

# Temptations of war and the struggle for peace

## Historical setting

The Hamar who live in the southernmost part of Ethiopia stress that in olden days they were lucky and escaped the worst effects of war and drought, which throughout history have plagued the Horn of Africa.

The late Hamar spokesman, Balambaras Aike Berinas, also known as Baldambe (Father of the Brown Cow), has characterised this original safety of Hamar with the following fable:

Hamar country is dry, its people are rooks, they are tough. Living between the rocks, and drying up, they dig fields and make beehives. That's Hamar. The *maz* (initiates) used to strum the lyre together with the elders:

"Our father's land,  
*Bitta* (ritual leader), Banki Maro's land,  
When the rain will fail it is not told.  
Our father's land has no enemy,  
Only the *wombo* tree (*Ficus* sp.) is our enemy."

So the lyre used to be strummed '*kurr, kurr, kurr*! The sorghum may get lost, but the Borana don't climb up the mountains, the Korre don't climb up into the mountains. The Korre kill men at Sambala, they kill down at the Kaeske. The Maale kill men in the open plains... No one climbs into the mountains to kill. In the mountains, however, there is a tree called *wombo*, which has a trunk, which reaches high up. When the fruits ripen at the top, when one's stomach is grabbed with hunger, then one climbs up the ripe tree. Having climbed up one eats, eats, eats, eats, eats, eats,

until one is swollen with food, and one's arms and legs are shortened. The way down is lost. So one sits in the branches and sleeps, and as one sleeps one falls—*wurp! dosh!*—one is dead.

"Our fathers' land, you have no enemies,  
only the *wombo* tree is your enemy."

For us Hamar the *wombo* is our enemy. In our father's land, rain never used to fail. Our '*bitta*' never told of its failure. Our grandfathers did not tell, our forefathers did not tell. There was rain. (Lydall and Strecker 1979b: 157-58)

However, in recent times the situation has changed. The rains have become unpredictable and during periods of drought people will be driven crazy because they don't know anymore where to find food:

Nowadays the months when you (the rain) fail are many. In the month of *kile kila* you left us dry, in the month of *dalba* you left us dry, in the two months of *mingi* you left us dry, in the two months of *shulal* you left us dry. Altogether that's seven months when you left us dry. Then in *barre* you made us crazy and drove men to Galeba (Dassanech), and drove men to Aari, and drove men to Ulde (Arbore). *Barre* means being crazy. Men getting crazy are lost. (Op. Cit.: 158).

Despite their relative safety the Hamar were affected by a number of large-scale conflicts, which extended into their territory during the past three centuries. First, some time during the eighteenth century, there was an invasion from the East when the Borana tried to expand into the Woito valley. Hamar oral tradition tells of prolonged fighting in the valley which only ended when the ritual leader of the Hamar (the '*bitta*') sent an army of stinging bees and other biting insects against the intruders who fled, it is said, in horror and confusion.

In the nineteenth century came a second invasion, this time from the South. First the Samburu whom the Hamar call Korre arrived, and then the Turkana followed who in the middle of

the nineteenth century swept around the southern end of Lake Rudolf looting and decimating the people they found on their way. But the incursion was only short, and because the Turkana weakened the Korre with whom the Hamar and Arbore previously had competed for the rich and healthy pastures between Lake Stefanie and Lake Rudolf, the Turkana campaign is remembered until today as a blessing, and oral tradition has given it a kind of mystical dimension.

The third invasion came from the North and had a devastating and lasting effect. At the very end of the nineteenth century, during the "scramble for Africa", the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II sent his troops as far south as possible in order to counter the territorial ambitions of the English who then were trying to extend Kenya to the North.

During the first phase of the conquest many lives were lost, people enslaved and livestock taken. But later, when the Emperor had assigned his warlords as governors to the region, they often tried to get on better terms with the impoverished populations. In fact, they provided them with arms so that they could jointly embark on raids into Kenya. In this way, the firearms, which initially caused the destruction of the people of southern Ethiopia, later helped them to recover and replenish their herds. Oral tradition is rich with stories and songs about these raids into Northern Kenya. I quote here an episode, which shows how at first the Hamar would use the firearms not to kill but only to intimidate people. According to Baldambe, his father Berinas was one of the first to acquire a rifle from the Amhara. He used it to raid cattle from the Korre who by then had retreated deep into Kenya:

Berinas fired just one bullet into the air and this was enough to put the Korre into flight. After he had taken the cattle, he sent the Korre woman (who he had captured) to follow her own people... In olden days it was forbidden to kill women and children. The one who was carrying a weapon would kill the one who was carrying a weapon too. They also sent some Nyeringa women back home

whom they had captured on their way, and then they returned with the raided herds. (Op. Cit.: 14-15).

The fourth invasion was the Italian occupation, which reached southern Ethiopia both from the North and the East and lasted from 1937 to 1941. The occupation had two particularly negative effects for it enhanced existing divisions and animosities between different local groups and in addition brought an unprecedented number of rifles into the area which the estranged groups could use to fight each other once the Italians had gone. This is how, for example, Baldambe has described the war of revenge, which the Hamar then waged on the Arbore:

As soon as the Italians had left the country, we began to raid each other. We raided the Maale, we raided the Ulde (the Hamar often refer to the Arbore by one of their segments, that is Ulde or Marle), and the Galeba came and raided us Hamar at Turmi. How can I describe the fighting that arose here? First we attacked the Maale and wiped them out. Then Berinas said: "We should attack the Arbore because they, together with the Italians have treated us so badly." Were we, the Arbore and Hamar, not people from the same country? But still they sided with the Italians although they had come from far away, and together with them they turned against us. Now, as the Italians had disappeared and had left the Ulde on their own, my father Berinas said: "We have some rifles of the Italians, and we still have some of our old rifles left which we hid from the Italians. Let us go and wipe out the Ulde. After we have wiped out the Ulde, in their country only the gazelle and the ostrich shall move, and their land will be empty."

This is how Berinas spoke. He called men to assemble at Barto, and from there the war party left for Ulde. But at that time some of the Hamar lived among the Ulde as their servants. They worked for them in the fields and were also friends of the Ulde. The leader of the Arbore was at that time Arkulo, another was Wuyi, another was Agare Oto, and there was another whose name I have forgotten. They were four in all. Those four had guns of the Italians in their

hands, and only a few young men were with them who also were armed. Thus there were only a few rifles in the settlement of the Ulde, just a few, but we, the Hamar, we all ran away once these rifles began to fire, and we returned back to our own country. (Op. Cit.: 38).

While the Italian occupation strengthened existing animosities, it also strengthened existing ties of friendship like those which existed between the Hamar and the Bume (Nyangatom) as Baldambe recalled:

The Bume and we were at that time good friends. The Bume had ammunition and rifles, but they had not forgotten the peace talk, which they had with my father Gino (Berinas; for an analysis of this peace talk see below). They gave ammunition to the Hamar and sold them the rifles saying: "The Hamar are our friends. Now the Italians have left. Let us go hunting together. In earlier days we have already made fields together at Bulkai (lower Omo) and have hunted together. Let us be friends." The friendship of the Bume is true. (Op. Cit.: 39).

A fifth large scale conflict which had and still has an impact on the people living in southern Ethiopia was the Somali war which began as a conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia in the 1970s and then turned into an internal Somali war which even today has not yet fully ended. The war brought many modern firearms not only to Somalia but also to southern Ethiopia and the Hamar and their neighbours.

#### **Traditional patterns of warfare**

The traditional patterns of warfare between the Hamar and their neighbours may be described as follows:

First there is a kind of 'forced exchange' where the raiders do not want to kill anyone but are only concerned to bring home, as the Hamar say, "the butter milk cow for the mother", a cow which enriches the herd and produces so much milk that not all of it needs to be consumed immediately, i.e., freshly, but can be

used to make butter. Baldambe, has described this 'forced exchange' in an almost playful fashion:

When we have lost our cattle, our mothers' brothers and our fathers call out:

"Hey, children!"

"Yo!"

"Have you lost your cattle?"

"We have lost them"

"Do you see the mountains over there? Do you see the Borana mountains? Those are no clouds, those are cattle. If you go there you will collect cattle."

The Borana on their side:

"Children!"

"Yo!"

"Do you see the clouds over Hamar?"

"We see them."

"Those are cattle, those are cattle."

If cattle have been lost in Borana a father will say to his son:

"There over Hamar those are not clouds those are cattle.

Go and get them." (Lydall and Strecker 1979b: 23)

Ideally no killing was involved in such cases, and, as the following conversation shows, at times the raiders even took special care not to harm the other party. This is what my friend Choke told me:

Choke: "Afterwards some Hamar went on a raid again, they were two together. They went to the Kirya waterholes. The girls they found among the goats were how many?" (shows two fingers).

Ethnographer: "Two."

Cho: "They took them together with the goats they led them, led them. *Misso* (hunting friend), that day the Hamar were good, they would not kill. They led the girls, the Gabare girls, till they reached the edge of the mountain. There they slaughtered a goat for them, roasted the meat for them, filled the empty stomach with water and

showed them their footprints: 'Look at the footprints and follow them till you reach your home'. That's how they sent them home..."

Eth: "They took them with them so that they could not call people?"

Cho: "Yes. 'Yi, the girls will come with the goats later, they will come later. Yi! What has happened to the girls, the sun is going down and they have not returned!'. That's how they wanted to cross the Kenya border before the other discovered that the herds had gone."

