



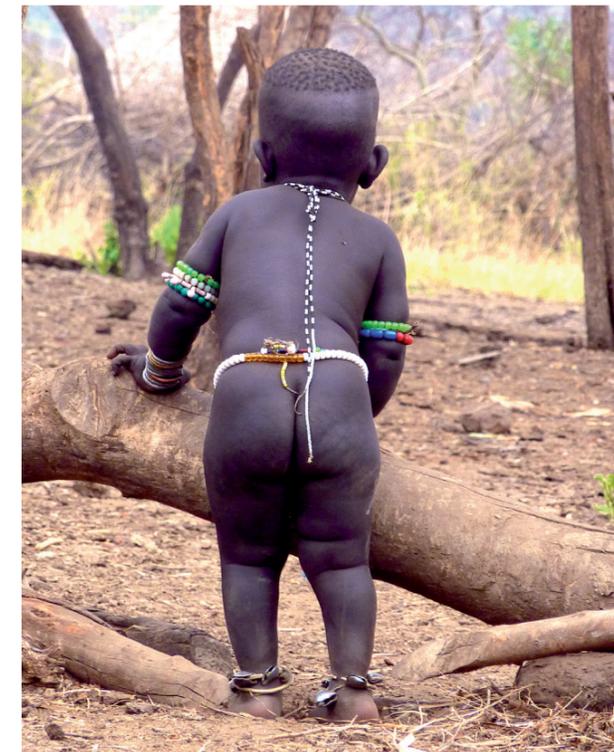
Stine Lise Jørgensen

Ethnographic Reflections on Marriage in Mursi:

A group of transhumant agro-pastoralists in Southwestern Ethiopia

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Stine Lise Jørgensen

Department of Social Anthropology

NTNU

Abstract

This thesis is the outcome of a fieldwork which I carried out among the Mursi people of Southwestern Ethiopia from January until June 2010. The Mursi are transhumant agro-pastoralists and inhabit an area marked by long periods of drought. Over the past few decades they and their neighbors' livelihood have first and foremost been threatened by the growing shortage of water in dry-season grazing areas. As a result there has been a northward migration within Mursiland. Moreover, there are also other underlying factors for the migration, such as intermarriage. In this matter I shortly discuss the various impacts and challenges which the Mursi people face in every day life. However, the main focus for this work is that of kinship and marriage. I argue that Mursi marriage may be looked upon as a total social phenomenon, as all the various institutions within the Mursi society play a part in constituting a Mursi marriage.

The Mursi kinship system is patrilineal, which is ancestor focused, meaning that kin is reckoned through one common male ancestor. However, as the Mursi kinship system is based on classificatory kin relations, there is no socially significant difference between various relations of kin categories. These categories are important in the Mursi bridewealth payments, which is ideally 38 head of cattle for a Mursi woman. The ideal distribution of bridewealth is important in the recurring of kinship ties, as a Mursi man is included in a debt lasting for three generations. I focus on showing how ties of kinship create solidarity between groups, and break down when the bridewealth payment has come to an end. However, the bridewealth rules allow the kinship ties to reappear. I also discuss the importance in cattle and how they are used as a tool in acquiring a wife, not the other way around as the "cattle complex" suggested in East African studies during the 1920s.

Acknowledgements

There are many who deserve to be mentioned in this thesis, as this process has been anything but an individual endeavor. First and foremost, special thanks go to my supervisor Harald Aspen, who has supported me from the beginning, throughout the fieldwork, and to the final result now lay beside me. His comments and guidance have been invaluable for me. I want to thank my fellow students for their support, and intellectual feedback and comments.

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1. Introduction

Looking for a cool place

In its direct sense it is reasonable to admit I was looking for a cool place to do my fieldwork, somewhere I had never been and something I had never done before; something cool. Without cultural guideposts I began my fieldwork among the Mursi of the lower Omo Valley, in South-western Ethiopia. The task of learning the values that others live by is never easy, and once I got to Mursiland it did not seem at all like a cool place, at least as far as the weather is concerned. It was hot and dry, and all the flies could make anyone mad. In the sense of looking for a cool place, I wanted to go somewhere I hardly knew anything about the people, their way of living or their language, a place totally unfamiliar to me. I was soon to learn that looking for a cool place has a different and deeper meaning among the Mursi, but first, who are the Mursi?

The Mursi, are originally transhumant pastoralists numbering around 7500 according to the 2007 statistical report from Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Populations Census Commission (FDRE 2008). However, I choose to refer to them as agro-pastoralists as their main subsistence consists of cultivation, of mainly sorghum and maize, and milk from the cattle. They are isolated in relation to the local administration of the Ethiopian Government as a mountain range, together with the rivers Omo and Mago, frame in the Mursi territory. "Administration in the whole lower Omo region is minimal and virtually non-existent among the Mursi" (Turton 1978: 95). There may have been changes after the Ethiopian People's Revolution Democratic Front came to power in 1991, however as it seemed they were still, in 2010, virtually non-existent. Especially now that a "huge irrigation scheme is planned for the Lower Omo Valley".¹

I quickly learned that life in Mursi was not about something cool like I was prone to think about it. *Looking for a cool place* has a deeper meaning for the Mursi and their present territory, both when it comes to past events and the interpretation of those events (Turton 1988). In a historical perspective, this particular phrase is important in "shaping and legitimizing their response to (...) ecological conditions" (Turton 1988: 261). Since the early 1980's there has been a northward migration of Mursi into the Mago Valley as a strategy for

¹ On Mursi Online one can read about the "announced plans to covert 150 000 ha. of the Lower Omo Valley into irrigated sugar cane plantations (...)" (Mursi Online 2006 onwards; 15.06.11).

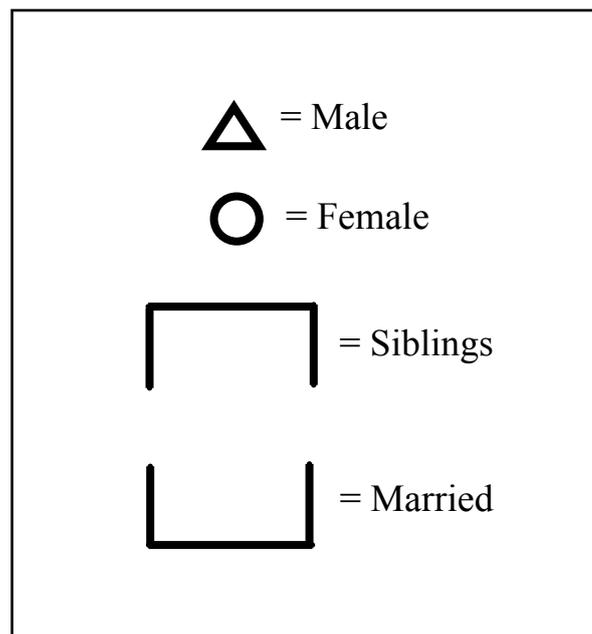
surviving the change in circumstances of drought and famine in the area. The Mursi describe this as ‘looking for a cool place’, and it has indeed become an important part of their history, and in looking for cool and grazing land for their cattle. Turton shows how cultural and historical continuity, summed up in the phrase ‘looking for a cool place’ has resulted in changes, both in territorial composition of their society and the view of themselves. My focus, however, being on marriage, also relates to this saying, as the northward migration is partly because of intermarriage. However, because I have indeed chosen a demanding fieldwork, the title of this thesis mirror the work I have done. And the focus I wish to present is simply based on the ethnographic reflections I have made during this process. Following the Mursi and cattle I aim to show the importance of cattle in almost all social events in Mursi, focusing on those concerning marriage and thus also kinship.

In this study I do not emphasize any one institution such as kinship, economic or political organization. Rather, I will try to show how these institutions are parts of a total. Together, they may be used as a tool of mapping the different meanings within Mursi marriage. Such activities “(...) involve a wide range of meanings which merge” (Beidelman 1971: 1). By using empirical examples of Mursi marriage, I will show how social behavior can be seen within the framework of marriage as a total social phenomenon. It was Mauss (1990 [1923-24]) who originally introduced the *gift* as a total social phenomenon. Later Døving (2002) has described a total social phenomenon, as the various social areas so central that they trigger all the other institutions as for example politics, economy, religious and the juridical. He suggests food to be such a phenomenon, while I however, suggest marriage is such a total social phenomenon because it involves all the institutions of a Mursi society, including that of kinship. As we will see the various institutions within the Mursi society are all part of constituting a Mursi marriage, especially as marriage payments are vital in the exchange for a wife.

I use terms like bridewealth and marriage, and because they are phenomena far from homogeneous, they are in need of an explanation. Bridewealth here refers to the cattle, which a man must transfer to his wife-givers; the kin of the woman he is to establish a relationship with, this relationship usually referred to as marriage. Marriage then, is the transaction where a woman attains the status of a wife, which is socially recognized and proves the task she has in front of her, being a wife to her husband supplying him with her procreative ability. Also, it must be taken into consideration that bridewealth, or marriage payments as I also tend to call

it, must be seen as a range of behavior as we will see in the chapter concerning bridewealth, as it puts a man in debt for three generations when he enters the relationship with his wife.

The Mursi language was until recently not a written language, now orthographies do exist (see Turton, Moges et al. 2008). In my thesis I use many Mursi words in lack of a proper translation. However, some of these words are probably written differently than according to the orthographies. I use the words as I learnt them and wrote them in my field notes. The reader will have to get used to the term *oine*, which is the term of reference for mother's brothers.² In the appendix the reader can find all the listings for kinship terminology and abbreviations, in addition to other tables and lists referred to in the thesis. The symbols below are the key symbols used throughout the thesis; the triangle illustrating a male, and the circle a female. The symbol for siblings is the opposite of that of marriage, however, in figure 6 marriage is indicated with an equal sign (=).



² Throughout the thesis I will use MB, which is short for mother's brothers. These are the men which are classified as ego's mother's brothers.

A reader's guide to the theoretical perspective

I have tried to follow a thread throughout the thesis, and thus I will here give an overview in order to sort the chapters chronically. In that concern I wish to give a guide, which may be useful as the theoretical perspectives have been difficult to follow without a certain background in kinship studies within anthropology.

In chapter two I will give a more thorough description of the Mursi, providing an image of the territory which the Mursi inhabit and the different patterns in which they are organized, I have therefore only briefly mentioned this in the introduction, simply to keep a certain order as it is much information that needs to be specified to give a correct picture of my observations and analysis.

Further I move to chapter three where my methodological reflections will be presented along with field techniques. I will attempt to give an impression of the dynamics between the researcher and the field setting, by trying to take the reader through the rollercoaster of methodological and emotional challenges faced by doing such a fieldwork. I have chosen to write myself into the thesis because I think my fieldwork demands that I do so in order to emphasize the fact that this work is based on a fieldwork starting from scratch. I have largely had to use myself as a tool in gathering information because I was unable to communicate in the Mursi language. I entered the field and was determined on learning the language, and finding a research question as I got to know the Mursi, their way of living and the area in which they inhabit.

Chapter four is largely based on a topic concerning the globalizing impacts on the Mursi and their territory. Unfortunately this topic demands more space than I have dedicated in this thesis, and I have for that reason analyzed and discussed it elsewhere (Jørgensen 2010; 2011). However, related to this topic is that of Mursi and cattle, which leads us to the main focus in this chapter, which is on the Mursi economy, as it is indeed one of the important institutions constituting a Mursi marriage. I also draw attention towards old ethnological work from African studies during the 1920s, when anthropologists looked upon the world as consisting of different cultural groups. Each of these cultural groups had its cultural complex, and so I use Herskovits (1926; 1928a; 1928b; 1928c) in showing how the cattle complex was a common way of exploring the "obsession" with cattle that seemed to be the case among many East African herders. I suggest turning around what has been known as the cattle complex;

instead of seeing women as a tool of getting cattle, I will show, as we move on to chapters five and six, how the cattle are vital in acquiring wives.

Chapter five is thus a presentation of some of the theoretical perspectives needed in order to analyze the most important transaction a Mursi will ever be part of, the bridewealth transaction. Here I will be concerned with kinship studies and the challenges with it, within anthropology. In addition I have attempted to give the reader an introduction to kinship and its various systems, including that of the Mursi, which will be important to get familiar with before going into the details in the next chapter.

Finally, in chapter six I have made an attempt to clarify the rules of bridewealth distribution in order to show how the cattle on the one hand function as a connecting link between kinship ties; both consanguine and affinal ties. And on the other hand, the cattle also function as a tool in getting wives rather than it being the other way around. When a Mursi man marries, he gives away a large number of cattle, considering that the ideal bridewealth for a Mursi wife consists of 38 head of cattle, and the average number of cattle is only one cow per person. The Mursi bridewealth is therefore high, compared to other cattle herders who might have a higher number of cattle per person. By presenting the rules of bridewealth distribution I attempt to explore the suggestion made in chapter four; by turning around the cattle complex and showing how the cattle can provide a man with wives (without, of course, making it a wife complex).

