there would be coffee in his host's house: each has obviously miscalculated the situation.

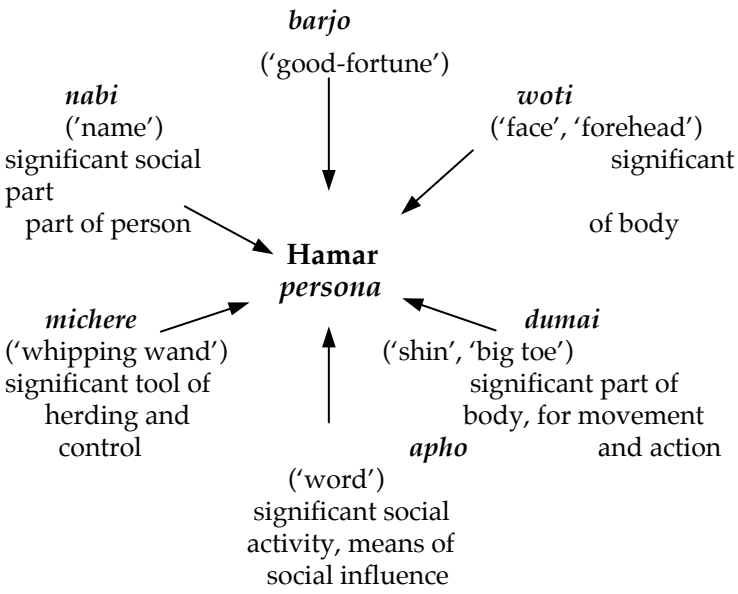
This is why 'causes' are invented which explain why it is not the people concerned but something else, which has caused the threatening situation, a stick or stone on the path, for example. Those who aspire to influence social standing must never show themselves as being unable to control things. This is why people use strategies of diversion which are ultimately nothing more than strategies of politeness, and which shield them from the critical view of others (and of themselves).

Woti ('face', 'forehead')

I have so far examined the notion of *barjo* and the Hamar metaphors of name (*nabi*), whipping wand (*michere*), word (*apho*) and big toe (*dumai*). *Barjo* is the most general of these concepts. It exists wherever there is well-being, harmony, good-

fortune. When well-being disappears, *barjo* has disappeared. Therefore the physical and social health of a person is a direct expression of his or her *barjo*. According to the Hamar, without *barjo* no development and continued existence is possible. This is why the notion of *barjo* is found at the top of the list of all the Hamar concepts related to the persona. Name, whipping wand, word, big toe and, as we will see, also face (*woti*) are nothing but particular manifestations of the general *barjo* of a person.

Which part of the body do the Hamar have in mind when they speak of *woti*, and which are the metaphorical meanings associated with it? When one asks the Hamar to point to their *woti*, they first move their hand up to the forehead and subsequently let it pass down slowly towards the chin. Similarly, the verbal explanations of the term *woti* first focus on the forehead. *Woti* is part of the head as the carrier of the brain. Behind *woti* there lies thought and reflection. Conversely, *woti* is the place where a person's worry and sorrow show, that is, the informed concern for others. Also, *woti* is the part of the body with which you meet and confront others, rather like the goats and cattle that typically meet head on in play and in earnest. Thus, by metaphoric extension, boldness and courage, as well as thought and reflection, are stressed when the Hamar speak of a person's *woti*. The following figure summarizes this argument:



Interestingly there is no Hamar word which focuses, like our word 'face', primarily on the area around the eyes and the mouth, which so easily betrays a person's inner feelings and, concomitantly, can be used to express them. The face of the Hamar is not one that could be hidden behind a veil. *Woti* does not focus on a person's concern for his/her own self but on his/her concern for others. Therefore it is not associated with shame. In fact, the Hamar have no word for 'shame', nor do they have one for 'sin'. What they are concerned with in social life is not to speak of failure but of success, not to humiliate others but to elevate themselves. Theirs is a culture of boasting and not of humility (see Strecker 1988: 87-88, 187).

Everything I have said so far about *barjo*, whipping wand, word and big toe has also pointed in this direction. The Hamar claim freedom of action for themselves. This is what they fight for: *"issa wotin saesan gara"* (Don't spoil my forehead—my 'face!'). The forehead refers here to a person's sphere of action,

the world, which he 'faces' and wants to control. The forehead, the word (voice), the whipping wand and the big toe all have a similar directional and outward element. They are metaphors of intention and action. They embody the will to confront, reach, influence and control others. What distinguishes *woti* from the other metaphors mentioned so far is the fact that it lends itself for the celebration of the social worthiness of a person.