Eth: "I like this story." (Strecker 1979a: 72-73)

But even though a theft may involve no violence, thievery is prone to lead eventually to armed conflict and once violence has been used both in defence and in the attempt to retrieve the stolen herds, there is the danger of even further escalation where ruthless leaders urge their men not just to go and steal cattle but kill the owners as well. Choke has described this development, accusing his own people, the people of a region called Angude, for starting the atrocities:

Choke: "On this raid they started the killing. Four Gabare died. They did not send them away with a sign of their hand. My friend, those who started the killing are our people."

Ethnographer: "Of Angude."

Cho: "Of Angude only. Before they used to chase the owners of the herds away with their hands, they would not kill."

Omalleinda (a neighbour): "Run, run!"

Cho: "'Run, run!' and then they would take the cattle."

Eth: "On that day they killed without reason?"

Cho: "They shot at the owner of the cattle just so, 'dull-dull' (imitates sound of gun) and they fell dead, dead, they had no guns. Then again Loirambe's raiding party rose. On that day I was there, my friend, they killed many, they wiped out a whole settlement... Loirambe got up and said: 'Kill people, kill them all off, people, people, people (knocks on the ground to emphasise the power of the speech, then he pauses), kill the people all off, kill the people all

off'. That was a very big meeting. My friend, your friend Kairambe was there, on that raid he killed two people, he killed two people. I didn't kill. We did not come to the settlement in time as we had run in a different direction thinking the settlement was there. When we heard the firing and arrived everyone was already dead." (Strecker 1979a: 75-77)

Traditionally, those who have killed an enemy sing in praise of themselves on their way home and are ritually greeted and honoured at the gateway of their father's homestead. Baldambe has described this as follows:

If they encounter the enemies and kill them, the killers return singing. If someone kills a Borana he sings:

"Father's home, so-and-so's father's home,  
He is the debtor of the father's home,  
He is a man from the mountains,  
He is a man from the cliffs..."

The women greet the killer:

"Elelelelelelelelelele...!"

This means: good, good, good, good. At the cattle kraal gateway the father gives a goat to his son and son's *misso* (companion). Its throat is cut and blood is spilled over the killer's shoulders. His father greets him by lifting his right hand in which he holds the gun and the genitals of the slain enemy. He puts these up at the gateway and then decorates the killer with a garland of *naja* (*Kedrostis pseudogijef*). Now the women decorate the killer with their beads and belts. The goat is roasted and eaten inside the cattle kraal and the men sit down together and sing:

"Yo-woi-yo, *hamodjilea*,  
he is the friend of the girls,  
*hamodjilea*,  
semen separated from his backside,  
*hamodjilea*,  
he is a youth from Mt. Marme,

*hamodjilea,*

he is a youth from the mountains." (Lydall/Strecker 1979b: 112-4).

The song shows how one indulges in exposing the loss and the pain one has inflicted on the other. But note that the ritual at the gateway also speaks of a bad conscience and fear of mystical retribution, for the blood, which is spilled over the killer's shoulder, is meant to wash away his guilt of having slain a human being.

The traditional patterns of conflict also involve peace making, alliances between different groups and, of course, a host of double-dealings, betrayals and the like. Most famous for their dubious manoeuvres are the Arbore and Kara whom the Hamar call 'snakes' for the following reason: Both groups are small, but they are nevertheless very powerful because they live near the River Omo and the River Woito respectively. Here they own cultivation sites which produce harvests at a time when other groups who depend on rain fed agriculture tend to have run out of grain and need a share of the crops harvested at Kara and Arbore in order to survive.

In fact, for a certain period of the year, the 'poor' Hamar, that is those who own no substantial herds, tend to become 'serfs' of the Arbore while the Bume become 'serfs' of the Kara. In our conversation Choke and Omalleinda have expressed this clearly:

Choke: "All our poor people were then among them (the Arbore), harvesting the crops for them, stacking the sorghum, *ahm* – all the work in the field was done by the Hamar. They didn't know how to grind, those who ground for them were (Omalleinda joins in), the Hamar. (Together with Omalle-inda) Those who fetched water for them were the Hamar."

Ethnographer: "Was that slavery?"

Cho: "The Hamar said to himself: 'Let me be clever, serve them here and carry home the sorghum to my mountain – work well for them down there, up here make your own field. Then go down to

them and work for them in the harvest while they just sit and rest.' It is the same as with the Bume and Kara."

Eth: "It's the Kara who sit and rest."

Choke: "While the Bume work for them. He, the Marle (Arbore), sits down while the Hamar works for him." (Strecker 1979a: 71)

Sitting in this way on their rich cultivation sites, the Arbore and Kara would receive visitors from all the surrounding groups who came to share in the harvest.

Later, when it rained again in the mountains, the Arbore and Kara would in turn visit their neighbours. In this way they would get to know many details about where and how their neighbours lived, where they had their homesteads, fields, pastures, water holes and the like. In short, they would acquire knowledge, which they then passed on to others.

This is why the Hamar call the Arbore and Kara 'snakes'. They accuse them for pretending to be one's friend while at the same time telling one's enemy how best to rob one's cattle and kill one's people. Thus the Kara are said to habitually help the Galeba to attack the Hamar, the Banna to attack the Bume, and the Bume to attack the Mursi. Of the Arbore it is said that sometimes they help the Borana to attack the Hamar while little later they act the other way round, helping the Hamar to fight the Borana like in the following account:

Choke: They (the Marle, i.e., Arbore) told the Hamar: "Look here, the Borana raiding party is coming. Be clever! Send your women away from your camps." So the Hamar sent them away and lay in ambush... Then at night the war party arrived. The Marle led them and then they returned. Hadn't they said before: "We will lead them?" That's why the Hamar waited for a while, so the Marle could return safely. "Let them just shoot at the fires in the camps!" That's how they waited. They saw them as they approached the camps in a long line... So then they shot at the fires in the camps, *durrr - durrr - durrr - kuk-kuk-kuk-kuk* - (imitates the sound of the guns)... (but) no one was there. They all were in the bush. As the

Borana were driving off the herds, the Hamar attacked them on the way. They chased them, chased, chased...then, my friend, there aren't any Borana anymore. There aren't any Borana anymore my friend (knocks on the ground to indicate how they were beaten). Holding on to them the Hamar finished them off. The guns, which they took may well have been as many as this (shows seven fingers).

Ethnographer: "They truly prepared a trap for them?"

Cho: "They truly did. Didn't they say, 'We are all one, all friends'?"

Eth: "Hm. Those who led them to you were the Marle, ..."

Cho: "... and who shot at them were the Marle."

Eth: "Unbelievable."

Cho: "Ha-ha-ha " (laughs quietly, Strecker 1979a: 69-71).

### Theoretical considerations

Ever since 1970 when Jean Lydall and I began fieldwork among the Hamar, we have witnessed warfare in the region and together with our host and teacher Baldambe as well as other friends from Hamar, Bashada, Kara, Arbore, Tsamai, Dassanech and Nyangatom, we have discussed the reasons for the conflicts and at times also have tried to do something about them (see for example Lydall/Strecker 1979a). Also, we described some of these conflicts (Lydall/Strecker 1979a), recorded people's accounts of them (Strecker 1979b) and devoted a whole book to the documentation of one of the major wars, which occurred between the Hamar and Arbore in 1974 (Strecker 1979a).

But I did not venture any theoretical view on the matter until 1991 when I gave a paper at the Eleventh Conference of Ethiopian Studies entitled "The predicaments of war and peace in South Omo" (Strecker 1994). In it I criticized the approach of Fukui and Turton's study of *Warfare among East African Herders* (1979). In particular I took issue with Fukui who had suggested that killing and warfare would necessarily go on forever between the Bodi and their neighbours because their cultural

conventions offered no alternatives. Bodi men, so Fukui, feel resentment whenever their favourite ox dies and therefore go to vent their anger by killing members of neighbouring groups. Thus, because of their cultural attachment to cattle, whom they metaphorically liken to human beings, warfare is destined to go on forever between the Bodi and their neighbours.

I objected to this, saying that Fukui had pictured the Bodi as prisoners of conventional beliefs and had not taken account of the critical difference between convention and performance. In order to strengthen this argument I quoted Stephen Tyler, who had said that social life is neither anarchic nor determined but a process emerging from the "intentional acts of wilful egos constrained by convention" (Tyler 1978: 135). Generally, I insisted, we must focus on the difference between convention and performance when we study warfare (Strecker 1994: 306).

In order to illustrate what I meant, I provided three examples which showed that at least among the Hamar, who live near the Bodi, not all men follow the conventions of killing. There was Bali who defended and saved a visitor from Nyangatom when all others were cruelly killed by the Hamar. There was Baldambe who refused to bless a nephew who had come to his gateway after killing an innocent Nyangatom. And there was Aira, who saved his bond-friend's family when war suddenly broke out between the Hamar and Dassanech (Strecker 1994: 306-307). These were thoughtful men who would not kill in order to be celebrated, or to vent their anger because of the loss of a favourite ox, or for any other superficial reason. They only subscribed to killing in defence.

If one looked closely, I suggested, one would find that among the Bodi things would be similar. Some men would go and kill for 'conventional' reasons while others would not, would in fact object to the injustice of such killings. This difference, I insisted, was crucial to see how things could change and how killings need not necessarily go on forever, not among the Bodi, not among the Hamar, not anywhere.