Lastly, in chapter seven I have made a summary of my findings and some concluding thoughts.

2. The Mursi



Map 1: The Mursi and their neighbors (Mursi Online © 2006-2007)

Mursi territory is oblong shaped and surrounded by the river Omo reaching from north-west to south-west, the river Mago to the east, and the seasonal river Mara to the north, which is a westward flowing tributary of the river Omo (see also e.g. Turton 1988). Looking at map 1 we can see Jinka to the northeast, which is the nearest town to Mursiland. A dirt road

connecting Jinka and Mursiland, however, most Mursi settlements are located in good distance from the road. To see things in perspective, the southern Mursis have about three and

a half days walk to Jinka, and the northerners about one day walk. Marege, the first Mursi settlement where I stayed, was located fairly close to the river Mara, which was only appearing as a small pond the time I was staying there, because of the long period of drought that had been lasting for about three years upon my arrival. In order to get to Marege from Jinka, there are the options of taking an irregularly Isuzu truck, or renting a four-wheel drive, and the road will only take you half the way into Mursiland. Going to Marege was a three-four hour car ride, and then an hour walk westwards. During the second half of my fieldwork, when staying in the settlement of Ulum Holi, further south, we had a three to four hour walk from the road. Communications network, such as the mobile, had not expanded to Mursi at the time of my fieldwork, and only radio connection with Jinka was possible at two locations in Mursiland.

Their economy is based on cultivation and cattle herding. In chapter 4 however, I will present a few points about a possible change and a future shift in the Mursi economy. The cattle are also an important source to milk, blood and meat, and function also as the main food source in times of drought, as it can be exchanged with grains in highland markets, such as in Jinka. When the main rains arrive and crops are a success, cultivation accounts for over half the diet, and consists of mainly sorghum and maize. Beans, pumpkins and chickpeas are also among the seasonal food sources.

There are two harvests each year; hoe-cultivation which takes place between February and March, and flood retreat cultivation, which takes place between October and November. Because of the variation in the level of the annual Omo and Mago floods, the Mursi are forced to integrate in seasonal movements, moving for grazing land. During my relatively short fieldwork time of six months, they were only living at one place, and it seemed like their settlements were built for more long-term purpose as their huts were more solid and not as easily erected as their previous dome or igloo shaped huts covered with grass only. One can still find settlements consisting of such huts; they might be more temporary settlements, than the ones I have stayed in. I believe that my family in Marege was living and cultivating there during the months from February until harvest in June. Then I believe they were moving to and planting along the Omo between October and November, to see the harvest come in

January, if the crop succeeded. While we were cultivating in Marege between February and March, the men were in cattle camps, where they kept most of the cattle in open wooden grasslands. This is a regular procedure in order to find good grazing land for the cattle. The rest of the cattle were herded together by the older boys, approximately for twelve hours each day in the Marege area.

Even if the Mursi are on the move regularly, it seemed like their settlements were built for more permanent residence as their huts were of solid wooden structures as shown in the photo below.



Photo: Stine Lise Jørgensen, March 2010

Leadership

The only formally defined role of leadership in Mursi society is that of a *komoru* (priest). This is an inherited role and principally of ritual and religious significance. Men, never women, exercise political and public leadership.

Another position of high importance among the Mursi is that of the *jalaba*. Through personal qualities and oratorical skills Mursi men can achieve a position of influence in the community. As a *jalaba*, they have earned their respect through contributions to public meetings or debates that are valued by the community (Turton 1992: 174).

Age system

Age systems also play an important role in Mursi society, as it is the senior elders who are expected to take the leading roles in public decision-making. As amongst other herders across

Ethiopia Mursi men are organized into age-sets, as a mode of social organization, which is prominent in parts of East Africa, though age-setting as a phenomenon is widespread geographically (Baxter and Almagor 1978: 2). During the course of their lives, Mursi men have to pass through a number of age-grades, and if they are married their wives inherit their age-grade status³ (see also e.g. Turton, Moges et al. 2008). To make it clear, an age-set consists of a group of men who are introduced to youth during a specific span of time. As a group they share certain restrictions and expectations to go by for the rest of their lives. Age-grade refers to a status a person passes through during his life, while an age-set refers to a group or a category of men (Turton 1978: 104).

By becoming a member of an age-set a man attains the status of full social adulthood. Even if he has reached physical maturity a long time ago, this membership might not occur until long after he is married. Men who become members of the most recent set to be formed, engage in the grade of *rora* (junior elders). These men are considered to have an authority among the Mursi, they are the Mursi "police"⁴. However, when a new set is formed, the men who are *rora* become *bara* (senior elders), and the previous *bara* become *karui* (retired elders). The *bara* men are in an authority position, which allows them to make the final decisions in cases concerning the public well of the Mursi, they also have the authority over the *rora*. The retired *karui* are the "supervisors" of public decision-making and can give advise during decisions or cases to be solved.⁵

Local groups

Stick fights (*donga*), or ceremonial duelling, is a popular activity among the Mursi, where only men, especially young, unmarried men from the *teru* or *rora* age-grades participate in the actual stick fight. Women and children are participating on the sideline watching and singing for the men belonging to their local group. This ceremony, like the lip-plate is also a key marker of Mursi identity.

³ Interview with Milisha Olibui, Makki June 2010

⁴ Interview with Milisha Olibui, Makki June 2010

⁵ Interview with Milisha Olibui, Makki June 2010

Donga (stick fight) tournaments are organized all over Mursiland between the different territorial groups (see map 2 below). Stick fights may be thought of as a ceremony for the young men to find their future spouse. Mursi men have long been known for their *dongas*, which is also characteristic for some of the neighboring ethnic groups, like the Surma. By using a *donga* (long wooden stick), they fight one to one. These *Dongas* are organized when a region decides to challenge another, as Mursiland is divided into three regions, and five smaller, local groups (see map 2 below).



Men from different local groups of the population join in these powerful combats, using a *donga* and protective clothing. Photo: Stine L. Jørgensen, May 2010

Map 2 shows the Mursi population as it is divided into five local groups. These are the sections where the members of each group practice flood cultivation by the Omo every year.⁶ From north to south; Baruba, Mugjo, Biogolokare, Ariholi and Gongulobibi, where the three former groups are different sub-units of the Dola. Baruba, Mugjo and Biogolokare are the most recent formed groups within Mursi territory. It is therefore not possible to draw clear boundaries between the different groups, their members do not live within clearly bounded

⁶ Mursi Online: http://www.mursi.org/images/map-04.gif/image_view_fullscreen

territorial units as they move back and forth. In other words "they have territorial foci, rather than territorial boundaries."⁷



Map 2: Local groups (Mursi Online © 2006-2007)

The stick fights are not only held for the sake of sports. It also allows the young men participating to show off for the young women. The *Dongas* are big events of the year and the atmosphere is magical. Over the years there has been a process of a northward expansion (see e.g. Turton 1979; 2005) from south to north, mainly through intermarriage; allowing the ties

⁷ Mursi Online: <http://www.mursi.org/local-groups-bhuranyoga>

of clanship and affinity, with its economic cooperation and exchange to cut across local group boundaries.

Mursi and the outside world

Many young Mursis are attending schools outside of Mursiland because of the local mission station's effort in establishing an institution of education in the northern region of Mursiland. Even if they only educate in grades 1 through 4, many youngsters get the chance to attend boarding schools in Jinka or other towns in the southern region of Ethiopia.

Also there is a website, Mursi Online (2006 onwards) which are run to inform the outside world about the Mursi as a people, and challenges they face towards the Ethiopian government and the surrounding environment. I will be concerned with some factual situations throughout this thesis. The website is a great informative as, especially tour operators, intentionally portray the Mursi and lip-plates as a symbol on "primitiveness" in order to promote tourism to the area. This does a disfavor both to the Mursi and the tourists, as it creates an incorrect image of both sides. The website also keep updates and newsfeed of the latest news concerning the Mursi and the surrounding area. This means a lot in a global perspective as it is an important link between the so-called "isolated" and the globalized world. The website is indeed a connection between the two, and I would argue the information presented are invaluable for the representation of the Mursi. It is then a pity that the Mursi elsewhere are presented as primitive, when the significance behind their history has a much deeper meaning.

3. Methodological reflections

Embodying the field, rather than seeing only the connection between anthropological methodology and theory has been the key to information in my fieldwork; focusing on being with the Mursi, living with them and spend all my time in the field trying to see every aspect of Mursi life. Though this was impossible in such a short span of time, my goal was to try to contextualize the rules of marriage from their perspective and point of view. Thus I spent the first month of fieldwork observing and participating, without speaking a word of the Mursi language. With body language as the only mutual form of communication, my data was mainly based on observation and participant observation. Later, I was to learn that I had made some misconceptions, which I was able to correct as I spent time with the Mursi and learning the language. I was able to have very simple conversations, and most importantly explore all the questions, which emerged in the beginning.

During the first month in the field, I lived in a village called Marege, not far from the river Mara (see map 1 and 3). Since I did not have an interpreter with me, I did not do any interviews during this field period. My data collecting is thus based on observations and participant observation, which became my most important tools for information at that time.

By stepping into a status as my host mother Ngatulage's daughter, I was participating, and by the status of a researcher I was observing – hence, participant observation. I will go further into details below, discussing the issue of positioning in the field. Some recordings were done, which I have been able to translate and transcribe later. Keesing describes a classic fieldwork situation as one where:

“one cannot learn a local language in advance, and little is known of society and culture, a field worker's place and tasks are in many ways more like those of an infant. Like an infant, the anthropologist does not understand the noises, visual images, the smells that carry rich meanings for the people being studied. (...) a lot of practice, and a lot of mistakes enable one to begin to make sense of the scenes and events of this new cultural world. But the anthropologist is not an infant, (...) the fieldworker has adult competence (though only partial in a jungle or desert) and can often use an interpreter (...). The difficulty is that the anthropologist, unlike the infant, already knows a native language and set of patterns for thinking, perceiving, and acting” (Keesing 1981: 6).

An anthropologist has to organize the knowledge from an already existing perspective, and then interpret the new experiences. These will always be interpreted on basis of what the researcher already is familiar with (Keesing 1981: 6). Keesing is here speaking of a longer fieldwork of at least one year, ideally longer where it is possible to make several trips. There

is always a question of how deep understanding one can get. An anthropologist will always be an outsider even if he or she gets the feeling of acceptance, and bonding on different levels. Because my lack of knowledge in the Mursi language and difficulties in finding an interpreter, the data collected is heavily based only on observations and participating in the daily life. While on the second half I got to explore various methods of data collecting within anthropology as I had help to translate.

The second half of my fieldwork was spent in the settlement of Ulum Holi, together with PhD student Kate Fayers-Kerr, who helped me translate during interviews, as she was also conducting her field research in Mursi. I was able to use other techniques with the privilege of having a translator, such as role-play and interviewing. Role-play was a good method in getting the interviewees interested in my questions, especially the men. By giving them different roles, we made a scene where we played a meeting concerning the distribution of bridewealth and the ceremonies connected with a Mursi marriage. As the men enjoy playing games when they are not working and have some time off, it was much easier to catch their time and attention when we made it into a play or a game. At the same time we used stones when we were talking about cows, as this is a common way for the Mursi men to discuss cow business.⁸ I had a little bag I carried with me at all times, containing a tape recorder, a pencil, a small notebook, and about 30 small stones as a symbol for the 38 head of cattle an ideal bridewealth consists of. In this way I was always prepared to ask questions concerning marriage and the distribution of bridewealth if the occasion allowed it. Photographing has been an important part of gathering and keeping information. The camera lens helped me remembering names and details in situations where I was not able to write detailed notes. However, the camera was not always appreciated by the Mursi, adults were often obviously annoyed with me, and some asked me for money, as many of them knew they would get money for photographs from tourists. I did not feel comfortable taking photographs when I was not able to explain the use of them, but it seemed like they were appreciated when they got to hold on to the photos as I had developed them during breaks from the field.

Doing fieldwork for the first time, either in familiar or unfamiliar settings, there are certain barriers the fieldworker needs to get over. Various barriers can be such as interviewing for the

⁸ Kate Fayers-Kerr, in personal communication, May 2010.

first time, using a tape recorder, or simply asking certain questions. These may seem like the simplest things, but sometimes they may be very challenging in the beginning. Getting used to being in the field as a researcher, using the various methods for data collecting, it can be useful to do a simple indicator survey, to get a feeling of how to gather and use the data collected. The survey ought to be designed and used as an instrument that may contribute to data collection activities, however one may find the data insufficient. If, for various reasons, the data turns out insufficient, I would still argue for its importance in getting to know the field and the position as a researcher better. Recordings and simple drawings and questions about the people living in the settlements became my way of showing the Mursi that I wanted to learn and get to know them, as I could not explain to them what I was doing there. I did simple surveys in the two settlements where I spent most of my time, helping me getting to know the people and the various settlements better. During the very first meeting with the field and the settlement of Marege, I started off by drawing simple pictures of the settlement, including the huts, a man, a woman, a boy, a girl and livestock, which were in this case cows and goats. Then I sat down with one of my neighbors asking how many of each.