In a literal sense the forehead of the Hamar is often anointed in precisely the way Brown and Levinson (1978: 75) have described positive politeness which 'anoints' the face of the addressee by indicating that, in some respects, S wants H's wants, for example, by treating him as a member of an 'in group', a friend, a person whose wants and personality traits are known and liked.

Such anointing of the *woti* is ritually done as a celebration of a man's proof of his competence and courage. In Hamar a man should prove himself before he marries, by hunting dangerous game and/or killing an enemy. Once he has done this, he is applauded, his 'positive face wants' are satisfied and he is ritually anointed. To give a lively and authentic picture of how this ritual celebration of the person is integrated in Hamar life, I quote here at length from a Hamar text:

> Now: "Has so-and-so's child killed a hyena?"
> "He has killed a hyena."
>
> When someone kills a hyena he shaves off all his hair. He takes some pure white paint and smears it on his head. Another person has killed an elephant. He smears red ochre on his forehead. A man who kills a lion puts on red ochre. He who kills a leopard puts on red ochre. When a rhinoceros is killed, red ochre is put on. Red ochre with butter.
>
> "Who's that?"
> "See he has white paint, he has killed a hyena."
>
> The paint is white like hyena shit, it shows, and so the girls know. Another man puts on red ochre and sticks a white feather in his

> hair. Another, after he had shaved his head, used to put a smooth plate on his forehead here, with flaps over his ears and white paint on his head. After four days like this he washed off the white paint on his head and put on red ochre. Another had no plate but had a *kalasha*, a white thing made from an elephant tusk and placed on the forehead. At the back of his head is a brass plate. That man has killed an elephant. That one has killed a lion. That one has killed a rhinoceros. That one has killed a man, maybe a Borana, maybe a Korre, maybe a Mursi, maybe a Maale, maybe a Karmit. After he has killed some fierce animal or a man, then:
>
> "Take the *boko* stick".
>
> Otherwise: "*A, a!* I have not killed a hyena, I have not killed a lion, so I will not marry a woman. Only when I have killed a hyena will I marry. Only when I have killed a lion will I marry. Only when I have killed a leopard will I marry. Only when I kill an elephant will I marry" (Lydall and Strecker 1979b: 74).

We can see here how highly the Hamar value their freedom of action. The most emphatic proof of this freedom is to kill. By killing dangerous game or humans who are traditionally the enemies of the herds and social group, men show that they are able to defend their 'basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction' (see the definition of negative face).

For this achievement they receive (and demand!) the attention of their group, are appreciated and approved of and are blessed and ritually anointed. But their forehead is not only anointed; they may also put on a *kalasha* as the text says. The *kalasha* is an ornament, which used to be worn by men who had killed dangerous game and/or human enemies. It was common among many cultures of southern Ethiopia before the area was conquered by the troops of Emperor Menelik II at the turn of the century. It belonged to the regalia of the old kingdoms of Kaffa, Dauro and Wolamo as well as to Oromo groups like the Borana, and to the Konso and Tsamai (Jensen 1936; Haberland 1963; Baxter 1965).

Interestingly, outside observers have often found it difficult to assert what kind of object the *kalasha* represented. Bartels' comment sums up the situation very well:

> E. Haberland speaks without a shadow of doubt always of a phallic ornament (1963: 51, 305). P. T. W. Baxter in his article 'Repetition in certain Borana ceremonies' speaks of a 'white metal horn'. But he assured me personally that the Arsi Oromo gave him only a phallic interpretation. The form of this *kallacha* is, indeed, evidently phallic. For the rest, a symbol can have many associations (Bartels 1983: 146).

For the present purpose it does not matter whether that 'white thing made from an elephant tusk and placed on the forehead' was shaped like a phallus or like a horn. The Hamar use the same word for 'to kill with a spear' and 'to copulate' (*uka* 'stab'), therefore the horn and the phallus must both be viewed as having an element of forcefulness. It is force that is symbolically represented on the forehead, the force to act independently and to such an extent that one is able to destroy or create the life of others.

The English term 'bully' comes to mind, which is derived from 'bull' and speaks of the domineering and self-assertive character of a person. Like a bull, the bully pushes others around, faces them aggressively and incapacitates them. In Hamar this image of facing someone like a bull has fewer negative and many more positive connotations. Indeed, it is part of the general ethos of personal independence and equality. People can only hold equal rights if they are ready and competent to fight for them. Also, everyone concerned must be outward oriented. They must show others what they want and articulate their negative as well as their positive face wants. An egalitarian way of life demands that all the 'equals' expose themselves to each other to a certain extent. No one is allowed to hide behind modesty and mask his/her real competence.