In a spirited comment Abbink scolded these “over-optimistic assumptions”. “The Bodi”, he wrote, “and other small-scale tribal groups living ‘in the kinship mode’ can be said to have a ‘positional’ idea of personhood, not an individual one” (Abbink 1994: 6). This was why men like Bali, Baldambe and Aira must be viewed as freaks whose refusal of violence was destined to be ultimately futile given the “larger socio-cultural whole in which they are socially and economically embedded” (Op.Cit.p.6). What counts, according to Abbink, are only “hard underlying reasons” like “resource competition”, “real engrained cultural differences”, “long-term adaptive behaviour... in the political ecological system” and the like (Op. Cit.: 4-5).

I fully agree with Jon Abbink, Tadesse Berisso (1994) and others who say that we must try to understand the “hard underlying reasons” which tend to tempt people to go to war, but I also insist that it is equally important to abandon the determinism to which, following Tyler, I objected in 1991 (see above). Although I had not read him yet, I subscribed to the view of Michael Bakhtin, who, in his celebrated essay on Fjodor Dostoyewski and the hero in the polyphonic novel, had written that it would be wrong to limit anyone to what she or he had done earlier, for people could always refute whatever might have been said and thought about them in the past by acting differently in the future, and as long as they were alive they could morally and ethically grow and change and transcend their previous limitations (Bakhtin 1985). Bakhtin’s ideas apply particularly to peace making, for peace making can only proceed if people are not intent on defining, reifying or judging each other but rather are ready and willing to believe in each other’s hidden potentials and in the fruitfulness of providing each other with an opportunity for a new start.

As I found out later, my attempt to develop a new approach to the theory and practice of peace making partly followed and partly preceded similar efforts made by other anthropologists at that time, first in Europe and then in the United States. I am

referring in particular to *Societies at Peace: Anthropological Perspectives* (Howell and Willis, eds. 1989) and *The Anthropology of Peace and Nonviolence* (Sponsel and Gregor, eds. 1994). Each of these two volumes was the result of a major collective effort, and in each we find theoretical and ethnographic contributions, which examine peace as part of the "construction of moral and semantic universes" (Howell and Willis 1989: 3).

A forerunner of these new anthropological studies of peace was *Learning Non-Aggression: The Experience of Non-Literate Societies* for which Ashley Montague had invited a number of anthropologists to contribute (Montague 1978). In this volume Montague had argued vehemently against the determinism of "hereditarians" and "environmentalists" and had emphasised the social roots of peace and aggression, but later he took an even more radical stance.

That is, in his 1994 foreword to Sponsel and Gregor's collection of essays, he squarely asserted that there is no other barrier to peace except wilful ignorance, and he quoted Spinoza who in 1670 remarked that "Peace is not an absence of war, it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice" (Sponsel and Gregor 1994: X). The virtue of peace depends, as Montague says, on mutually shared hope, which acts as a driving force and constitutes the possibility for the fulfilment of peace (Op. Cit.: X). This, of course, supports what I tried to say in my paper on the "Predicaments of War and Peace in South Omo" which Abbink criticised for its "over-optimistic assumptions".

The premise of contemporary anthropology that war is not a necessary concomitant of human existence is, of course, not new. In fact the view is already thousands of years old and has been expressed in fables and stories the whole world over. Let me provide the example of Pyrrhus, who was one of the most skilled generals of antiquity and over time has become a figure around whom legends and myths have been woven which are of interest here because in one way or another they tell us of the

thoughts and feelings which the ancients held about war and peace. In Western thought the name Pyrrhus evokes above all the idea of useless victory. That is, Pyrrhus is the prototype of a victor who turns out to be the loser. This goes back to 279 BCE when at Asculum the Greek and Roman armies fought a particularly bloody battle. Pyrrhus was afterwards congratulated by a friend on his victory but he answered, "One more victory like that over the Romans will destroy us completely!" (Plutarch 1973: 409). This candid reply has been remembered (or was invented to be remembered!) to the present day, so that we speak of a 'Pyrrhic victory' whenever we mean a victory gained at too great a cost and whenever we want to remind each other of the fact that 'victories' are not necessarily what they appear to be, and that possibly and even very likely they may be nothing but a first step to defeat.

However, Plutarch has also related another story, which reads like an ancient fable about the needlessness and folly of war. The story says that, yes, Pyrrhus was a great general, but his victories were useless, senseless, unnecessary because fortune had given him already, as Plutarch says, "the opportunity to enjoy his possessions without interference, and to live at peace ruling over his own subjects" (Op. Cit.: 397). But when the citizens of Tarentum invited him to be their leader in a war on Rome, Pyrrhus accepted. Then Cineas, a great Greek orator, tried to persuade Pyrrhus of the futility of his plans:

"Pyrrhus," he said, "everyone tells me that the Romans are good soldiers and that they rule over many warlike nations. Now if the gods allow us to defeat them, how shall we use our victory?" "The answer is obvious," Pyrrhus told him, "if we can conquer the Romans, there is no other Greek or barbarian city which is a match for us. We shall straight away become masters of the whole of Italy..." There was a moment's pause before Cineas went on. "Then, sire after we have conquered Italy, what shall we do next?" Pyrrhus did not yet see where the argument was leading. "After Italy, Sicily, of course," he said..." "No doubt what you say is true," Cineas

answered, "but is our campaign to end with the capture of Sicily?" "If the gods grant us victory and success in this campaign," Pyrrhus told him, "we can make it the spring board for much greater enterprises. How could we resist making an attempt upon Lybia and Carthage...?" (Cineas replied) "But after all these countries are in our power, what shall we do then?" Pyrrhus smiled benevolently and replied. "Why, then we shall relax. We shall drink, my dear fellow, every day, and talk and amuse one another to our hearts' content". Now that he had brought Pyrrhus to this point, Cineas had only to ask him, "Then what prevents us from relaxing and drinking and entertaining each other now? We have the means to do that all around us. So the very prizes we propose to win with all this bloodshed and toil and danger and all the suffering inflicted on other people and ourselves, we could enjoy without taking another step.'"(Plutarch 1973: 399-400).

This dreadful story, so delightfully told by Plutarch, shows how the futility of war was known already in antiquity. But one might also add that the same knowledge existed probably even earlier, that is ever since people first raised arms against each other. There will always have been a Pyrrhus who would want to go to war, and always a Cineas who would argue against it.

#### **Witnessing the struggle for peace and the temptations of war**

In 1973-74 I found myself in the midst of ever increasing armed conflicts between the Hamar and their neighbours, and in order to show the dynamic and complex nature of the situation and allow the reader to understand both the Hamar who struggled to keep peace and those who followed the temptations to go to war, I draw here at length on my diary and the conversations I had with Baldambe and my other friends in Dambaiti (Lydall/Strecker 1979a; Strecker 1979a).

Everything began in the morning of 29 April 1973 in the mountains of Hamar at Baldambe's homestead in Dambaiti where one of our neighbours had put on a pot of coffee. That morning the following grim talk developed:

Usually, about the time that the Ethiopian police celebrate Easter, the first sorghum ripens and the small children 'steal' from it and survive. But look at the fields today. They are empty, a desert! Where can we go to exchange our goats for grain? There is no more grain in Banna, nor in Tsamai, nor in Aari. The doors to Galeba and to Arbore are closed (because of war) and there is hunger anyway. We are now slaughtering our goats and those who have none take them by force.

Soon we will run out of animals and then we shall kill each other over them: 'why don't you let me have one of your cows?' and we shall take up spears and kill each other. Soon there will be nothing but turmoil. There are no fruits in the bush ripe enough to eat, there is nothing but salad. Times have never been as hard as this before (Lydall and Strecker 1979a: 102-3).

My friend Banko who had conjured this dismal picture then added that the lot of the neighbouring Bume (Nyangatom) was even worse than that of the Hamar.

Driven by hunger they came to visit the Hamar at the cattle camps where the people of the territorial segment called Kadja who were loyal to Baldambe would welcome and feed them, while the people from Angude killed them:

To illustrate the desperation of the Bume, he (Banko) tells me the following story which once again reveals the divisions amongst the Hamar.: One night about a week ago, the Kadja men who have a cattle camp close to the Omo found a young Bume boy among their goats. He had been driven there by starvation and the Hamar fed him with milk and blood. They even slaughtered a small goat for him and the led him back to the Omo (i.e. back home). A few days later some Angude men shot a deer close to the Omo and while they were eating it, a half-dead Bume approach-ed them asking for food. A young Angude man got up and speared him to death (Op. Cit.: 103).

I think that these entries in my diary clearly show how in spite of an objective threat of hunger there was still no objective

need for the Hamar to kill, and that any theory which would attribute the killing of the Bume who came to share the meal in the forest to some 'hard underlying reasons' rather than to an 'absence of virtue' (see the theoretical discussion above) would be utterly misleading. A few weeks later, the Kara accompanied by some Banna and Hamar attacked and destroyed two Bume villages at Aiba on the west bank of the Omo River. In fact, the villages were inhabited mainly by descendents of the legendary Murle of the Lower Omo, a branch of a group which otherwise lives mainly in the southern Sudan. Baldambe was very disturbed upon hearing the news and commented that those who fought the Bume were digging their own graves:

(4.7.1973) A young man from Kara and one from Mogudji are our guests this morning and they give us the details of the raid on the two Murle villages. We hear all about the massacre and the rituals the Kara performed before the raid and about the participation of Hamar... Baldambe remarks that all those who fight with the Bume are digging their own graves and goes on to say that in olden times the men would have whipped all the 'thieves' who joined the raid and would have killed any youngster who spoilt a peace agreement without permission. Killing was only allowed in defence of cattle and land and, of course, during raids that were ritually licensed by the elders and war magicians. Those who had raided and killed without permission would hide from public social control by living with the stolen herds in the bush for a long time. Today, Baldambe says, people praise any killer without distinction. Cynically, he imitates the call with which the women welcome the killer home: '*Elelelele!*' (Op. Cit.: 149-50; see also Tornay 1979 for an account of the Kara attack on the two villages).