During the second half of my fieldwork, in the settlement of Ulum Holi, my language skills improved, and having Kate helping me with translating, the more thorough information I got. In Ulum Holi I also tried to get an overview of which clan and descent groups people belonged to. However, due to not asking some of the right questions, the survey is still in lack of some information. The point here is simply to show how such a survey can easily be used to gather essential information, in this case in getting a somewhat overview of household patterns in relation to clanships and descent. The survey information is inadequate because of the small amount of people involved. However, it was a helpful method in order to reflect upon the further information gathered. The illustration below shows how the settlement of Ulum Holi is set up, with a total of twenty huts; indicated with circles with numbers. The dotted circles illustrate the calves' huts. I have not marked off the compound boundaries or the enclosures for the cattle. The settlement of Ulum Holi consisted of eight compounds, varying from one hut up to five huts in each compound. I have tried to indicate each compound with simply leaving an open space between them. In the large space in the middle was a big discussion tree, which was used as shade during discussions of public matter to the settlement. This was also the space in which men were playing games, and sleeping when they did not sleep inside the hut. The important matter of point here is that using such a survey method was a useful source of getting an overview on clans and descent groups in the

settlement. The complete list of clans and descent groups can be found in appendix 4. The figure below gives an overview on how the settlement of Ulum Holi was organized.

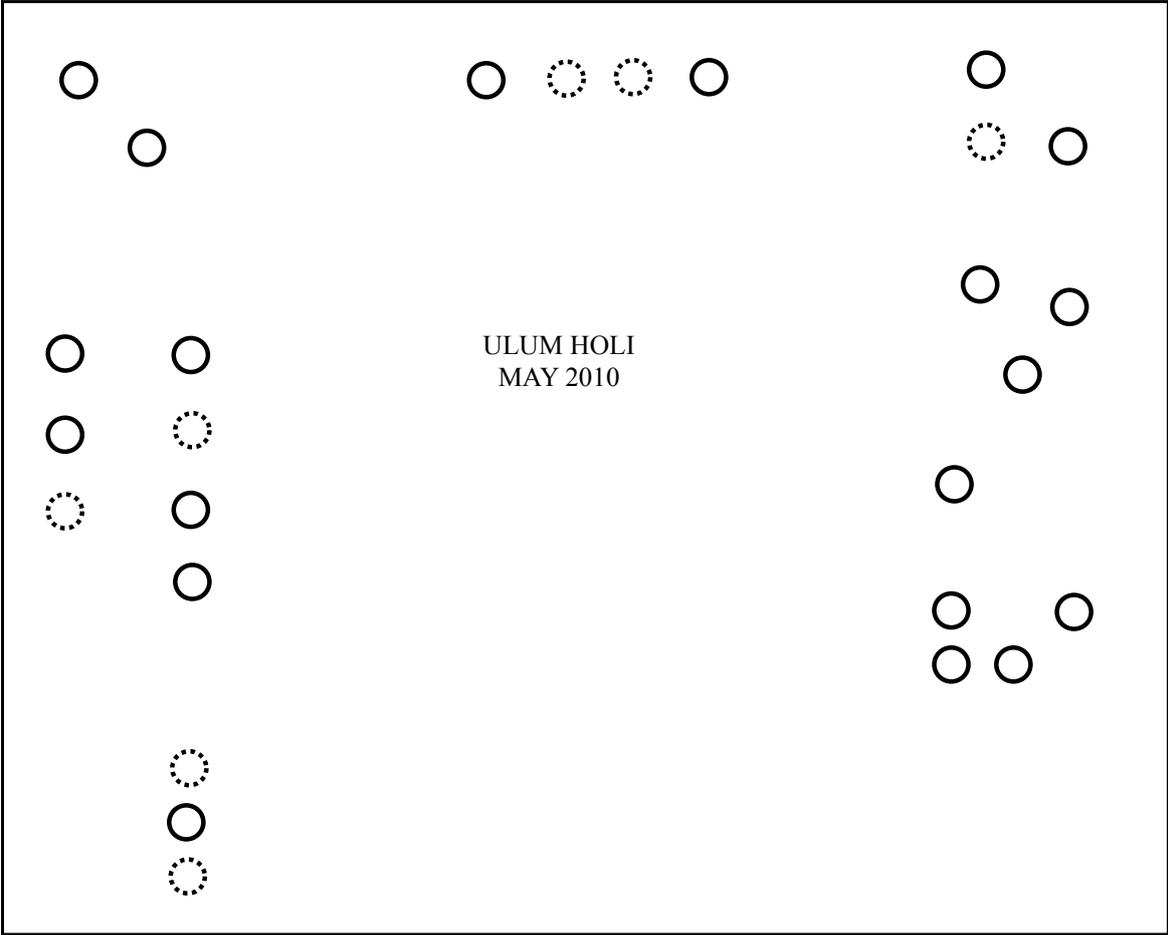


Figure 1: Survey, Ulum Holi, May 2010

Depiction of the setting – meeting with field

Arriving in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia January 2010, I immediately began the work on sorting out the research permit and an affiliation with the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) at Addis Ababa University (AAU). As it was difficult to get a 3-month visa due to strict visa regulations in times of state elections, getting a residence permit for 6 months was the best alternative, as they were then sure about my status as a student. An affiliation with the IES was needed in order to get access to the library at AAU and South Omo Research Center and museum (SORC) in Jinka, where I was based when I was not in Mursi. Having dealt with bureaucracy for over two weeks in Addis Ababa, I finally had all the papers needed, and

could start the two-day journey down south, to the town of Jinka and South Omo Research Center. Jinka is the closest market town, located about 3-days walk from Mursi territory.

While waiting for my papers to get ready, and as I worked on preparations for the field, I learnt that the topic which I had chosen to focus on, tourism and its effects on Mursi, was indeed too large for an MA.

I spent some time at the University Library for Social Anthropology at AAU, at the same time I also had the privilege of having conversations with Professor Ivo Strecker, researcher and founder of SORC, who was very kind to give me advice concerning my fieldwork. He led me in the direction of finding a topic, which allowed me to build on and complement the work already done by other researchers working on the Mursi. Thus, I decided to enter the field open minded and with the methodology of simply going with the flow.

Once in Jinka I began making contacts and working on the logistics of getting to Mursiland. Through Kate Fayers-Kerr, also working on Mursi, I got in touch with Ulikibo, a young Mursi man who later became my host brother. Ulikibo lived in Jinka, and he also ran his own business from there (he was trading maize at the time). His plan was to save enough money to buy a truck for his business, so that it would be easier for him to get to and from Mursi in the future. He was one out of approximately 500 Mursi people to be integrated in the society outside of Mursiland.⁹ Ulikibo speaks Amharic, which is the official language in Ethiopia. Therefore, we have been able to communicate with each other through some of the Amharic-English speaking staff at the museum when Kate has not been available to translate. I will get back to Ulikibo's status as my field assistant and host brother, though I prefer to refer to him as my host brother as I stayed with his mother in the village Marege.

Ethiopia is divided into nine regional states. These states are divided into zones and they are again divided into districts. Mursiland lies within the Sala Mago district in the South Omo Zone. Jinka, even though not very big, is the capital of this area, being a market town and center for the people living in the South Omo Zone. When it comes to the two main settlements where I spent most of the time while I was in the field, they were respectively

⁹ The number of Mursi people living in "urban" areas of Ethiopia was 448 in 2007, according to the Population and Housing Census report (FDRE 2008). However it is reason to believe that the number probably has increased as the mission station located in the northern area of Mursiland sends Mursi youngsters to Ethiopian schools, mainly in the Southern region of Ethiopia.

Merege in the North West area, about a day's walk from Jinka, and Ulum Holi in the South Eastern area of Mursiland, about a three day walk from Jinka, lying North East of Mursiland.

My first meeting with the Mursi was the small settlement of Marege. I was full of emotions, excitement, joy and anxiety as Ulikibo and I reached the settlement where I was going to stay for the next month. We had walked for an hour from Magantu, the nearest settlement to have road connection. I had insisted on carrying my own backpack, and later I learnt that was a correct move as it would have been embarrassing for a woman not to be able to carry her own things.

I was soaking wet from the heat, one could see the haze over the sandy bank as we walked up the last hill before reaching the village. Not a single gust of air, every breath burned my throat. Only the sound of grasshoppers was heard, it took me a while to recognize the smell of clay. Once we came closer one could see children running around playing and laughing. A constant even beat of a sound, and women humming. We could only hear them. The children playing outside the settlement did not notice us at first. Once they saw me, the children's laughter changed into tears, and the sound of women humming and grinding stopped! We walked into one of the compounds. For a minute, everything was just silent! Some of the women and older children came closer to have a look to see who this stranger was. They were curious. Now everyone dropped what they were doing, and came to greet us, the terrified children were hiding behind their mothers' legs.

It was mid-day, we sat down around the fireplace outside Ulikibo's mother's hut, there was no fire. An elder woman, whom I later learnt was my host mother's sister, Ngahamen, welcomed us by drawing three stripes of ashes on our forehead to take away drops of sweat, and to send away the bad spirits we might have taken with us from *ba harangi* (the land of the foreigners). I introduced myself as Ngateri, the Mursi name Ulikibo had given me a few days before. "Nga" is the meaning of a woman or new, while "teri" means grass or the color green - "New Grass". Ulikibo thought it was more proper than Stine, also it was easier to pronounce. I was very happy with my new name, and thought it was quite right fitted for me, though most people laughed when I presented myself. Probably because they did not expect the *harangi* to have a Mursi name.

As I understood very little of the Mursi language at the time, I got an unpleasant feeling of being a nuisance as my host mother had a worried look on her face as the conversations

sounded somewhat aggressive. Until this day, I do not know if they really were bothered with having me there or if it was simply a common feeling I may share with fellow researchers coming to a new place for the first time. As I got to know my host mother, or Mama, as I called her, I could see the twinkle in her eyes when she showed me how to do things like a Mursi, or the frustration when I could not eat the food.

Four different compounds formed the Marege settlement, with a small distance between each of the compounds. The settlement where my host mother's hut was located, was formed by thirteen mud huts, including the ones for the calves and goats. There were only women and children present. All the men had gone to cattle camp in the mountains where there is rich land for the cows. Cattle camps normally take place between October and February.

After Ulikibo had said a few words concerning my presence in the settlement, he went in Mama's hut to sleep. I found myself alone with about 30 Mursi women and children who wanted to look at me and touch me. They were laughing while they drew their fingers through my pony tale and eyelashes; especially interesting was my lean bosom. They wanted to see what I was hiding underneath the clothes. I showed them, they got a good laugh and said *maddi ninge* (you have no breasts)! I explained to them with the few simple words I could that I am not hiding anything; it is just my way of dressing. Some of them had been in Jinka at the markets, and in that way seen local Ethiopians and other "foreigners" way of dressing. The Mursi can tell, by looking at a woman's breasts, her experience in life; whether she has married and had children. The women went back to their work, while the children were still sitting, preferably on top of me, teaching me games and songs.

After a while I went to sit with the women, watching and learning how to grind, they insisted I do my share of grinding. They burst out into laughter when they saw my "outstanding" grinding technique, which they were not too happy with and told me to sit in the shade and relax instead. As I tried my best to participate in the women's work, I found myself ever more playing with the children, teaching them Norwegian songs and games, while they were eager to teach me Mursi games and songs.

Food resources were very rich in the area at the time, but the daily nutrition is simple and consists mainly of *ur-a-lisa* (sour milk), *ur-a-chala* (fresh milk) for the children, and *tila* (porridge) *ko kinui* (with green leaves). The porridge was mostly eaten two times a day

(sometimes only once a day), and is made out of either sorghum or maize flour. For breakfast the porridge was eaten with sour or fresh milk, and for supper with sour milk or *kinui* (boiled green leaves). This latter dish, the *kinui*, tastes best when meat is available. Depending on availability and resources, access to food varies. Due to government restrictions in the Omo and Mago national parks, where the Mursi and other ethnic groups are located, limited space for crops and grazing land have been brought on by the government and food aid has been pledged. Many Mursi are dependent on this, especially right before harvest time, though, they prefer the food made with their own hands. This will be further discussed in chapter 4.

During the second half of my fieldwork I spent most of the time in Ulum Holi, which was a little bigger than Merege, with twenty huts, not included the ones for the animals. These twenty huts were divided on several compounds formed as a horseshoe (see figure 1). Six additional huts formed a small satellite village nearby (not illustrated). While in Ulum Holi, as I got to know the language and culture better, I was able to catch and participate in various social happenings and correct some of the misconceptions made during the first period in the field.