Thus, at their public gatherings and in their public speeches (as well as in their informal conversations) the Hamar often

reprimand each other for pretending to be incompetent, inexperienced, not well-informed enough, etc., to act in matters of public concern. In their eyes, false humility is the greatest enemy of equality, and this is why they encourage boasting and self-elevation. Every *donza* should think of himself as great and capable and act accordingly. At the same time, if he fails, if for some reason he does not reach the intended goal, he should not feel guilty or despised.

This is why the Hamar have no concepts of sin, shame or honour. A person should not be inhibited by the fear of losing face if he/she fails. The consequence of failure should only be positive, that is, that the person does not continue doing what he/she is not good at. In Hamar people always make a clear conceptual separation between what someone is and what he/she does. The practice of calling *barjo* is closely related to this: by calling *barjo* people bless each other. They do this especially after conflicts have occurred among them. When a bad deed has been done, it is not the offender who is condemned, but the deed, and both the offender and the offended are subsequently blessed. No one speaks of 'loss of face', 'shame' or 'sin' in such situations. What counts is the *barjo* of people, that is, their well-balanced and harmonic power to live. If your *barjo* is rich, you will act well. You will be socially competent and able both to assert your own sphere of action as well as to respect the interests of others. The metaphor for this necessary measure of self-assertion and readiness to fight for your rights is the metaphor of *woti*, your forehead.

Conclusion

The picture which I have drawn here of the Hamar notion of 'face' is far from complete. But I think it has become apparent that their 'face' is very different from ours and that this cultural variation is related to variations in social organization. Perhaps it is possible to generalize and formulate an as yet, untested (but testable) hypothesis which says that societies with long lasting social inequalities and asymmetries of power (as in

feudalism, monarchism, absolutism) tend to develop concepts of 'face' which focus on the inner self, on a person's feelings of guilt, sin and shame, and conversely, on a person's sense of honour (Bourdieu 1979). Such concepts would logically also focus on the openings of the face, especially the mouth and the eyes.

In egalitarian societies one would, on the other hand, expect a tendency towards concepts of 'face', which do not have an inward but an outward direction and are less concerned with the self than with the other. Such concepts would stress impenetrable parts of the face and would be used as metaphors for unimpeded action and the confrontation of others. Also, while the inward notion would be associated with humility, the outward notion would be associated with assertiveness and culturally controlled ways of boasting. The following table may summarize the argument:

Cultural variations of 'face'

Stratified societies	**Egalitarian societies**
Responsibilities and opportunities are evenly distributed among men	Responsibilities and opportunities are unevenly distributed among men
Many adult men show humility towards others	Many adult men boast in front of others
Concepts physical face stress penetrable and revealing parts like the mouth and eyes	Concepts physical face stress impenetrable unrevealing parts like the forehead
Metaphors of 'face' stress inwardly directed feelings of guilt, sin and shame, and the need for self-control	Metaphors of 'face' stress outwardly directed want of action and control of others
'Face' motivates negatively as fear of loss of social standing, and constant reminder of the power of the opinion of others	'Face' motivates positively as hope, social gain of freedom of imposition by others

We need, furthermore, to examine the hierarchy and order of the different concepts relating to the *persona* in any particular culture. As we have seen, in Hamar the perception of the person as a socially sensitive being happens first and foremost in terms of *barjo*. *Barjo* is the most general aspect of the person. If I threaten the 'face' (*woti*) of someone I also threaten his *barjo*, but if I threaten someone's *barjo*, this need not necessarily involve his *woti*; the focus may well be on other aspects like, for example, the *nabi* ('name'), *michere* ('whipping wand'), *apho* ('word', 'voice') or the *dumai* ('shin', 'big toe'), which all emphasize different sides of the *persona*.

To me the data from Hamar suggest that if a Hamar were to develop a theory of politeness, he or she would not base it on 'face' and the 'face-threatening act' but would probably speak of the '*barjo*-threatening act'.

As *barjo* is the power of life, the well-being, the good luck and good fortune of a person, this central notion would inspire the Hamar theory of politeness. Also, negative and positive politeness would be expressed in terms of *nabi*. Strategies of negative politeness would say, 'I do not want to threaten your well-being', while strategies of positive politeness, 'I wish you well'.

I find this more widely cast approach, which is inherent in the Hamar concepts relating to politeness, very attractive. It is not moulded by a feudal, monarchic or bourgeois past and is not overburdened by social fear and painful introspection. If one wants a democratic theory and practice in which human rights and the concern for others have a place, then one's thoughts and actions should not be dominated by notions of fear and threat, but should be matched with hope and the confidence that one may have the courage to 'face' others and speak one's mind. Therefore, the Hamar view of politeness phenomena seems to be more timely than our own (and of other 'civilized' societies), which still has to extricate itself from a non-egalitarian past.