Against all odds, Baldambe kept working for peace between the Hamar and Bume, castigating everyone who turned against the Bume and refusing to honour anyone who was involved in the killing. By the middle of November Baldambe and the men of Kadja had averted the most immediate crisis and I made the following entry in my diary:

(15.11.1973) A Bume boy came into Hamar territory, driven by hunger. He was picked up by some young men who brought him to an elder. The elder called all the young men of the neighbouring area together and said to them: 'Kill him!' This was his way of emphasizing the taboo on killing him, for hadn't the speaker of Kadja just explicitly forbidden the killing? Baldambe stresses the point that at the recent meetings only the Kadja men 'had the word' and they insisted that Kizo (a grazing area near the Omo river and close to Bume territory) was Kadja territory. The men of Angude, Mirsha, Wungabaino and so on (i.e. other territorial segments of Hamar) were allowed to keep their herds there but they were not allowed to act against Kadja's interest, which includes, among other things, keeping peace with the Bume." (Op. Cit.: 183-84)

As we have seen, Baldambe and the men of Kadja were eventually able to secure peace with the Bume. But—in the safety of their mountains—they soon began to hear news of fierce fighting between the Galeba and the Bume. Interestingly, in these conflicts also the Kara and Arbore were involved:

(2.1.1974) In the evening, as we drink coffee in front of Ginonda's house, Banko emerges from the dark. He leans on his spear and stands and waits... Everyone knows that his stance constitutes a powerful command, so a cowhide is brought and coffee is served to him with speed and respect. He gives me the 'talk of the country': fighting between the Galeba and Bume has been heavy. The Galeba attacked the Bume at Nakua and drove away three herds of cattle. As the fighting continued, the Ethiopian police arrived on the scene and requested that the Galeba withdraw. But the Galeba replied by firing on the police, killing two of them. Just as last year, the Bume overtook the Galeba and collected at the waterholes where they waited for them, guns in hand. It is said that many Galeba died and that the Bume pursued them all the way into Galeba country, where they retrieved their own cattle and took some of the Galeba's as well. Some fifteen Kara men and, even more interestingly, some Arbore joined in the Galeba raid. So that's where those two 'snakes' the Kara and the Arbore, meet—in Galeba! This makes me think of

an interesting parallel between these two small river peoples and their two large antagonistic neighbours. Like the Hamar and the Arbore, the Kara and the Bume have been fighting over the crops that grow by the river. The Bume's successful self-defence action makes the Kara uneasy and they now expect the Bume to attack them any time, especially since the Omo is running low and it is easy to cross by foot. The Kara have been buying as much ammunition as possible; they even buy some from the Hamar with sorghum. At night the Kara and their Hamar guests watch the ford close to the Kara settlement where the Bume can cross the river. The crops are ripening now and the Kara cut any ripe grain quickly, remove it from the fields and hide it in the bush. Everyone believes that the Bume meant what they said when they came to the river once to announce that they would soon come on a 'visit' after which they would not be concerned about the survivors for there would not be many (Op. Cit.: 229-30).

Not only the situation between the Bume and Kara but also between the Hamar and Arbore began to deteriorate at that time. First there were a number of clashes like the following:

(3.6.1973) Baldambe tells me he has heard about new fighting, not with the Galeba but with the Arbore: a few days ago they clashed at Assilebaino. After the Arbore had raided them at Karabaino, the Hamar had pulled their herds back into the impenetrable mountains. But as it had recently rained on the lowland plains there was an abundance of grass and water and the Hamar could not resist driving their herds into this fertile area. The Arbore had expected this and had sent a party of raiders into Hamar territory. But the Hamar too were on the alert and their scouts spotted the raiders, who had arrived during the night. As it was early in the morning, the Hamar had not yet driven their herds away from their enclosures and they had time to organise themselves. They encircled the Arbore and attacked them. Two Arbore were killed and two wounded. The Arbore retreated in order to carry their wounded to safety. Then they returned and the fighting continued. Two Hamar received light wounds (Op. Cit.: 142).

As these clashes continued, the Hamar began to plan a full-scale war against the Arbore. They were to 'exterminate' the Arbore just like the Bume said they would 'wipe out' the Kara in retribution for the losses they had inflicted on them. I was staying at the Hamar cattle camps when I first heard of this. The impending raid put me in a difficult position. What should I do? Was there any meaningful way for me to act? I thought about this and then decided that the best thing for me to do was to return to Dambaiti and witness what happened there:

(19.1.1974) A couple of days ago, when I first heard of the planned raid I thought for a moment of interfering, but then I realised that I didn't even really know what it was that I was thinking of interfering with. How big was the raid to be? Was it really going to happen? If I tried to stop the raid, if I tried to interfere I would only make my powerlessness obvious. On the other hand, to pretend that I was not against the raid and rush to Assile in order just to try and see what was happening would be to make a fool of myself. One can not study warfare in the way one studies 'harmless' customs and counts cattle. So it seems to me that the best thing to do would be to return to Dambaiti quickly, set up my recording gear next to the coffee pot and listen (Op. Cit.: 260).

This is how we returned to Dambaiti:

On our way up to the Hamar mountain-plain we did not meet a single man... Moreover, last night a few drops of rain fell, extinguishing old footprints—but there were hardly any new ones: 'Nobody has been here today, everybody has left, and tomorrow we will hear the firing of guns from the other side of the Hamar mountain'... When we drive into Dambaiti, only the smallest children, those born during our period of fieldwork, welcome us by standing on a little ant-hill and waving their hands... Anti serves us coffee in Aikenda's house. When we have finished, Baldambe arrives and we all sit outside on the *boaka* (open space) and exchange our first 'talk of the country'. Baldambe evokes an insane picture of himself walking home, meeting countless people going in the opposite direction to join the raid: here our Ogotemmel (an old

blind hunter who introduced the French anthropologist Marcel Griaule to the intricacies of Dogon culture), anthropologist, intellectual, son of a great leader and warrior, walking alone against the stream of his people who pass him by on their way to fighting: madness and confusion! In the villages he passes, he meets only three old men who do not join the rush to the war. Women call out to him, 'Where are you going?' Baldambe answers them, 'Well, someone has to make the fire while all the other bulls have gone.' 'Oh, yes, make fire, make fire!' To 'make fire' is an euphemism for 'to fuck'. Tears run from Baldambe's eyes as he tells us this (Op. Cit.: 261-62).

In *Conversations in Dambaiti* (Strecker 1979a) I have documented the social drama which unfolded in Dambaiti when the raiders were away, and when they returned, beaten, humiliated and full of regret. Here I provide only a few excerpts of these conversations.

During the first days of suspense, when no one knew when and how exactly the raid on Arbore would happen, Baldambe and his friends in Dambaiti worried and gloomily forecast the defeat of the Hamar. Like so often before when they attacked the Arbore the Hamar would take to their heels and run:

Baldambe (addressing his old friend Walle, Lokarimoi): "Bond-friend, how often have we run away? Didn't we run away from the Ulde first when Arkulu was their leader? Say 'one'."

Walle: "One."

Bal: "Didn't we run the day when Anyero died?"

Wal: "We ran after we attacked Maetzan (east of Arbore)."

Bal: "And didn't we run when Sinka died?"

Wal: "That makes three."

Bal: "Doesn't it? Then recently, when so many of us died, didn't we run away? So we Hamar have already run away five times." (Strecker 1979a: 91)

I had heard Baldambe say that this time the Hamar would be defeated like before because once again they had gone not

really to fight but to get cattle. I broached this question to Walle, and the following conversation ensued:

Ethnographer: "My friend was angry yesterday with Hamar."

Baldambe: "Who?"

Eth: "The one who is called Baldambe, Ogotemmel. He said: 'The Hamar have run to Ulde for cattle and that will turn out badly for them'."

Bal: "Hahahaha."

Eth: "They should go and show the Ulde their strength instead. But now even children have joined the raid and they have become so many that they are incapable of fighting and will only run away. What do you think, is that right?"

Bal: "Lokarimoi."

Walle: "Hmm."

Bal: "He says: What my friend Baldambe said angrily last night was: 'The Hamar went to Ulde for cattle, but there are the owners of the cattle. Their fathers had instructed them: Here, your cattle, look after them well. Here, your father's goats, look after them well. With their father's cattle they bought guns, bought bullets. The owner of the cattle is standing up like a man, the Hamar will not break him'."

Wal: "Hmm."

Bal: "Now the Hamar have gone for cattle. Had they talked together before: 'Kill the owner of the cattle first, the owner of the goats, kill him. Kill the father of the children, the husband of the wives. Eradicate the owners first like this and then take the cattle slowly,' this would turn out well and would allow the Hamar to survive. In this way the Ulde would..."

Wal: "... see our strength."