After having observed and participated in several healing ceremonies, it was not until later I was able to understand what the ceremonies were. I had for instance observed, and also received a healing treatment for my stomachaches, without understanding why there was only women performing these procedures. Nor did I understand the meaning behind it. However, as I understood more of the language, and having help with translating I was able to understand that some Mursi women can be a *ngerrêa*, meaning they are healing women (Fayers-Kerr n.d.). In order to take my pain away the *ngerrêa* stroke her hands in systematic motions from the top of my stomach and back area down towards the ground, and blowing while making a soft whistle sound. I understood that this was done on several occasions, when people were sick. When I witnessed the killing of a cow I did not understand it was for healing purposes and that the cow was offered. By observing and participating in healing ceremonies in Ulum Holi I learnt that the meat was divided among people in the family and settlement, and a broth was made for the person who was ill. When old Arsigolony in our village was losing his hearing and eyesight, we gathered for a healing ceremony where a cow was offered and Arsigolony himself painted us with clay by soaking his fingers in clay mixed with water, drawing his fingers over our faces from the forehead down, and from our shoulders down the chest.

The ecology of survival

What has fascinated me about the Mursi way of life is the way they make use of the nature. Except for a few articles, they live only of what can be found in the nature. Cooking equipment is made of different kinds of wood or bones, except the aluminum kettle used to cook the porridge. I ascribed myself one daily task; wiping the hut, with some branches I bound together into a nice broom. They light a fire by stroking a piece of wood against a stone. Grass/dried grass and cattle urine were used to clean the eating and drinking gourds. Children's toys were seasonal and made of different sorts of trees, dung and mud, or fruits. During the rainy season different sorts of materials were available for making toys to play with. They had their own kind of chewing gum. When peeling off a piece of a special kind of tree it was excellent for chewing on and had a special mild and juicy taste to it; this same material is also good for making rope. Another kind of tree is good for cleaning teeth. Ashes and a fruit named *lomai*, a citrus fruit, were used to clean wounds and cuts. The *lomai* was also good for making a whirligig when a stick was put through. Grass or nicely shaped round stones were used as wipes for the babies.

Challenges – in sickness and in health

Throughout most of my fieldwork I was struggling with illness; as I got sick already in Jinka, I was not feeling very well when I first came to Marege. I lost some weight during the first week because I could not keep any nutrition. Natulage, my host mother, got worried and did not know what good she could do for me, she then tried to feed me as much as possible as she was afraid I would get malaria. The last three weeks of my first field period I had to eat all day! The “food situation” really grew from being a positive experience into a big problem, because I would get bad stomach aches. Another problem was the sour milk, I had a hard time drinking it, and fresh milk was also hard in the beginning. Because milk constitutes a large part of the nutrition per day, I had to get used to it at some point or another. The meals in Mursi are what I would call a rather aggressive affair. The food is to be eaten quickly and as much as you can possible eat at the time. Mama would shout at me “*ba tila...kop kop kop*” - “eat your porridge, quickly!” while raising her hand with a small stick. This was also a method they used to get the children to drink their milk, although I am sure it was only meant as a mocking joke, as I probably acted a little bit as a child not eating fast enough.

After one month in the field I was still struggling with illness, and left for SORC and medical

treatment in Jinka. When I did not get any better I went to Addis Ababa, where I started yet another treatment and took some time off to recover. It turned out the treatments was not helping, almost a month had passed, and despite the fact that I was still feeling ill, I had to go back to the field, as I was running out of time. My body felt tired both physically and emotionally. Because of my health condition I decided to spend the last six weeks in the field with Kate, when she offered me to stay with her in Ulum Holi. As far as my health is concerned, I was still sick when I finished my fieldwork in June. Unfortunately this took a lot of valuable time, but I do feel that I managed to spend the time I had in the field as well as I could, finding a balance between resting and working.

Unknown territory

Working with the Mursi in this way offers many challenging moments both when it comes to patience and the wide context of understanding. Although I spent a lot of time preparing for the field; theoretically, practically and emotionally, I could not be a hundred percent prepared for what was expecting me, as I had not been in contact with any Mursi before I left to Ethiopia. It was when I met Kate that she put me in contact with Ulikibo, who then put me in touch with contacts in Mursiland. No matter how much practical preparation I had done beforehand, I could never know how the Mursi people would react on my presence, and what was expected of me as a guest and a researcher. These were things I had to learn by doing, and also an important part of the process in doing fieldwork on an MA level.

As already described above, the Mursi greeted me with the kindest welcome as I showed up with no warning in advance. Though Ulikibo had invited me to stay with his mother, I am not sure they were expecting me. What I was not prepared for was their direct and honest way of approaching, something which took me a while to get used to. Also my little knowledge of their language had also its impacts on my understanding of what was said and done. As for example every time they would ask something from me, it felt like they were asking me to give them the whole world. They asked for my shirt, my shorts, my shoes; even my hair would do a good *masai* (rope). Every time I would say no, then they walked off, either laughing or very disappointed in me. Now, when I think about it, I have a feeling that I misunderstood many of the occasions when I thought they were asking me for things. For a whole month I thought the boys were asking me if I could give them my watch, as they came up to me and admired my watch, looking at it. I had probably misunderstood what they were saying the whole time as I thought they were asking what it was, and if I could give it to them

later when I left. I tried to explain to them it was something we used to tell what time it was. Of course they knew what a watch was, and every time they asked what time it was, and probably what time it was in my country, I kept answering annoyed: “I only have one!” It was not until later I realized they had been asking me what time it was, probably laughing with amusement of the girl whose time was always one o’clock.

At all hours they would ask for something, at least that was how it felt like. Once my host mother woke me in the middle of the night, it must have been around 2 am, she was one who had never asked anything from me. She kindly asked if we had chickens were I come from, then she followed by asking if I could buy her a chicken. Sometimes women would ask for my water, they would come to look at it and taste it, even if they knew it was fetched from the same water source as their own water. I do not know why they acted like this, but it seemed they were asking from each other as well. Whether it has to do with trust and the acknowledging of friendship, or if it simply has to do with tourism’s impact on the Mursi I do not know, all I know is that it was many times hard to handle as it was exhausting, especially not being able to communicate properly or to be in private. As I was living in the field, there was never an opportunity to get a break and “refresh”.

For an anthropologist fieldwork involves living with the people among whom one wants to do research. This is one of the most important sources of collecting information about the specific topic one is interested in. Yet a big challenge for me was to be around people constantly, and being up for anything at any time. It was very little time to withdraw, to write up notes and gather thoughts. If I went inside the hut there was always someone following me, they could sit and stare at me for hours; this was mostly during the first month when I did not know a nice way of telling them to leave me alone. Still, when I was able to express myself properly in their language, it was sometimes difficult to get some time for oneself.

Perspectives on life in the field

Ellen describes the fieldwork as a rite of passage where: “(...) material theories are developed and ideas are tested; by “doing” fieldwork new anthropologists undergo a rite-de-passage, living and participating in alien cultures and thereby are admitted into the discipline” (Ellen 1984: 35). Fieldwork is a process of learning, especially when doing fieldwork as part of an MA. Not only have I experienced the discipline of anthropology, I have also become experienced in life and in how to do research. Also, it gave me the chance to see the complex

world I normally live in, and all the luxury problems that follow with it, from the outside. Worries like exercising, bad hair days and catching the bus were easily forgotten, and the most important task of the day was about finding food and preparing the day's meal(s).

The feeling of being hungry and thirsty took place in my body for real, when eating five times a day suddenly was not an option. During the last field period, in Ulum Holi, the food situation was not quite as good as in Marege, as it was getting closer to harvest and food supplies were poor. Because Kate and I had come with a lot of equipment and supplies needed to do our work, this was kept inside the hut that we shared. This may have been a reason for why our host family sometimes hesitated to give us porridge, though there was enough food for everyone to have at least one proper meal a day. They may have been under the belief that we were hiding away food we did not share – the fellowship between us was tested and thus became a little strained. Sometimes, there was only fresh and sour milk available for us. Working under such circumstances was hard, luckily the water resource was a little better in Ulum Holi than in Marege, and we had easy access to drinkable water.

When I was working in Marege, it was the dry season, and the water situation was a little tougher than during my last field period in Ulum Holi. When I got back to the research center after having spent a month in the field, with water only enough for drinking and cooking, I really needed a shower, as I had not been able to wash my hair and hardly felt water on my body in a month! It had its advantages, of course, which I was very happy with. I did not need to wear sunscreen for instance, because my skin was dirty all the time, the sun could not get through to burn it. Neither did I have to put on lotion or other things I am normally depending on. Water is precious. The constant feeling of being thirsty, or walking for half a day, only to find a small pond, then carrying your water home, makes one think and it puts things in perspective. My favorite part of the day was when the sun had set and the constant summing of the flies were gone, we had just finished the last meal of the day, and were laying on a cow hide around the fire, watching the stars, singing my favorite Mursi song until we fell asleep. It was my favorite part of the day, because for a little while I was able to forget how thirsty I was, and for a little while I could close my eyes and just be in the moment.

I thought I was in quite good shape after many hours at the gym. It did not take me long to discover I was wrong! The Mursi women and girls were strong; they carried between 30 and 40 liter of water in one go, even if the water source was at a great distance. After having been three days in Marege, I was panicking because my 10 liter jerry can with water, which I had

brought with me, was getting empty. I was very happy to hear that my host sister, Ngatui (whom I have estimated to be around 14-15 years old) was going to the river to fetch water! I begged her to take me with her, and though she really hesitated she agreed. I started off in good spirit with my empty jerry can in one hand and a stick in the other, to keep the herd of calves we brought along. After 5 minutes I had lost two calves, and decided to rather focus on stepping one foot in front of the other in the rough terrain. After an hour, we reached the river. Wondering eyes, laughing mouths and pointing fingers were many around me, as I used my shirt to filter the water filling the jerry can. Reflecting upon this almost a year after coming home from the field I realize there were many codes that needed to be broken.

“There must be something else I can do then”, I thought, and tried, once again, to grind the grain, which was one of the main activities during the day in order to get flour for the porridge. I could not get the flour fine enough. It was March, and season for planting, as the big rains had come in February. When I got to Marege in February I found that Mama was working on burning off her cultivation land. “Burn off cultivation land! I can do that, no problem!” It was soon to be discovered that there was one problem. Before one could burn off the land, it needed to be “weeded”, and after having swung the *banka* (machete) a couple of times during a short half an hour, my hands were full of blisters! Well, so was I a hopeless case of a woman, and I found myself, yet again, watching Mama work. “She really is pure muscle power that woman, and her work morals remind me quite of my fathers’,” I thought to myself as I sat on a hill watching her work the *banka*, efficient as few.

During the last two weeks in Marege, we were working on planting the sorghum and maize. Finally I had found my niche; I did an excellent job in planting the seeds! Believe it or not, but that job got a little tough too.

Working together in the field: On the biased objective and remedies

I ascribed myself as a family member once I met with Ulikibo, my first host brother and field assistant who helped me get to the field and make sure I was safe before he left off to Jinka again. Even though I liked to think of Ulikibo as my host brother, he was hired as my assistant and our relationship was first and foremost that of business.

As far as working with another anthropologist is concerned, several challenges follow. Because Kate and I were both working on our individual projects, a good portion of trust between us was important when rights to research material and ideas were concerned. We were not only at different stages in our careers, but we also came from very different academic backgrounds. This could be difficult at times and it was necessary to keep a good dialogue between us. Also, for me to know where the limits were, not asking too many questions concerning Kate's field, and for me to trust her in situations where I needed her to translate for me. It was good to have someone to make discussions with and someone to ask for advice or simply just talk to, about anything else than fieldwork sometimes.

On the one hand it might have been better to have an unbiased interpreter, who simply could translate everything I wanted translated, on the other hand, it would have been more difficult to have academic discussions and conversations to the same degree as I had with Kate. Another issue is that there are quite few who can speak Mursi and English, so I had very little choice as far as an interpreter was concerned. In fact the only choice would have been a local guide from Jinka, this again could have been more work than help, and it would probably have been very expensive as they earned quite good money guiding tourists. It would also have been a lot more organizing for two instead of one, living under such circumstances as the Mursi do. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are Mursi living outside of Mursiland. As most of these are children and youths attending schools away from home, a few of them could have been suitable for translating; however due to my longer field trips it was impossible as they had school to attend to.

As an anthropologist and having field experience, Kate was aware of what situations were of importance to my work and what conversations to translate in that matter, even though she was not a local. At the very end of my fieldwork I had the privilege of working with an English speaking Mursi, Milisha. However, he was a very busy man working for the local mission station (SIM) in the northernmost region of Mursiland, and I was only able to work with him for a few hours a day, during my short stay close to his settlement in the area of Makki. His brother Olisarali also knows English, as he was given the opportunity to spend a year in Australia by the same local mission station as Milisha now works for. Olisarali lives in Addis Ababa where he is engaged in local, national and international projects, trying to visit Mursiland and his wives and children as often as he can. Just recently Milisha worked

together with Olisarali and others on a documentary film about the Mursi.¹⁰ Because Olisarali also is a busy man he was not in Mursiland during my stay in the field.

I was only able to “borrow” Milisha for interviews after his work hours. In a way, he functioned as an interpreter when, during interviews, he would help me translate recordings and data already collected. Though he was young, he was an important man in the area and he was used to working with “outsiders” such as myself, as the mission station has been around most of his life. Working with both an anthropologist and a local has given me the access into two different spheres (see e.g. Berreman 1962). On the one hand, Kate being a woman, I got information that was difficult to speak about with a man. On the other hand, Milisha had the advantage of being socially incorporated in the Mursi system; he could help me understand the different factors giving rich meanings to the Mursi.

When it is not time, in a 6-month fieldwork to learn the native language well enough to make interviews and catching conversations and thoughts, I was simply in need of an interpreter who could help me translate in order for me to collect the data I needed. Even though Kate was more of a fellow researcher working on her own project than my interpreter, she helped me translate in situations where I needed to ask questions, during interviews, and when doing the indicator survey in Ulum Holi, in order to taking a census in the village, learning about the local cast of characters and recording kinship relations. She also translated on a daily basis when I was not able to understand what was said to me. Axel Borchgrevink discusses in his article “Silencing language” the fact that it has been little written about the use of interpreting within anthropological work. He writes “(...) anthropology’s claim to understanding other people and their lives, societies and cultures, could be convincing only if it were based upon mastery of the local language” (Borchgrevink 2003: 96). Further, he argues that the problems connected with using interpreters may be overcome or reduced if one is to present an awareness of them (Borchgrevink 2003: 113). Working with both Milisha and Kate had its advantages and disadvantages, however, for a short-term fieldwork, like for example 6 months, it is an overall advantage of having an interpreter, and in this case two different

¹⁰ "Shooting with Mursi" a DFID/UK AID film made by Ben Young and Olisarali Olibui. It has been screened at two documentary and ethnographic film festivals in Germany and Paris, where Olisarali received an "honorable mention" for his work on the film (Mursi Online 2006 onwards; 19.06.11)

interpreters.

Ngateri (New Grass) and Stine. About positioning

The ideal position for a researcher in the field is to be one's own informant as far as feasible (Fossåskaret 1997). Early on I took the role as a *dole* (girl); one was considered a *dole* until engaged (*ngoni*), or a married woman (*moai*). There were several reasons for taking the role of a girl. As a girl I was Ngatulage's daughter and therefore had a role, which the Mursi could relate to. To a certain extent, I could use myself as an informant by participating within this social system and thus keeping a temporary "half-local" status. I was still an outsider, and could maintain a status that was half local and half external (Fossåskaret 1997) in the way that I did not belong to the original status fixture of the particular social system. This status, however, was nevertheless local enough, for me to be able to reside within the system, as well as to make good observations, recordings and to some extent conversations. By entering such a status I was participating, and as a researcher I was observing, and thus I was able to do participant observation even if my language skills were minimal.

The role of a fieldworker is tentatively fitted, and can vary and change over time depending on the fieldworker's gender, social ties and projects. Warren and Hackney (2000) argue that young anthropologists, especially women, may often be ascribed roles of "fictive kin". In my fieldwork among the Mursi I can relate to the example Jean Briggs (1970) presents on the role she was given as Kapluna's daughter among the Eskimo:

"Categorization of me as a child was probably determined by several factors: I had introduced myself as one who wanted to "learn" (...) and I had asked to be adopted as a "daughter"; I was obviously ignorant of [the culture's] properties and skills. The fact that I am a woman may also have facilitated my categorization as a child in several respects. For one thing among [this culture] a woman's technical skill (...) is very difficult to learn. (...) In order to be considered properly adult, a woman must have children, and I had none. For these reasons the role of an adult woman was virtually closed to me, whereas had I been a man, I might have earned an adult role as a fisherman and hunter (...) (1970: 23).

Later on, as my vocabulary increased, I entered the role as a *ngoni* (fiancé), meaning that my cows were already collected, but not yet handed over to my father. I wanted to step out of the role I was already categorized in, in order to get more access to the daily life of the women, as

well as I also could join the girls in different situations. In Ulum Holi when Kate introduced me as Ngateri and explained my presence for the people living in the village, she made it clear I had also come in the same errand as her. We were of the same “clan” as Lusigolony, anthropologist David Turton’s Mursi name. *Lusi* means boy, and *golony*, the color red. In their terms I was of the same “clan” as Lusigolony. In this way they were able to place me and relate to me as someone who had an errand and wanted to be included, as I was not the “daughter” of any family in this settlement. At first when I arrived in Ulum Holi and they asked where I had come from, I told them I had come from Marege and my mother was Ngatulage. They laughed and said it could not be true, I was from *ba harangi* – land of the foreigners. As much as anthropologists try to be included they will to a certain extent always be outsiders, in the way that they already come with “cultural baggage”; meaning that they cannot fill in “(...) an open framework with the design of one’s people, as an infant does, the anthropologist must organize knowledge in terms of an existing design (...)” (Keesing 1981: 6). The data then will always be colored by the anthropologist’s “cultural baggage” in the interpretation from an outsider’s perspective on the *inside*. This of course could lead to a whole discussion on the problem of representation, which I rather not go into in this thesis.

4. The Mursi and Cattle: an insight in Mursi economy and the impact of tourism

The Mursi are highly dependent on their environment and their material culture is very simple. I would think that most of their wealth lies within the cattle because of the values incorporated with the bridewealth and the meaning of attaining a wife. I argue this because, as mentioned above, compared to other herding people in East Africa the ideal bridewealth payment of 38 head for a Mursi wife is of great significance compared to the average number of cows per person. Even though one does not use marriage as a tool in gaining more cattle, it is an investment in solidarity and the bonding between groups.

However, In only one case did I come across a bridewealth payment, which had reached above the ideal total. This particular payment consisted of 44 head of cattle, though I am not sure all of it consisted of cattle since it is usual to compensate for the lack of cattle with guns, goats or calves. In another case I was told that the payment reached its ideal total with 38 head. Turton writes that he did not come across one incident where the actual payment had reached its ideal total (Turton 1980: 70). Because I have not done a census of cattle per person it is hard to estimate if there has been an increase or decrease in cattle among the Mursi, but it may seem like the bridewealth payments in some cases are higher than they were 40 years ago. Ngashilo, an old lady I have estimated to be around 80 years of age, told me that earlier, when the Mursi did not have much cattle, the ideal bridewealth was 10 head of cattle, but when she married she had competition and the bridewealth reached 38. One should keep in mind that there is one public number, which will always be 38. Then there is the *de facto* number, which, to me, seemed more private and not something discussed with anyone. Bridewealth is by far the most significant transaction in Mursi economy and in chapter 5 I will be concerned with the distribution of bridewealth in Mursi marriage.

I believe that tourism has had a big impact in Mursiland over the past decade or so, not only on the Mursi as a people but also on their economy. In this chapter then, I think it is reasonable to present a few thoughts based on observations and data collected during my fieldwork, which I have analyzed further in other publications (Jørgensen 2010; 2011). Mursi economy has begun to take a turn, as many are making money on tourism. Turton wrote in 2004 that “each woman photographed expects to be paid 2 Ethiopian Birr - less than 20 p – for each photograph taken of her, although she normally has to settle for 2 Birr for each series of

photographs taken of her by one single tourist” (2004: 3). Now, during my fieldwork the price varied from 5 up to 10 ETB for each photograph, and they were watching carefully, as the camera equipment could capture many moments in one push. The tourists also had to pay an entrance fee to get access to the settlement. When I visited a Mursi settlement together with a smaller group of tourists, I witnessed them paying up to 100 ETB for each person entering the village, compared with the average wage for an unskilled worker in Jinka, which was 16 ETB a day at the same time. The Mursi know that visitors are willing to pay for just about anything, and know they can push the limits to where they want them to be, by making the tourists pay for staged ceremonies, dancing and singing performances, they earn hundreds and up to thousands ETB for each group visiting them. The money may be spent in markets, such as in Jinka, where one can buy grain in times of crop failure, medicines and medical help, and various other supplies needed. I would argue that since cash economy has been introduced to the Mursi, they are depending on somewhat different articles. Also, the rights to use of land have become limited as restrictions in land areas and hunting concessions have been made by the Ethiopian state in the Omo and Mago National Parks where the Mursi live (see map 3, appendix 5). Traditionally, skins from e.g. lesser kudu and goat were used to make skirts and other garments for wearing or carrying, however, they are becoming more dependent on factory clothes and cloth. Many tourists bring clothes and other materials like razors, soap, and flash lights. One can therefore see many Mursi dressed in what they have got from tourists, traded for or bought at markets in Jinka.

The lip-plate as a symbol of the ”untouched” world of the Mursi?

The Mursi women are one of the last groups in Africa to cut the lower lip in order to wear large pottery or wooden lip-plates. When a Mursi girl reaches puberty, she is most likely to get her lip cut and a small wooden plug is inserted. She is given a new identity – she becomes a *bansai*, which indicates a girl becoming a woman (LaTosky 2006: 374). When the lip is stretched over a year’s time by inserting bigger wooden plugs, and in the end replaced by a bigger lip-plate, she is characterized as a mature woman alluring for marriage and the bearing of children (Turton 2004; LaTosky 2006). The lip-plate has its symbolic value, representing strength and self-esteem, at the same time, as it is their concept of beauty, which lies far from our own ideals. Thus they have become the prime attraction for tourists from all over the world, who come to see and photograph them (Turton 2004: 3). I wish to shed light on this

topic in this thesis in order to discuss the possible effects that may lead to a drastic change for the Mursi, including their kinship system and marriage ceremonies.

Tourists visit exotic places and people, and get to feel the “authentic” culture. If one is to choose a trip like this, rather than a charter with all inclusive, the feeling of an authentic experience is part of the total adventure. It is probably “the others’” way of living, which is the key in this concept.

Being a tourist

The logistics of getting out to Mursiland is quite challenging, after having waited around in the nearest town, Jinka, for cars that did not show up and one truck after the other, my Mursi host brother and I were lucky enough to get a ride with a group of tourists. They were on a trip organized from their home country, where they were to visit all the ethnic groups down in the southern part of Ethiopia as well as some historical places in the northern part of the country. Jinka is a market town, located in the highlands of the southern part of the country. Jinka is also a meeting place as its markets attract all the different people from the ethnic groups around, to come on market days to sell or trade their local products. The roads in this area are tough and very unreliable, as they are dirt roads, heavily marked by avalanches that are most likely to happen during the rainy seasons.

Our journey to Mursi had begun. A group of fifteen tourists, my host brother Ulikibo and I, divided on three four by four trucks. The four hour car ride was much more comfortable than the alternative we had, in the back of an Isuzu pick up truck. Ulikibo and I still had an hour of walking ahead of us from the Mursi village where the tourists paid a visit. The guide had been there several times before with other tourists and welcomed us to join them for their visit in a Mursi village located by the road. I had never been in Mursi before, I did not know the language and I had only seen a few Mursis in Jinka, apart from Ulikibo, whom I was able to sort of communicate with, in some strange way.

When we arrived outside the village we were told we could ask questions to the chief, a translator was present. I had a feeling this whole thing was set up, in a very good and convincing way, of course. And I knew, there was no such thing as a chief in Mursi, however, I did not say anything, sat down and observed the situation. We were sitting in a semi circle under a big tree, later I learnt that every Mursi village has a big discussion tree. About six or

seven Mursi men were sitting in front of us, some of them were carrying Kalashnikov automatic weapons. The women and children were sitting behind us. After 20 minutes the tourists were already well on their places in the cars, having asked their questions and paid for taking their photographs of the Mursi. Ulikibo and I said our good byes and headed westwards for the one hour walk to his mother's village, my head was full of impressions, questions and confusion. It felt as if I had officially stepped out of myself and had no idea what I had got myself into. Emotions had taken over my body, and I was in no condition of even imagining what the next few months would bring.

The globalizing impact and the local other

The search for authentic adventures has a leading role within modern tourism. However, what is authentic? Is there such a thing as something authentic? And for whom is it authentic? I would argue that one is creating a picture of “the others” biased by Western notions of the so-called “primitive”, rather than getting the authentic experience. Are we making enough efforts to learn about “the others” history, in order to better understand why they do as they do?