Bal: "But now they have taken their guns. The men from Assile want to take cattle, Kadja wants to take cattle, Mirsha wants to take cattle, Shanko wants to take cattle, Bonkale wants to take cattle... man, there are the owners of the cattle and our men will return

dropping their shit. That's what I have said and he asks you whether you agree with this or not."

Wal: (emphatically) "True, True!" (Op. Cit.: 87-88).

The raid was ill-fated as forecast already by Baldambe, and when the raiders returned, Anombe, Baldambe's brother-in-law gave us a long account which showed in every detail how right Baldambe had been. I quote Anombe here at length because this allows us to see how he experienced the raid.

As the Hamar had decided to attack not the western but the eastern Arbore (i.e., not the Ulde but the Marle), they had to wade for many hours through the reeds of the delta north of Lake Stefanie. Here a sharp piece of wood growing in the water cut Anombe's foot and incapacitated him right from the beginning. When we visited Anombe the day after he had returned home, Baldambe first asked about Anombe's foot:

Anombe: (to his wife) "Spread out the cowhide so that they may enter and sit down."

Baldambe: (after having settled down, to Anombe) "How is your foot?"

Ano: "Look at it, it is something one does not speak about (that is, it is really bad and really hurts)."

Bal: "What kind of wood cut it?"

Ano: "How could I see it? It was under water... As we were crossing to the other side it pierced my foot, just like a knife. 'Yi!' I felt the cut but walked on through the water. When we reached the dry land on the other side, the flesh had torn open, one part hung down and the other was bent upwards. 'You have come looking for it, so don't complain.'... Who knew the way over there? There was only the way through the reeds and the water. And in it there were holes so that the water reached your knees, reached your thighs, reached your stomach... and as we continued walking the sun went down. None of us knew how long we would walk through the reeds. Those men of Assile mountain, accustomed as they are, who of them did really know the way? Have they ever sent anyone into

the sky saying there was a way? I wonder who has ever crossed this before... we walked all afternoon in water and reeds. We only reached the other side at about the time when the cattle here are milked and when those who have only a few cows have already gone to sleep. It was dark, people could not see each other. You had to bend down and peer closely:

'Who is this?'

'It is I.'

That is how we looked for each other. We were scattered all over the place, like goats.

'The settlements are close by!'

Not at all, they were far away at the foot of the mountains.

They said:

'The settlements are close by, don't you hear the dogs bark, the cow bells ring?'

But none of them had ever gone and really looked at the country. (short pause, Anombe reflecting) The Marle must have made true sacrifices to the ancestors so that the Hamar went mad. He knew we would be coming.

'Lie down and rest!' (one of the leaders said)

Baldambe, haven't you seen it before? When the Hamar step on the Marle land they go crazy. Instead of lying down and resting quietly: *dyan-dyan-dyan* (imitates chaotic talk), 'let's go and kill people'. So I called my younger brother and said to him: 'Boy, I can't walk with this foot. We have come together with everyone from our country for what we looked for. We wouldn't have come if it concerned only our own homestead, but now they made us join this raid. Let those who want to go and kill go ahead. Leave it, sit here with me, and let us go tomorrow when the clear light has come.'"

Baldambe: "Who was with you?"

Anombe: "Your hunting-friend Uri (Anombe's brother), and Lukusse (Baldambe's brother). We were stopping our people from going on in the night. Lukusse and Tsasi (another brother of

Baldambe) had already sent back the young ones of your homestead... The young men Dube and Makonen (Baldambe's brothers) were over there with us. They sat with us there in the night like birds. We who had seen too much of war before, asked them to sit with us like birds and wait for the morning light. Others had left during the night and had gone on. It is they who met death. I don't know what was driving them there. All the time Lukusse's men and we were together. The man from over there who has now died (Gaito, one of Baldambe's best friends), we were first together with him, but then he left us and we didn't hear of his death until much later. The other boy of the homestead up there (another man from Dambaiti who was killed in the raid) he just went mad and left his older brother to go on his own way. He went looking, looking, looking, I wonder what he was looking for! I think that some were really killed by something, which had made them lose their senses. It was madness, which killed them.

On our side we went ahead and when we arrived the cattle had already been taken: 'Help drive the cattle!'

So we turned back towards the water. As we turned we thought there were others of us on the other side of the herds, but there weren't. We were driving the cattle and not a single shot was fired by us. We continued driving the cattle till we came to the area where you, brother-in-law, once made a raid. There the Marle overtook us and were waiting for us. 'Who is driving the cattle on the other side?' we asked ourselves and we kept hearing the shooting at the foot of the mountains. Some were killed, our men, as they attacked. That is what is said but we did not see it. As we reached that place the bullets were coming. We were (so many that) a bullet flying high over my head would still hit one of us. Then everyone began to run. Upon this: 'Uri.. don't return to the fighting... We have nothing which we can bring to our wives, come this way'... Lukusse was then still with us all the time. The fighting happened to our left but we were down by the water and didn't see it. We went on and as we were about to enter the reeds they came."

Baldambe: "The owners of the cattle."

Anombe: "The owners... Uri fired one shot at them there and that was all. We returned. As we walked through the water... I saw Lokolil Korre's younger brother who was hit by a bullet in the arm and I also saw Nukimba's son's son who had a wound in the leg. We all returned the long way through the water and the reeds and after we had reached dry land I didn't meet others until I had reached the foot of the Hamar mountains where I met with Lukusse again. He, like us, had run away when the Marle began claiming back their cattle." (Op. Cit.: 175-78).

Later Baldambe asked Anombe and Goiti, a man from Dambaiti who also had taken part in the raid, what the spokesmen had said at the public meetings, which preceded the raid. Sarcastically Anombe and Goiti imitated the spokesmen as follows:

Anombe: (imitates the speaker) "I have called you."

Goiti: "I truly have called you."

Ano: "I truly have called you. Today none of them will survive. He is a woman. I will pick him, he is soft like the *mulaza* plant (unidentified, has soft roots and is easily pulled out)."

Goi: "His gun won't fire."

Ano: "His gun won't fire. Man, I have everything well prepared. Man, I have truly killed him. Go over there and kill him. Just fetch him, while he is weak like *mulaza*. I have poured water into his gun."

Goi: "Man, never before have I liked it as much as this time!"

Ano: "Man, never before have I liked it as much as this time!"

Goi: "Even old limping men will kill today." (Op. Cit.: 185-86).

While some spokesmen belittled the enemy in this way, others belittled the Hamar, calling them weaklings and in this way tried to provoke them into action:

Anombe: "This is what Oitamba's son said. He spoke at the end of the speeches and provoked the men:

'I am the last to speak, now you will not talk anymore.'

He provoked, provoked. Hadn't he taken his spear?"

Baldambe: "Taken."

Ano: "Provoking, provoking us: 'Today I have gone on my way having prepared all the rituals well. I have gone on my way with babies; I have gone on my way with the blind. Hm. Now you, whom I have brought up, rise and sing the war song. If anyone asks you who you are, say 'I am the son of so-and-so'." (Op. Cit.: 187).

Now, to ask someone to say that he is the son of so-and-so means to remind him that in order not to spoil the name of his father he must not be a coward, must not be concerned with his own safety, must be a 'bull' who ruthlessly attacks the enemy. Therefore, if a man gets up at one of the meetings, which precede the raid and publicly identifies himself with his father, this is like an oath, a public announcement that one is ready to die. According to Anombe, Baldambe's hunting-friend Gaito was driven to his death because he was provoked and forced to commit himself in this way:

Anombe: (addressing Baldambe) "Upon this (after he was provoked by Oitamba) your hunting-friend at first did not get up, he kept on sitting and only pointed his gun towards the enemy. Only slowly he got up and said: 'My father's name is Kala, I am the son of he who was called Kala'." (Op. Cit.: 187).

Also Lukusse, Baldambe's brother was provoked in a similar manner but was wise enough not to respond to the provocation:

Anombe: "One man—it is said he was from Assile, I don't know his name, but I heard what he said."

Baldambe: "Tell us."

Anombe: "He called Lukusse and said: 'Don't the Marle owe your father's homestead a debt?' (the Marle had killed one of Lukusse's brothers some time ago)... They were singing war songs but Lukusse would not join them and trample (trampling is a strong sign of a commitment to fight), he just got up and pointed his gun towards the enemy: 'Here, my gun is black and the owner of the

cattle is mine. Man, the left wing of the fight is mine! That is what I heard him say. When that man from Assile asked: 'What about the debt of your father's homestead?' Lukusse did not answer. It is this kind of spokesman who drives the brave ones to their deaths." (Op. Cit.: 191).

But people are not only driven to their deaths by others, it is also because they have lost their *'barjo'*, their luck or good fortune. Thus Anombe and Baldambe were convinced that Gaito died in the raid because something had killed him already at home:

Anombe: "Gaito himself died before he could kill anyone. Not a single bullet had left the mouth of his gun. (pause) If something has killed you here already, how can you survive over there? That was his misfortune..."

Baldambe: "He who consults the intestines and sees for himself the death of someone from his homestead, how can he go on a raid? ... *Ach*, friends, that which extinguished him, it hunted him to his death."

Ano: "Say: 'It closed his ears so that he would not listen to his age-mates'."

Bal: "It hunted him to his death."

Ano: (moved with a high voice) "Hunted him. *Ye-ye!* I have seen this with your brother-in-law, and now... (again). If you try to hold them they just go mad. *Ye!* ..."