As tourism is one of the biggest businesses in the world, one should draw the attention towards the social and cultural impact of the activity which tourism has on local societies. Tourism emanates largely from relatively wealthy, powerful societies, and is an expression of a specific kind of consumer identity (Abbink 2000); through the consuming of tourism, which comes with a globalizing impact, one creates a reification of the traditional. This means that traditions and cultural expressions are reified, and appear as if they are stronger and more unchangeable than they really are. The need of making oneself more exotic may become greater, and one is therefore creating a picture of one self and one's own culture corresponding with the expectations of the outsiders. State pressure may also be one of the factors leading to a globalizing process making the local people to adjusting themselves and their traditions to please both the state and the tourists.

Mursi and money

Because the Mursi are transhumant agro-pastoralists, in search of fertile ground, it forces them to live in different locations or settlements in the area of Mursiland. Although their houses have become more solid and permanent than they may have been earlier, they still have

seasonal movements. As mentioned in chapter two, their economy is based upon cultivation and cattle herding (Turton 1975; Turton 1988; LaTosky 2006). Cultivable areas varies significantly from year to year and times of drought may occur in the very hot July and August; however, there have been periods of drought lasting for years. In times of drought cattle have played an important role in maintaining the long-term viability of economy, which, although based primarily on cultivation, could be marked by frequent crop failures, it still is. Cattle could be exchanged for grain among neighbouring groups or highland traders, as it was the only source to dealing with food shortage in times of drought. Even though the conversion of live animals into grain does not have the ultimate ‘exchange rate’, it was their last defence against starvation (Turton 1988: 264). Upon my arrival in Mursi the big rains had not come in three years, the last Omo flood in the previous year was very low, and several areas along the riverside had not been cultivated. With several crop failures in 2009, relief food was accepted among the Mursi although it was far from adequate.¹¹ It did not occur to me at the time, however, based on information collected through observations, and from what I have found out later about the situation, there is reason to believe that my host family, in Marege, together with many other families, received relief food at the time of my arrival and stay in Marege. As the main rains had arrived, we began clearing the vegetation off our cultivation land in Marege in February, planting took place during March. Unfortunately I was not able to go back to “Mama’s” cultivation land during harvest in June, however, I stayed in the very northern region of Mursi with a woman named Biobala, where I got to participate in some of the harvesting processes.

Thus far I have mentioned the three main subsistence activities, which the Mursi highly depend on; “each of which is insufficient and/or precarious in itself, when taken together with the other two, makes a vital contribution to the economy (...)” (Turton 1995: 11). Cattle are not, as we will see, only of economic importance to the Mursi, for it is of great cultural importance as well, seeing that almost, if not every, social relationship is validated by the exchange of cattle, especially that of marriage.

The Mursi have been in increasingly close contact with the “modern world”, something that may have affected their own view of the world, and their place within it. It is reasonable to ask if such all-round pressure makes it impossible for the local others to develop and step into a

¹¹ News feed from Mursi are credited the Mursi home page Mursi Online: <http://www.mursi.org>

modernizing world on their own premises? As mentioned above, there is reason to believe that there has been an increase in cattle among the Mursi as the number of bridewealth cattle was closer to reach its ideal total than for e.g. 40 years ago.¹² However, there might have been a decrease in cattle as well, considering the last period of drought, lasting around three years, coming to an end in the beginning of 2010, many had to trade cows for grain, and I believe many were depending more on the money coming from tourism. Because of the rainfall during the first months of 2010, the harvest in June was expected to be one of success. Towards the end of my fieldwork people were noticeably happier, the river Mago was big, and everyone was commenting on how beautiful the water was. The meaning of the word beautiful, which can in this case derive from the Mursi word *challi*, was very powerful towards the beginning of June. I spoke with several men who were saving enough money to buy a good cow in order to increase the herd. In such a way one can say that the money coming from tourism is good, however, there are many other consequences having unfortunate impacts on the Mursi society, as mentioned above.

At first sight the Mursi and cattle may be looked upon as a cultural obsession. The problem of the diffusion of cultural traits was indeed something which was paid attention to by the early ethnographers, such as Herskovits (Herskovits 1926) and the generation before him. However, what is entailed here is the importance of cattle to the Mursi, without making it a cultural complex, such as Herskovits and others have looked upon it.

The cow as a cultural complex?

During the 1920s Herskovits wrote in a series about the problem of the diffusion of cultural traits, more specifically the "cattle complex" (Herskovits 1926; 1928a; 1928b; 1928c). Even though it is an old and outdated way of thinking about the world, one can find newer literature on the subject (see e.g. Diener, Nonini et al. 1978). Herskovits' article is from a time when it was usual to think about the world as cultural groups or *kulterkreis* as Herskovits speaks of it. *Kulterkreis* was the area in which the cultural complex or *kulterkomplex* existed; every *kulterkreis* had their cultural complex. This was innate characteristics for the people living in such *kulterkreis*, and for East Africa the cattle complex was dominating and characteristic for

¹² Turton, in his unpublished thesis (1973), presents different bridewealth payments proving that they were not only consisting of cows. Goats, guns and other things were also of great value.

this *kulturkreis* (Herskovits 1926: 238). Cattle were important, in different regions in Africa, in the establishment of identity. The utilizing of cattle in different settings, attitudes and different rituals or ceremonies connected with cattle varied from region to region. Herskovits was concerned with all the different ceremonies in which the cattle or something associated with it is present. Cultural elements such as birth, death, illness, marriage, inheritance and other dispute settlements are characterized by the prevalent use of cattle.

The "cattle complex" presents a view on the cow, which is of the highest value and obtained by the means of sisters and wives. Cattle may seem as a cultural complex in Mursiland at first, because it is important in many cultural elements within Mursi society. However, according to David Turton (1980) the Mursi only have one cow per person, and thus I suggest turning the cattle complex around. Because of the bridewealth rules putting a Mursi man in a debt over three generations it forces him to give the cattle away in order to get a wife. He also has to give cattle away for example by the marriage of his daughters, because he is then in debt to men who have given him a wife. It is the same men who has given his father, grandfather and great-grandfather a wife, he is then in debt to these men and will have to distribute the bridewealth cattle of his daughters to these men. As we will see throughout the next two chapters it is therefore the wives and sisters that are important, as their relationships are obtained by the means of cattle. I am not suggesting that the Mursi have a wife complex but it is a way of looking at the cow without necessarily making it a cultural obsession or complex. As we will see throughout the next chapters, and especially concerning the distribution of bridewealth, the cattle are also used in obtaining kin relations among the Mursi. Because a Mursi man inherits a bridewealth debt from his father, grandfathers and great-grandfathers he is most likely to give away the cattle he may receive from the bridewealth cattle due to him from the patrilineal kinswomen he has a right to claim a share of the bridewealth from. This means that the distribution of cattle in bridewealth transactions submit a circular explanation which makes the cattle of significant importance in order to create marriage alliances, kin relations and also the degree of prohibited marriage.

In the next chapter I wish to move on to show how I regard the importance of the cattle among the Mursi, in the notion of kinship and marriage. In the final chapter, I will get further into the rules of bridewealth payments and thus how the cattle must be seen as a tool in a circular system of the repetition of events.

5. Kinship and Marriage

Non-industrial societies, traditionally hunters and gatherers, have the simplest form of technology. On the other hand they often have very complicated kinship systems, which are so intricate that it will take an outsider years to fully understand them. As will be shown, using the Mursi kinship system as an example, they can name a big number of various kinds of relatives. Despite a complicated kinship system, which I probably have not been able to get the full insight in, a good starting point in learning about the rights and obligations concerning Mursi marriage, politics and organization was to begin with finding the relationships involved with such social interaction. Levi-Strauss states that a kinship system operates as an agent to a system of matrimonial exchange within a society:

“(…) the function of a kinship system is to generate marriage possibilities of impossibilities, either directly or between people calling themselves by terms which are derived, according to certain rules, from the terms used by their ascendants” (Levi-Strauss 1965: 14).

I would argue that it would be wrong to speak of “the institution of marriage”, because then it would imply that marriage does not in fact involve economic, political and religious institutions, as indeed applies to both kinship and affinity. It would be completely meaningless to describe what we would call Mursi marriage ceremony, without looking at the economic and political aspects of it; in using these aspects of behavior to see the total of a social phenomenon as part of a bigger whole. The ceremonies in which a Mursi man and a woman participate, in order to enter partnership, involve first and foremost the distribution of bridewealth, which is an economic transaction of wealth for a woman and her source of labor and her children. It is also of political implications as it unites two groups of kin, while regulating kin relations, and maintaining the specific rules of marriage alliances. In this chapter I will be concerned with all the aspects of Mursi marriage, and then, go further into how this is all put together.

The study of kinship – terminology, perspectives and critique

Everyone familiar with the history of anthropology and its classical ethnographies is acquainted with the fact that analyses of different peoples’ political, economic or religious lives often were based on thorough knowledge of these people’s kinship systems. The study of kinship has from its very beginning been based on the assumption that kinship is a “(…)

distinct domain which is universally recognized as existing in every culture” (Holý 1996: 151). In *A critique of the study of kinship*, Schneider (1984) argues that “kinship need not be universally recognized in all cultures as a culturally constituted domain (...)” (Holý 1996: 150-151). Some of the leading controversies between anthropologists have in fact dealt with questions in connection with kinship, and I will be concerned with the critique of the study of kinship below.

Since the second half of the 1800s and the time of Maine and Morgan, among others, through the functionalists and structural functionalists like Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and Fortes, to Marxists and structuralists, anthropologists have been concerned with how people and groups organize within a community. In the societies studied at the time of anthropology’s beginning, social life was first and foremost organized based on how people and groups created ties of kinship and marriage alliances (Smedal 2000: 115). The study of kinship may have been the obvious approach for an outsider in finding the logic of the social organization within a society. In most cases modern institutions like legal and educational systems, church and organized working life did not exist. Disputes, religious beliefs, education and acquisition were therefore controlled by people whose power depended on the roles they inhabited as members of descent groups. However, how kinship is understood varies between societies, a fact that challenges our notion of what is “natural” in biological terms and in terms of what is socially accepted. Barnard (1994) reminds us that kinship is not just an idea with a past and no future. Rather, kinship remains important, still as an element of human society, but with new perspectives within the social and biological sciences. These new perspectives offer opportunities to reconsider some old arguments shedding light on new debates and new ideas (Barnard 1994: 783). This will be further discussed below.

Anthropologists may have agreed on the central role of kinship within the study of different societies, but they may have disagreed on how kinship should be studied. Barnard presents three broad areas which the anthropological study of kinship traditionally has been divided into (Barnard 1994: 783; Smedal 2000)):

- i: The study of group structure, which includes descent and residence.
- ii: The study of alliance (relations based on marriage).
- iii: The study of classification of relatives.

I would argue that none of these on their own may be regarded as sufficient, they need to be analysed as parts of something bigger. To find such a holistic understanding one has to find the cultural meaning within the society or community to be analyzed (Larsen 1996). One cannot assume that the fundamental units of kinship in every society are defined from only one perspective. Rather, it is important to find the connections between the fundamental institutions of a society. The challenge to anthropologists has been which one of these to prioritise to ensure that the understanding is good enough. Further, while working on my field data I realized that to understand Mursi marriage, a thorough analysis of the Mursi kinship system was necessary. Anthropologist David Turton had already done an in-depth analysis of the structure of the Mursi kinship system in his PhD thesis *The Social Organisation of the Mursi: a pastoral tribe of the Lower Omo Valley, South West Ethiopia*, based on a longer field period at the end of the 60s (Turton 1973). While in the field, I became concerned with understanding various kin relations, trying to ask the right questions in finding the specific rules of marrying within and marrying without. There are complicated kin relations; social, biological and classificatory, which have to be taken into consideration when trying to locate whom the Mursi can marry and whom they cannot marry, and most importantly, how these rules are regulated. When speaking of marrying without and marrying within, I am referring to the fact that they can marry within Mursi, specified rules taken into consideration. On the other hand, they have neighboring groups whom it is okay to marry, and in this way creating alliances.

However, before I move further, it is now well in its place, in this introduction, to discuss some of the challenges related to the main areas of the three points above. Let us start with presenting those concerning classification, a classical topic within anthropology (see for example Durkheim, Mauss). Relatives can either be classificatory or descriptive. When a descriptive term is used it can only describe one relationship between two people. Classificatory kinship terminology is used about people whom one is not biologically related to, and is normally a term used to describe a number of different people, usually people of the same sex. In Mursi the same kinship term is used for father and his brothers, and for mother and her sisters (see figure 5 below: Mursi kinship). The Mursi, like many other societies where social organization is based more or less on kinship, have complex clan systems. A clan is based on unilineal descent groups united in a series of lineages, which descend from the same common ancestor. The founding ancestor is usually considered so distant that genealogical links are not remembered (Berihun Mebratie 2004). A clan's members may

share a common name or ancestor and assume they are related. The clansmen in Mursi depend on each other. If a Mursi man proves to be infertile, one of his clansmen can impregnate his wife, though he will not be reckoned as the child's father. The legal father of this child would be the husband of the mother.