Bal: (recalls his last conversations with Gaito and remembers how he had wanted to warn him) "Had he come on his way back from his older brother I would have told him that if he went it would mean his death. I would have told him to stay put here like an owl. Hadn't the diviner seen in the intestines those who die in war? Hadn't he seen the ox slaughtered at the funeral and the coffee pot which is put on at the funeral? He went on the raid. Knowing that there was death through war within his homestead. I was going to tell him that the diviner was hiding the truth from him, that when he talked of some one already dead he really meant the death of someone living, but then I myself was afraid to tell him."

Goiti: "Yes, so it is."

Bal: "*Hm.*"

Ano: "Brother-in-law, he had even sent word to us: 'Alma, Kula, Banko, I won't join the raid of which the news has reached me. I have some other important matter to settle, I don't think I will be able to join you.' But when we all arrived over there I saw him. His father's sister's son who was with us had been saying all along that he would come and join us after all."

Goi: "That is what his father's sister's son said."

Ano: "'He won't stay behind.' When I saw him over there, I said to someone: 'Tell him he should not go'... 'Why don't you tell him?' 'How can you send him into the fight although you have seen his death?' Didn't I tell them? ... I liked him very much. Did I ever dislike him? Hasn't his death made me very sad?... Had I told him he would have survived."

Baldambe: He would not have survived. Only the raid as a whole would have survived. – Wait! He would not have survived. When he went over there, didn't many die?

Ano: "*Hm.*"

Bal: "That was caused by his misfortune as revealed in the intestines. Wasn't it he who killed the others? Had they said: 'You whose bad luck was forecast by the intestines, return,' he would have turned back, but no one said: 'You go ahead alone, all we others will return.' This would have been his medicine! But no one said this. *Ach* – let it get lost! ..."

Ano: "I said to the others:... Are you leading Gaito to his death?... So take him with you, but I will be very surprised if he returns. Aren't you going to talk to him? Go ahead, if you don't do it I will do it.' After I had said this (his voice gets suddenly very quiet) they said I should not talk like this and hold my mouth... (raises his voice) *Yi!* And then I just could not look at Gaito without feeling bad. I saw him last when he had arrived at the other side and we were trying to stop our men from attacking before the night was over."

Goi: "Gaito looked bad, not like a human being."

Ano: "Hadn't he lost his shadow?"

Goi: "He had lost his shadow."

Ano: (vehemently) "He had no shadow anymore. His shadow had been taken away. The shadow with which you walk, you know what I mean—it wasn't there anymore. We said, let us keep a good watch on him, but when the bullets began flying something chased him away from our side."

Goi: "Something chased him ahead."

Ano: "He reached that very small homestead with only two cattle. The owner of the cattle had hidden in a hole in the earth. He aimed his gun at him whom the ancestors had taken hold of and from behind the bullet hit him in the back. The first we heard was: 'Gaito has died.'

'Hm'. 'That is what you have always wanted.' 'Do you let people knowingly walk into their death?' That is what I had said. That is their madness, the madness I had seen already at my older brother's death. (raises his voice) He who has been taken hold of (whom the ancestors have destined to die), he won't listen to you if you try to talk to him... Gaito, wasn't he bright before? But when his heart had been taken away how could he have listened to us, he would not have turned back. Wasn't his shadow put down over there a long time ago? Hadn't his shadow been fastened over there? That's how it is. (pause, then Anombe continues quietly) Our meeting ground of Kadja has never seen something like this before."

Bal: (sighs) "Let it get lost!" (Op. Cit.: 192-98).

The men argue that not only the warriors live or die according to their individual destinies, also the raid as a whole is destined to succeed or fail for reasons which only divination can reveal. Or, to put it differently, that it is the diviner who exercises the greatest influence over people. It is he who induces them to fight, saying that the drought will end and rain will fall if they go to war and so on. Baldambe sarcastically points this out to Anombe and Goiti, implying that the raid on Arbore ultimately was the product of the diviner's mind:

Baldambe: "He who has consulted the sandal oracle is Djagi Bacho. He threw the sandals by himself after he had dreamt that he should do so.' Wasn't it like this?"

Goiti & Anombe: "Yes, so it was."

Bal: "Some of it was his dream, some his sandals: 'This day, this day, if you now go down to the river and no rain falls immediately then I have not consulted my sandals, then I have not dreamt.' Wasn't it like this?"

Goi&Ano: "Yes."

Bal: "'Man, if you don't get up this month and finish him, then it's your end, then all the country will belong to him.' The one who said this was the son of Bacho and the one who brought the news was Nyetigul's son Darsha. (sighs) Let it get lost!" (Op. Cit.: 190).

As Baldambe, Anombe and Goiti were talking in this way about the causes, especially the different kinds of 'madness', which had led to the disastrous raid and the death of Gaito as well as many others, a guest entered and, implying that the raid was not that mad after all, said the Hamar could very well have brought home cattle had they only acted quickly enough. Upon this, Baldambe let loose the following tirade:

Stop getting rich with empty words. While you have to carry the burden of the hard time (the present drought) you are brave only in your talk. In fact you are the cause of the misery of others. Have you considered the tears which these hard times have brought to the women? Look, your mother is hungry, your father's cattle are hungry, your father's goats are hungry, the kids are hungry, your children are hungry. Where will you survive? Will you survive in the country of the Bume, or? Will you survive in the country of the Aari, or? Will you survive in the country of the Marle, or? Or where will you survive? Are you the only one who has a voice? You have spilt it. (pauses in his emphatic speech) Now look! Should you cry about the dead or should you try to find something to fill your stomachs? Haven't you gone mad?" (Op. Cit.: 199-200).

#### **Madness as the ultimate cause of war**

From the conversations which I have quoted above we have learnt that the Hamar attribute war to madness. Here I want to explore this important point more fully. Also, I want to show that the Ancients also held similar ideas, and that even today we ourselves draw connections between madness and war although we are not always aware of this.

The Hamar, like other groups in Ethiopia, attribute great significance to the great toe and hold the idea that it manifests the well-being, good luck and good fortune of a person. Interestingly, the idea that the great toe embodies the fate and good fortune of a person was also found in antiquity. Thus Pyrrhus whom we have met already above, had, according to Plutarch, a magically powerful right foot with which he would heal patients from diseases: "While the patient lay flat on his back, he would gently press upon the region of the spleen with his right foot. There was nobody so poor or obscure that Pyrrhus would refuse him his healing touch, if he were asked for it" (Plutarch 1975: 386). Furthermore, "the great toe of his right foot was also said to possess a divine power, so that when the rest of his body was burned after his death, this was found unharmed and untouched by the fire" (Op. Cit.: 386-387).

When it comes to war, however, the Hamar do not speak so much of the great toe and victory as of the feet and defeat. Running feet are their metaphor for combat like in the following example where my friends Baldambe and Choke examine the sky one morning after the Hamar have left for an attack on the Arbore (also called Ulde):

Baldambe: "Well, if the raiders were still meeting and talking, there would be a black cloud. A black cloud, dark like a rain cloud. Now they have got up and are already on their way."

Ethnographer: "Why?"

Bal: "Look at the brightness, 'misso'. At the clearness. That is dust, dust only. The white over there that is dust. That is the men running, the cattle that are running. Over there, the white."

Eth: "It means that cattle are running?"

Bal: "It means that the people are running (...). The white ones (white clouds) are the ones who run (...)."

Choke: "And when the raiders are on their way, the clouds show us their footprints: *ba-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta*, white and spreading out like my hand (points towards Ulde, spreading his fingers). That's how the clouds form (...)."

Bal: "Look at all the whiteness which flashes like metal, those are their footprints. The white over there that is dust. That is the men running, the cattle that are running" (Strecker 1979a: 32-33).

The running, which Baldambe and Choke see in the clouds is, as I have said, more likely to lead to defeat than to victory, for in the eyes of the Hamar all excited running is dangerous. People should not run but walk like baboons who move with natural ease, rarely hurt themselves and also have the strange capacity to know what lies ahead of them. Their instinctive knowledge and ease of motion make them safe. Thus Baldambe blessed the men who had gone to attack the Arbore by wishing they would walk like baboons:

"Let the people walk their different ways as baboons do.

The people of Kadja, let them walk their ways as baboons do.

The people of Bana, let them walk their different ways as baboons do..." (Op. Cit.: 3).

But the wish that people may walk like baboons is not only uttered in the context of war, it is also often used in blessing to emphasize the wish that one's fellow human beings should be well and sane and know what they are doing. Many people stumble from one mistake to the other, run into trouble, get thrown off their feet and lose their way in the struggles of everyday life. This is why one wishes them to walk like baboons and to have a green right great toe.

Furthermore, erratic running and walking are associated with lack of orientation, loss of sound judgement and madness. Thus at the height of the dry season there is a month which the Hamar call the "mad month" (*barræ*) because at this time

people tend to get crazy searching desperately in all directions for water, pasture and grain (see also Baldambe's fable at the beginning of the chapter).

According to the Hamar, this craziness lies at the back of war. In their eyes, people mostly fight because they have gone mad, are out of their minds, have lost their self-control and power of reasoning. A grown-up married man is called a *donza*, someone who can control himself (*donsha*) and does not get mad, fly into a rage and fight even when he has been wronged. The term *donza* implies that as a responsible person you will encounter and suffer injustice, but this should not disturb and blind you. Rather, you should "put a stone in your heart" (so that it does not shake like a gourd filled with water) and think and act calmly, for everyone who does not have this mental and emotional power of self-control is a danger to society and his actions are prone to cause conflict and war.

In Anombe's account (see above) he repeatedly drew a connection between running, madness and defeat: Gaito died because "something chased him away from our side", because "something chased him ahead", because "that which extinguished him, it hunted him to his death." Others "were really killed by something which had made them lose their senses. It was madness which killed them..." When Anombe urged some of the men to sit with him "in the night like birds" and be safe in this way, they did not listen, and "it is they who met death. I don't know what was driving them there".

The latter was, of course, a rhetorical remark, for Anombe, Goiti and Baldambe later agreed with each other that it is the spirits of the dead who drive people crazy so that they go to war and die. Gaito died after the diviner had already seen his death in the intestines of a sacrificial animal. Let me again quote the particularly telling passage where Anombe tells how Gaito had gone mad, would not listen and was doomed to die: "That is their madness, the madness I had seen already at my older brother's death. He who has been taken hold of, he won't listen

to you if you try to talk to him... Gaito, wasn't he bright before? But when his heart had been taken away how could he have listened to us, he would not have turned back. Wasn't his shadow put down over there a long time ago? Hadn't his shadow been fastened over there?" ('Shadow' is used as a metaphor for soul or spirit.)

But not only your own dead forefathers cause you to go mad and die in war, also the dead forefathers of those who you attack may determine your fate. This is why Anombe said that the Marle "must have made true sacrifices to the ancestors so that the Hamar went mad", and that "when the Hamar step on the Marle land they go crazy".

Finally it is interesting to note that according to Anombe the war leaders tried to provoke the Hamar and wanted them to trample with their feet on the ground as a strong sign of their commitment to fight. Such trampling is associated in Hamar (as well as many other groups in East Africa) with ecstasy, loss of consciousness and possession. Therefore one can say that the war leaders wanted the men to get mad and loose their senses, and they were offended when Baldambe's brother Lukusse "just got up and pointed his gun towards the enemy" but otherwise remained sober and refused to trample.

Not only the Ancients and the Hamar have associated the movement of feet with madness. We ourselves, that is speakers of Indo-Germanic languages, have done the same. In German *irren* means to make a mental error while *irre*, means to be 'mad, crazy, deranged'. Kluge's etymological dictionary (1960) provides the additional information that the Latin *errare*, the English 'err' and the German *irren* have an old root 'ers' from which the Old Indian *iirshyá* (jealousy) and *irasyáti* (he is angry), the Gothic *airzeis* (mad, seduced), the Old Anglo-Saxon *yirre* and the Old German *irri* (angry) derived. Like the Hamar *barri*, the German *irre* involves an uncontrolled movement of feet. When you are mad (*irre*) you do not only go wrong mentally

(*irren*), you also lose your orientation and walk hectically in different directions (*irren*).

This aspect of bodily movement in the notion of error also comes out clearly in English where according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary 'erratic' means "uncertain in movement; irregular in conduct, habit, opinion" and where 'errant' means both someone who "errs, deviates from correct standard" and also someone "roaming in quest of adventure", especially a knight.

As we have seen above, the Hamar make the same connection between madness, error and war, and they think that from madness and error come the greatest social dangers and the most unpredictable threats to peaceful life. Those who are mad will stumble, fall and bring misfortune, while those who are sane will walk 'like baboons', and their 'green big toe' will bring good fortune, abundance and well-being.

### **The rhetoric and magic of ceremonial peace making**

Although the Hamar think that war is ultimately caused by human madness (which in turn may be caused by the spirits of the dead, see above) they do not address this most fundamental cause directly when they engage in ceremonial peace making but focus on more immediate and intermediate causes instead. Let me illustrate this with the help of an account in which Baldambe has described a peace ceremony held between the Bume and Hamar two generations ago. First I provide Baldambe's text and then I attempt an interpretation:

When the Hamar and Bume were enemies, they said to each other: "Let us forget our quarrels, let us become one family again". The Bume *bitta* (ritual leader), who was called Loteng, called to my father who was then a spokesman:

"Berinas!"

"Woi!"

"Do you have a *bitta*?"

"I have a *bitta*."

Whereupon he brought out ten sacks of sorghum and gave them to my father to bring to *bitta* Elto. When my father had given Elto the sorghum, Elto got up and said:

“Bring a biiiiiig pot of honey to the Bume *bitta*. Our country is full of honey. The Bume do not know how to make beehives. I have made beehives. Bring honey to the Bume *bitta* so that he will call *barjo* for us, the ‘*barjo* of the cattle, of the goats and of the children’.”

So my father brought the honey to the Bume *bitta*... Then the Bume performed their peace ritual. Loteng took a big spear, which is used in calling for rain, and in sending away the sickness of the cattle, and called his people to come... They all came and an ox was slaughtered. Loteng then said:

“We Bume and the Hamar have been fighting. Now Berinas has offered us peace... The Hamar *bitta* has given us a big pot of honey. Berinas says that we should all become one family again, and that we should forget our fighting. That is good! Yesterday we killed Hamar and dressed our heads with ostrich feathers and we scarified our chests. Let us forget the scarifications, let us forget the feathers.”

They brought two spears:

“We have used these spears to kill each other. Now Berinas should take one and use it to call forth rain. The *bitta* Elto should take the other and bury it in the earth.”

Next, Berinas brought a white, white, white, white, white ox that had not a single colour other than white. All Bume, Kara and Hamar were called and my father said:

“Do you see this white ox?”

“We see it.”

“My stomach is like this, completely white, neither black nor speckled, nor brown, nor yellow. My stomach is pure, it is only white. Eat this ox. May the stomach of the Bume and the stomach of the Hamar become one. May they become like this ox. May the stomach of the Bume only be white. May the stomach of the Hamar only be white.”

Then my father slaughtered the ox. The elders gathered together and ate it. They called forth the end of all fighting:

“May the sickness of the cattle get lost,  
may the sickness of the goats get lost,  
may our spear that killed get lost.”

Then the Bume took the rain-spear intended for Berinas and fastened a branch of the *dongo*-tree to it, and put an ostrich feather at the top. With this they went into Hamar country and when they came to Berinas’ home they began to dance and sing:

“Let us forget our fighting,  
let our stomach become one,  
let us forget our fighting,  
let our stomach become one,  
let our talk become one,  
let us be brothers,  
let us be in-laws,  
let us be friends,  
let us be *misso*  
let us be *bel*.”

Singing and dancing they came to the house of my father. Again my father brought a white ox... He called the Hamar elders:

“The Bume elders have come. Hamar elders!”

“Yo!”

“Bume elders!”

“Yo!”

“Look at this ox. What colour does it have? White. Is there any black in it? No. Are there any speckles in it? No. Is there brown on it? No. Isn’t its colour just white? It is white. My stomach is as white as this. I tell you the truth. Now you Bume, tell me the truth, the only truth.”

Then the Bume *bitta* got up and answered:

“Berinas has told the truth. Bume, in your belly there is war. Do you see this spear? Do you see this big spear?”

"We see it."

"Its blade is big, isn't it?"

"It is big."

"If you should make war, if you should kill the women and children of Berinas, if you should steal his cattle, then this spear will turn back upon you and kill you. Like Berinas' stomach, my stomach has become one and is like the white ox. Now you and Berinas and his children shall become in-laws, friends, one family."

Then the ox was slaughtered and the other spear was brought up to *bitta* Elto who buried it in the earth. Isn't then the spear dead? Since the spear was buried the talk of Bume and Hamar has become one. If people start fighting:

"*Ai-ai-ai!* Stop it, stop it, stop it! *Bitta* Elto and spokesman Berinas have put magic into the spear. Fighting is bad."

So the fighting has now ended, because of the ostrich feather, the *dongo* branch and the spear of the Bume, our honey and our white ox. When we killed the white ox we rubbed our hands with chyme from its stomach, and rubbed the chyme on our bodies so that we might all become one, like the grass and the water and the plants in the ox's stomach. If the Bume should start a war we Hamar will get up and call out that they should die, and they will simply die. If we Hamar start a war and kill the Bume the Bume will call out that we should die, and we will simply die. This is the talk between Hamar and Bume." (Lydall and Strecker 1979b: 31-34).

Baldambe's account provides a vivid picture of the event and of the speakers' intentions: their will to respect one another and be one family again; their wish to forget all wrongs of the past and harbour no bad feelings in the future; their hope that all will adhere to their promises—and their threats that the spear will turn back on anyone who dares to break the peace.

What is stressed most repeatedly and at times almost violently is the stomach. Why such insistence on the stomach and on activities related to it? In my view, the explanation runs as follows: when the speakers at the peace ceremony ask the listeners to positively change their attitudes, they do not

mention or even allude to madness, even though madness constitutes, as everyone knows, the most serious danger to peace. Yet it simply would not help to exhort others saying they should not be mad anymore. This would only upset them and generate the very madness, which needs to be averted.

With the stomach it is different because one has control over it. To understand this fully one must know that among people like the Hamar and Bume it is the pride of every man to control his stomach, to never ask for food if it is not offered freely, to never complain even if he has to starve days without end. I have witnessed this often in Hamar. During times of plenty it would be the men who would get served first, often even in public, so that everyone could see how richly they were feasting. But during periods of drought it would be the men who first would go without so that the children and guests could be fed.