In general kinship systems center around an arrangement of kinship relations on both the mother's side and the father's side. There are different principles for the transfer of names, group membership or certain rights between generations, a system can for example be patrilineal, matrilineal or cognatic, just to mention the main ones. However, as will be shown, the same principle does not need to be valid for descent as it is for inheritance, for instance. Mursi reckons descent through a common male ancestor. A kinship system where membership follows the father's lineage, is called a patrilineal system. The kin group within such a system includes ego's siblings and father, father's siblings, father's father and his siblings, together with all the children the men in this patriline would be father of.

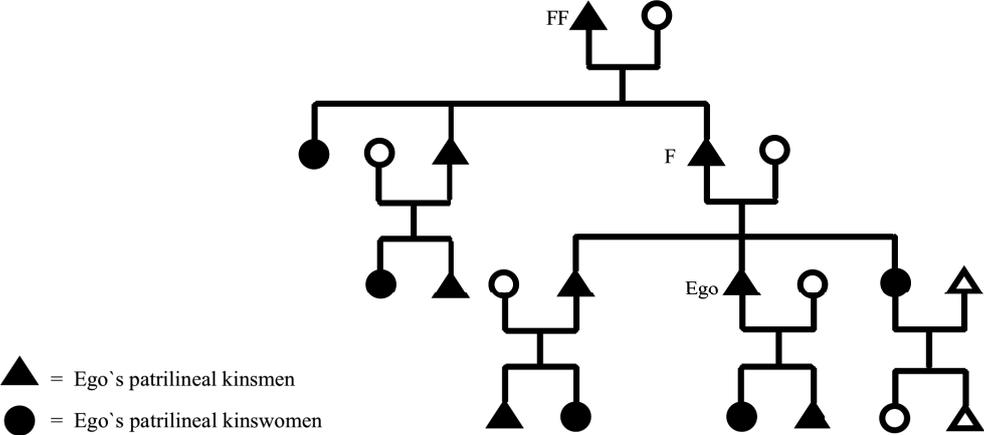


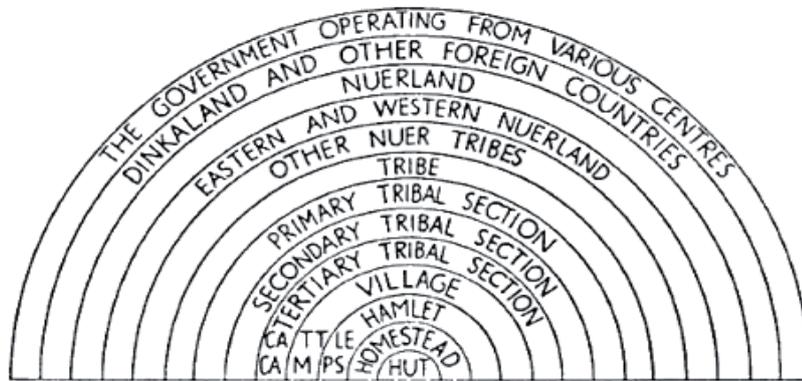
Figure 2: Patrilineal descent

Manipulating genealogy – the flexibility of a social system

The anthropological starting point is that ideas about kinship are cultural embellishments of something 'natural' – the engendering and bearing of children (Holý 1996; Smedal 2000). Biology is the raw material. It is what people do with biology, which is kinship, in an

anthropological perspective. The first generations of British anthropologists, who were deeply marked by the philosophy of structural-functionalism, raised questions on how societies were built up and put together - especially those in areas without a centralised government. Therefore, the common answer had to lie within the kinship system as people were organised through kinship. Thus, it was in the organisation of kinship relations that one could find a society's orderliness (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Bohannan 1952). As societies thus were based on groups, they had to be partitioned off as they were in control over given areas and resources. Such groups were called groups of unilineal descent or lineage groups, which can be matrilineal or patrilineal, real or fictitious. This theory of lineage was thus also as much of political concern as it was kinship, in that the groups were united and easy to mobilise in a political matter. The principle of unilineal descent made it easy to create corporate groups, as well as ties between groups could be created through marriage. A corporate group is based on "people who look upon themselves as a bound unit in proportion to other units – they have reciprocal obligations to one another by virtue of their membership" (Smedal 2000: 132). The central feature of such groups was that it would stay intact for generations (Smedal 2000: 132). Thus, structural-functionalists like Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard, among others, thought of such corporate groups as units of society. Units where Evans-Pritchard supposed that people's behavior were conditional on the membership of these groups. It would be difficult to see how societies, with such units, could remain over a longer period in time, given that people were members of more than one group. Different interests and loyalty moths¹³ would bring upon all-round pressure and thus lead to an unstable life. Therefore, the ideal way of organising people in separate groups, which did not overlap, would be to organize them in lineage groups.

¹³ I prefer the word moot here, instead of conflict, as it is a more proper word due to its meaning of discussion or debatable topic.



Socio - Spatial Categories (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 114)

Evans-Pritchard presents a typical example of such social systems in his book about the Nuer (1940). A person has different relations given the circumstances; in some occasions it may be necessary to enter into a relation with his or her brother, with others it may be needed to call for his or her cousins. This particular society, like the Mursi, is based on patrilineal or agnatic descent, where one is reckoning descent from a common ancestor. Corporations are thus formed after such a principle. As is shown in the figure above one can be member of more than one social group, but as mentioned, the loyalty may be deteriorated the farther out in the circle one gets. Based on this figure, one had the initial for a model: membership of a unilineal, corporate lineage group is given automatically by birth, and the group as a whole will appear as one 'juridical' unit. And so will each group have certain rights to land areas, spiritual privileges and so on (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 114; Smedal 2000).

Kinship is not only about the engendering and bearing of children or the transfer of knowledge and values between generations. Also, it is about politics and organization of life as we know it – here and now. In Mursi a man needs many relatives; both consanguine (blood related) and affinals (in-laws) under different circumstances. Further, I attempt to show the functioning of kinship in various aspects of Mursi marriage, however not based on corporate groups as such, but in a more general sense as a part of bigger social system.

Within anthropological research many have been criticized for their work on kinship. Several anthropologists took action and argued that such models of corporate groups were to be expected in certain societies where hierarchical organisation was missing. Such groups will from now on be referred to as segmented clans, as several anthropologists, especially New Guinea researchers, found that these societies both had members who did not belong to the patrilineage, and that they were missing the ability of merging and demerging (Bohannon 1952). Several anthropologists have criticised Evans-Pritchard, among others, of mistaking the *map for the territory*, (see e.g. Bateson 1936; Bohannon 1952). I will be concerned with how genealogy can be manipulated, and thus how the map is not necessarily the territory.

As we can see, we often meet difficult terminology in such discussions. The two main terms here will be *lineages* and *clans*, in which the difference between the two is formal, meaning they have been used in different ways by different authors. However, to make it clear, there is a certain agreement on what they refer to. A lineage consists of people who trace descent from one common ancestor, through specified links. In other words, the names of those which kin is reckoned through, are known. A clan, on the other hand, consists of people who trace descent through a common ancestor where the links are not specified. Because the ancestor is so far back the links in between are forgotten, a phenomenon which Geertz and Geertz (1964) have called genealogical amnesia. When referring to differences between historical facts and the actors' consciousness or knowledge, structural amnesia is a common used term among anthropologists (Eriksen and Frøshaug 1998: 144).

Genealogies may then be manipulated, for example where descent is important to state the rights to land, or the right to a wife. Laura Bohannon (1952) writes about this in her work on the Tiv of north Nigeria. The Tiv, who are agriculturalists, number around 800 000 and are organised in segmented lineage systems. These lineages' compositions are often consciously manipulated so that the relations will fit in with the living people's interests. Structural amnesia is common in all societies, as mentioned especially in connection with the remembering and writing of history.

In Mursi there are specific rules of marriage, which seem to be carefully determined. In order for a marriage to take place, the fathers of the couple marrying need to have a social or familiar relationship which defines them as *lang* (exchange partners). There are also specific rules on who, in principle, can be in such a relationship. However, in certain occasions these rules may be manipulated and twisted around to fit within a preferred social setting. Milisha, a

young northern Mursiman, fell in love with a beautiful southern girl. He met her at one of the *dongas* (stick fights)¹⁴ in the south. When Milisha came home, he told his father about this girl he wanted to marry. Because their fathers new of each other and happened to be age mates, meaning that they have achieved the same age stages in life, their relationship were considered to be *lang*. They did not have a familiar relationship as referred to in the list of kinship terms (see appendix 2 and 3).

Another incident happened at a *kidong ko duri* (wedding dance)¹⁵ I attended in Anyoye, Mursiland, 2010. Because milk constitutes a large part of a Mursi's consumption of nutrition on a daily basis, cows are very important, not only as a resource of nutrition, but also when it comes to economy, politics and different ceremonial events, such as the Mursi marriage. At the *kidong ko duri* I noticed that the brother of the groom was part of a ceremony where the groom and his brothers and sisters were sprayed with *uro lisa* (sour milk). The man performing it was of the Bara age set¹⁶ and therefore considered a senior elder. He was also one of the groom's *oine* (MB), and functioned as a *kwesani* (referee) during the *Kidong ko duri* with a couple of other men (interview with Ulikuri, May 2010. For more readings on the use of referees, see e.g. Turton 1973; 1977; 2002). I was later told that this was an old ceremony, however not commonly performed at a *kidong ko duri*. It is only performed if the man already has a child with the woman he is marrying, hence a tradition made to fit in with the situation and the social setting.¹⁷ This specific blessing ceremony was thus a symbol on the legitimacy of reproduction, as their milking cow had been in danger because of their actions. After this ceremony was held the cow would survive and was no longer in danger.

This incident is indeed not an example of manipulating genealogy; it rather proves the flexibility found in a society. At the same time, it proves how the framework of a society is nothing without its content. And turned around; the content, or the interacting people within the society are dependent on having a framework to keep a certain order. However, it is this order, I argue, that is manipulative. And when its social organization is, to a certain extent,

¹⁴ See chapter 2 for further reading on the stick fights.

¹⁵ See chapter 6 for further information on the marriage ceremonies.

¹⁶ See chapter 2 for further reading on Mursi age system.

¹⁷ Interview with Milisha Olibui and his grandmother Ngashilu, Makki June 2010.

built on kinship, genealogy is also in a position which the people to a certain degree are able to control and adjust to correspond with their actions.

The critique of kinship studies

An anthropologist's job is to speak the native's language. To be able to relate to the native's conceptions and terms, models and theories; for it is from their kinship system these processes have their basis. In order for an anthropologist to speak the native's language – portray the native's point of view (Malinowski, Geertz), it is indeed necessary to study their kinship system in depth. Ever since Morgan (1970 [1871]), Western notions of kinship have been the basis in global analyses of descent, marriage, relations of authority, joking-relationships and principles of group formation (Smedal 2000). By saying 'blood is thicker than water' it has been easy to think about kinship as a biological fact. However, as I have shown above there are kinship terms that are built more upon social organisation than biological kinship, as for instance in Mursi kinship terminology. Also in Europe, we include particular types of affinals as 'uncles' and 'aunts'; those who have married our parents' siblings. We do not have a terminological difference between our biological uncles and aunts and those married to them; the affinals. Terms like sister in law and brother in law applies to both to a siblings' spouse and to a marriage partner's siblings.

As we can see anthropological theory formulation has in a wide context been centred on group formations, interaction between groups and people's positions within the different groups. Several anthropologists have therefore argued that it says more about Western anthropological methods and intuition than what people really are preoccupied with. Though this is not to be discussed any further in this thesis it is of importance here to mention that the study of kinship has been criticized over the years. Holy argues that the anthropological concept of kinship has been built on relations established in the process of production and bearing children. Holy refers to Marilyn Strathern and writes that kinship has thus "to do with tracing natural ties. (...) it is a cultural recognition of something that precedes sociality and something that sociality has to take into consideration in one way or another" (Holý 1996: 143). Further, Strathern argues that with modern biotechnology, the distinction between nature and culture is getting more blurred. With reference to newer technologies of reproduction, she says that science (our "culture") is manipulating the natural processes in such a way that it becomes more difficult to keep nature and culture separate (Strathern 1992).

Take for example the case mentioned above, where an infertile Mursi man can have children with his wife with help from another clansman. If we were to place this situation in England or another Western country for that matter, an infertile man with a fertile wife has the option of choosing a donor. The semen of this donor will then be implanted in the infertile man's wife.¹⁸ Anthropologists may therefore insist that kinship is the socio-cultural understanding of genetic or biological relationships, however it becomes difficult to know which biological reality one should stick with (Strathern 1992; Smedal 2000).