So when the orator at a peace ceremony mentions the stomach and speaks of the need to purify it, make it white and rid it from war, everyone gets immediately reminded of his own well-developed power of self-control. This, as I see it, is the logic of reasoning here. To put it differently, when the Hamar focus on the control of the stomach they follow the maxim of, as we would say, 'mind over matter' and mean that just as people should be able to control parts of the body, they should also be able to control their social behaviour.

There are, of course, further reasons why the peacemaker draws attention to the stomach or belly. The most obvious is that, as the anthropological literature on witchcraft accusation has demonstrated, people almost universally experience the belly as a seat of particular kinds of anger, such as hate, malice, grudge, spite, envy and vengefulness. It is this 'anger in the stomach' to which most efforts at peace making is addressed. At least this is what we learn from Baldambe's account.

The orator first draws attention to his own stomach and says that it is not black (like 'dark' thoughts of vengeance), not

speckled (like 'mixed' feelings), not brown or yellow (like bile, the fluid secreted by the liver which in English is figuratively used to express peevishness) but pure, completely white like the ox which was slaughtered to seal the peace. By eating together, so the orator continues, the men will become one because in their stomachs they will carry the same substance, the meat of the ox. Not only this, they will become one like the grass, the water and all the different kinds of plants in the ox's stomach. They will mix and become a new substance, which is healthy and protective like chyme. In addition, Baldambe says, that the first things the Bume and Hamar do in order to show their desire for peace, are activities also related to the stomach. That is, the Bume gave food (brought ten sacks of sorghum) to the Hamar, and the Hamar gave food (a biiiiiig pot of honey) to the Bume. The food was then used to prepare beer and honey wine with which the ritual leaders (*bitta*) blessed their former enemies and called forth their well-being: "Bring honey to the Bume *bitta*", said Baldambe's father Berinas, "so that he will call *barjo* for us, the *barjo* of the cattle, of the goats and of the children". Finally, and very importantly, Baldambe explains how the spear is used in peace making. Not a simple spear but a 'rain-spear' was involved in the ceremony, and it was adorned with a branch of the *dongo*-tree and an ostrich feather.

In order to grasp some of the meaning of this, one needs to know that *dongo* (*Cordia ovalis*) provides, together with *baraza* (*Grewia mollis*), the best whipping wands (*michere*) which the Hamar as well as their neighbours use both to herd animals, especially small stock, and to 'herd' (*gisha*) people, especially children, young men and women. The Hamar say that at the top of the *michere* there is butter and honey, meaning that the use of *michere* leads to abundance and well-being. In fact, *michere* are an extension of the human body and in many ways similar to the *dumai*, the right big toe. The *michere* of a person who has *barjo* (luck) will bring him good fortune, like the 'green big toe'. This is why elders often carry *michere*, especially the

very long ones made from *dongo*, and this is why the *dongo* branch gives added magical power to the rain-spear.

Furthermore, from *dongo* come both the drilling sticks with which the Hamar ritually kindle new fires and the charcoal with which they smoke the milk containers. In both instances *dongo* is used for cleansing. Analogically, the *dongo* fastened to the rain-spear is meant to emphasize that the spear should cleanse people and rid the communities of their disease, that is war.

While *dongo* alludes to herding and the domestic sphere, the ostrich feather evokes hunting and the domain of nature. Also, it speaks of the exuberant dancing and feasting which follows the attainment of peace. To create peace always means to renew an embracing harmony with nature, which was spoilt when people killed each other and shed their blood on the ground. The spokesmen blessed the people, the herds and the country using a rain-spear charged with additional symbolic power. But at the same time they used the spear as an instrument to force peace upon the people. As Baldambe said, they put magic into the spear: "*Ai-ai-ai-ai!* Stop it, stop it, stop it! *Bitta* Elto and spokesman Berinas have put magic into the spear".

Here we can see how among the Hamar and their neighbours peace making at times involves something more than the social use of metaphor (Sapir and Crocker 1977), or the persuasive power of tropes (Fernandez 1991). The Bume *bitta* got up and said:

"Bume, in your belly there is war. Do you see this spear? Do you see this big spear?"

"We see it."

"It's blade is big, isn't it?"

"It is big."

"If you should make war, if you should kill the women and children of Berinas, if you should steal his cattle, then this spear will turn back upon you and kill you."

This is indeed a very massive threat and goes beyond the more symbolic images with which the spokesmen at other moments in the peace ceremony try to evoke the possibility of peace. The image of the spear, which can turn back upon you, is more than a simple simile. It evokes in the minds of the speakers and listeners that magic has been put into the spear; magic more powerful than words, for it will kill anyone who would dare to break the peace.

Belief in the magic of the spear is strengthened by experience. As we know, the Bume *bitta* brought two spears saying: "We have used these spears to kill each other. Now Berinas should take one and use it to call forth rain. The '*bitta*' Elto should take the other and bury it in the earth."

The spear given to Elto was buried in the mountains of Hamar where it has remained ever since, and the spear given to Berinas was inherited by his son Baldambe who kept it in his house at Dambaiti, in fact in the house which we used to share together (Lydall/Strecker 1979a). Often I witnessed how Baldambe took this spear in order to participate as a spokesman in public meetings where he eagerly spoke for peace with the Bume and cursed all those who would dare to begin a war with them.

As long as he lived, Baldambe's threat was effective and kept the Hamar and Bume apart. But in March 1995 Baldambe died and was buried in the mountains of Hamar near the grave of his father Berinas. For two more years the old peace between the Hamar and Bume continued, but then, in March 1997 the Bume suddenly attacked the Hamar. The assault was huge and on a scale unprecedented in history. Here I give only the barest outline of what happened.

There had been a prolonged period of drought in 1996-1997. In fact, the drought had been so severe that almost all the water holes in the mountains of Hamar had dried up and most of the grass had perished. Therefore the Hamar had driven all their herds down to the Omo which used to be a large river but now

had almost dried up, providing only a trickle of water for the many animals. The river was easy to ford now, and the large concentration of herds 'in grasping reach', as it were, was extremely tempting for the Bume. Also, they knew that Baldambe had died. Were he still alive, perhaps they would have refrained, but, as the spear was now without its master, they disregarded the magic that had been put into it.

I had just arrived in Hamar when the attack occurred. The drought had ended and there had been heavy rains over the previous days. At night a blanket of clouds covered the whole land in darkness, and it was this darkness, so the Hamar later said, which tempted the Bume to attack. They knew where the main cattle camps of the Hamar were located, they knew approximately how many men were tending the herds, they knew the terrain from hunting and earlier visits to the Hamar, and they knew how and where to ford the river even in the darkness of night.

The Hamar also knew that the Bume might be coming, for the Bume recently had made a minor raid in which they managed to drive away some cattle and had boasted that this was only the beginning, that they would return to 'visit' the Hamar again. Being aware of the danger, the Hamar left their cattle camps at night and hid in the cover of the bush.

Hundreds of Bume crossed the Omo river that night, maybe as many as two thousand, according to the Hamar. They split in to three groups, which were to encircle the Hamar cattle camps, take them by surprise and drive all the herds across the river. But as they were on the way to take their position, some Bume were detected by the Hamar who fired a few shots at them. This sparked off an exchange of fire, not, however, between Hamar and Bume but between the Bume themselves. The darkness of night, which they had thought would protect them, now turned against them and stopped them from realizing that they were shooting, not at the Hamar but at each other.

Armed with newly acquired Kalashnikovs and large amounts of ammunition, the Bume fought a most extraordinary battle amongst themselves through much of the night while the Hamar kept quiet in their hiding. At dawn, when the Hamar returned to their cattle camps and inspected the scene, they found that some of the Bume were dead, others were wounded and guns and ammunition were littering the ground.

At his homestead my friend Choke could hear the fighting all night and was one of the first to get the full news when his friends returned from the cattle camps next morning. Two days later, when Choke gave me an account of the event, he was full with exhilaration and his eyes gleamed, for he knew that I understood the significance of the event, that I knew without saying that here the magic of Baldambe's spear had been active and that the curse which Loteng uttered two generations ago had finally found its target.

### **By way of conclusion**

The aim of this short essay has been to invite the reader to listen to the Hamar and witness their struggle for peace in the face of war. I began with Baldambe's fable of the original safety of Hamar country, a safety both from the threats of the natural world (drought) and the social sphere (war). Then I recalled the large-scale conflicts which in the past three centuries occurred in the Horn of Africa and in many ways also affected the Hamar. After this I outlined the traditional patterns of warfare and showed that in spite of the external incursions the Hamar have upheld much of their old sense of security even until today. It is from this vantage point of original safety that one can understand the various personal thoughts and feelings expressed in the sections 'Witnessing the struggle for peace and the temptations of war' and 'Madness as the ultimate cause of war'.

The final section dealt with an example of collective and ritualised peace making. I examined the rhetoric and magic

involved and tried to show that the peace maker employs three strategies: Firstly he relegates the ultimate cause of war (the mind) to the realm of the unspeakable (see Tyler 1987); secondly he uses his rhetorical skills to address the intermediate cause of war (the body) and makes it the focus of persuasion; and thirdly he turns to the means of war (the weapon) and uses it for magic as the strongest shield against the madness of war.

Embedded in the presentation and interpretation of Hamar discourse was an attempt to articulate my own theoretical position. Following Tyler (1978) and Montague (1994) I argued against determinism and emphasized the need to study war not as a necessity caused by resource competition, cultural differences or other 'hard underlying reasons', but (to paraphrase Spinoza as quoted by Montague 1994: x) by people who wilfully have abandoned "virtue, benevolence, confidence and justice."