Schneider (Holý 1996: 150) on the other hand argues that the facts of procreation's ascribed significance may be a result of affecting others with a view particular to the Western culture. It makes the analyst able to talk about kinship in different cultures as a system of social ties based on the relations resulting from that of producing and bearing children (Holý 1996: 151). Further, he argues that this theory is based on constructed generalisations, when different meanings may be imposed to the 'natural' facts of kinship. Thus, he concludes that anthropological conceptualisation of kinship is in a state of being rather than doing. Kinship being grounded in the process of reproduction, creating ties of consanguinity which immediately are connected to a universality of social significance in all societies. The study of kinship may be ethnocentrically grounded in such presumed universality of the meaning in which kinship is based on in different societies. One cannot regard kinship as the "base" of a society; neither can it be an expression for which the relations between members of a society are formulated (Holý 1996: 151). Ultimately, it is the people within a society, which is in the power of deciding what kinship really "is". To the extent that anthropologists succeed in contributing to shed light on what "the others" reckon as shared substance – real or figuratively - their perspective is only one among many others (Smedal 2000: 153).

Kinship systems

Kinship may be something which people use to create a certain order. Accordingly it consists of 1. The actual working of the system within a given society, and 2. A model stating the sets of rules. When exploring and analyzing kinship systems for example, on the one hand the rules and the model of reality specify how it should be. On the other hand, a consideration of

¹⁸ Sexual intercourse would not be an alternative because the relationship between the genetic father and the mother then becomes a sexual relationship and may further lead to misinterpretations in the relationship between the social father and the genitor.

what people actually do and what they say they do may not correspond with each other (Beattie 2006 [1959]). I would argue that real people and empirical terminologies need to be taken as the starting point in order to find a theoretical model in which the reality can be represented. However, the anthropologist's incorporation in a society will have underlying factors, such as age, gender, social importance and time. These can all be decisive for what information in a society is available to the anthropologist. Beattie (2006 [1959]), among others, argues that in the study of societies, anthropologists often use theoretical models as a starting point (see e.g. Beattie 2006 [1959]; Holy and Stuchlik 2006 [1983]). This is indeed a topic, which is far too comprehensive to be squeezed in here.

As will be shown in the next chapter on marriage practices, there are several rules concerning kin relations linked to all the ceremonies and stages of marriage, including the distribution of bridewealth. Before going into the details of the Mursi *gama* (marriage), it is much needed to explore Mursi kinship, which is similar to that of the Omaha type (see e.g. Levi-Strauss 1965; Morgan 1970 [1871]). The Omaha kinship system, as Morgan (1970 [1871]) describes it, distinguishes between descriptive and classificatory terms, in addition to sex and generation, and between siblings of opposite sex in the parental generation. In figure 4 below I have chosen to mark the males and females related to ego as they appear. The different colors mark off the classificatory terminology, which is characteristic for the Omaha kinship system. Like most other kinship systems, Omaha also distinguishes between parallel and cross cousins. Siblings are grouped together with parallel cousins, while separate terms are used for cross cousins. Terminology for the latter are divided and vary across generations as we can see from the figure.

Also, ego's mother's sisters come into the same category as mother, ego's father's brothers come into the same category as father. One refers to one's mother's brother and one's father's sister by separate terms. According to Morgan, with ego a male, mother's brother is ego's *uncle* and so is mother's brother's sons in an infinite line (Morgan 1970 [1871]: 179). As we can see the same term is used for mother's brother's daughter as for mother as they are marked with red. Ego's mother is defined as a female member of ego's patriline, and ego's mother's brother as a male member of ego's mother's patriline. Omaha kinship terminology is therefore associated with societies that have a strong patrilineal approach in their social organization. When Morgan use terms like *uncle*, I assume it is in an attempt to make sense out of more classificatory kinship systems than ours, by using our categories of kinship.

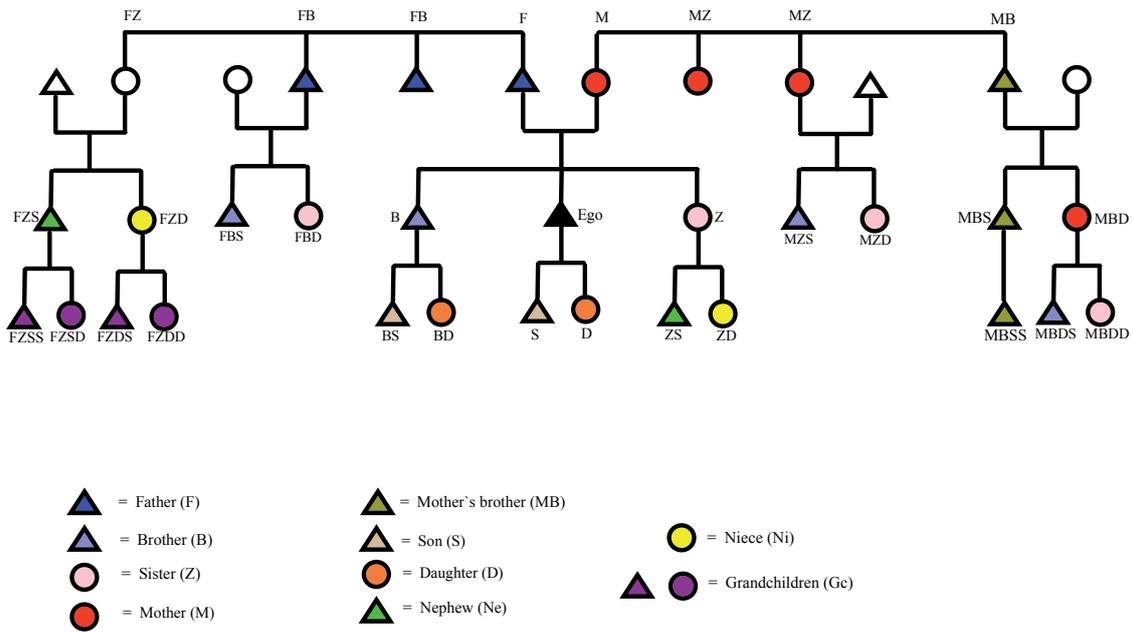


Figure 4: Omaha kinship system

Figure 5 below shows the Mursi kinship system, I have marked the men and women related to ego with colors and their respective classificatory terms, the color corresponding with the term in which are incorporated in the Mursi kinship system.

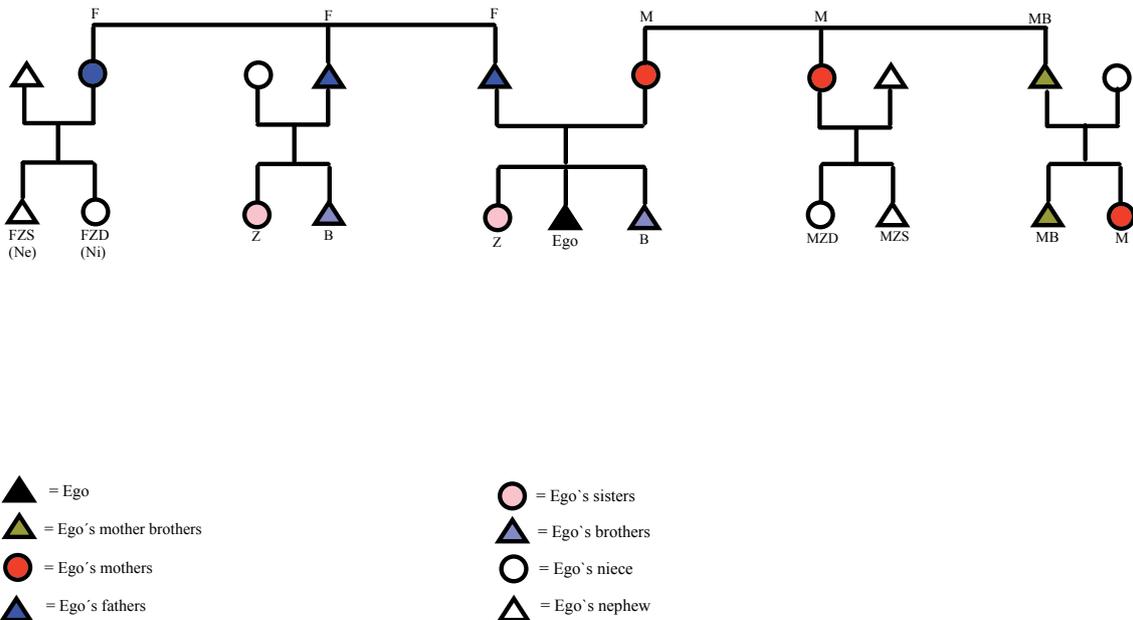


Figure 5: Mursi kinship system

The Mursi kinship system and terminology differ somewhat from the Omaha system, as it is reason to believe that father's sisters and brothers are grouped together with father. Though terms like *dada* ("father") and *jhone* ("mother") should strictly not be translated father and mother, as these are English terms for male parent and female parent, or the persons who gave birth to ego. In Mursi, *jhone* means female member of a descent group to which ego's descent group is linked by marriage¹⁹. In Mursi kinship terminology father's sister is referred to as *dada angaha*, and thus grouped together with "father". I assume, therefore, that *dada* means all the men and women in ego's parental generation belonging to ego's patriline by descent. Additionally, in Mursi kinship terminology ego's mother's brother is referred to by the term *Oine* (MB, MBSs), marked with green in figure 5. As we can see, mother's brother's daughter is marked with red and grouped together with the other women whom are related to ego's mother's side. However, there is a distinction made in the category *jhone* as the women in ego's own generation (MBD) are called *dole jhone*, which could be translated into English as 'girl mothers'.²⁰ The bridewealth rules make these maternal links vital, as will be shown in the next chapter.

In the Omaha kinship system we could see that siblings and parallel cousins were grouped together. In the Mursi kinship system we can see that father's brother's children are grouped together with brother and sister. According to Mursi kinship terminology²¹ if ego is a male, *gwodine* ("brother") refers to ego's male relatives of his own and descending generation, meaning the men who are members of ego's descent group, which are B, FBS. As we can see, this is in correlation with siblings being grouped together with father's brother's children; accordingly, his parallel cousins. Thus, the term *ngone* ("sister") is referring to ego's Z and FBD. Again, ethnocentric terms like brother and sister should be avoided, however I have put them in quotation marks here to prove my points. It should be noted that the females called *ngone* and the males called *gwodine* are, in Mursi kinship terminology, not necessarily offspring of ego's father. They are of the same generation as ego and belong to the same patrilineal descent group.

¹⁹ Personal communication with David Turton, June 2011

²⁰ Personal communication with David Turton, June 2011

²¹ Interview with Milisha Olibui, Makki June 2010

However cross cousins, marked with white, are mother's sister's children, who were referred to as *ngangnun*, and father's sister's children (FZS and FZD) who were referred to as *ngosoni* together with ZS, ZD, and FBDS, FBDD (the latter two are not illustrated in the figure). I chose only to illustrate the two generations in order to give an idea of Mursi kinship relations. Furthermore, the *ngosoni* are the offspring of female members of ego's descent group and refer to the relatives who would be, in our terms, cousins and nephew or niece. These relatives are not members of ego's descent group, since this is a patrilineal system and not a cognatic system like the one we have (see also figure 2 for an overview). The important thing about the *ngangnun* is that these are the offspring of a female member, who is not of ego's descent group, but of a descent group to which ego's descent group is linked through marriage - excluding ego's own siblings.²² Again, *ngosoni* (ZS, ZD, FZS, FZD, FBDS, FBDD) and *ngangnun* (MZS, MZD) are not members of ego's descent groups, they are members of descent groups that have married into it, as they belong to their father's descent groups. In chapter 6 I will be concerned with how these relations are maintained and appear in a circle of recurrence.

Clans and lineages, marriage and the making of family are like a puzzle in every society, big or small. I am indeed missing many pieces in my puzzle, however, the model of reality lies in front of me and I need to work with the pieces I have got moving from the model of reality into the "elementary structures" of kinship.

Clans and Lineages, Marriage and Alliances

Kinship and lineage do in many ways constitute the ground pillar of many societies. In simple societies where administrations of Government are virtually non-existent for the functioning of the society and its organization, kinship becomes the key foundation to a society's way of structuring and organizing various arenas in society. In Mursi, kinship is an important social institution, as it is the kin relations that are arbitrate for a number of social relations. It is therefore a correlation between the society's kinship system and the rest of the social organization, as I have stated above. In some cases there is a link between kinship and the social organization. As for the Mursi, one can say that their use of kinship may be an ideal way in order to monitor marriage, as both marriage and the distribution of bridewealth are

²² Personal communication with David Turton, June 2011

conducted through sets of rules based in their system of kinship. However, kinship is not only centered on biology and blood relations. Anthropologists often tend to study kinship as cultural classifications of humans and as aspects by the emerging of groups (Eriksen and Frøshaug 1998: 114). As mentioned above classificatory kinship terminology is used about people whom one is not biologically related to, and is normally a term used to describe a number of different people, usually people of the same sex.

In a patrilineal system one has, of course, relatives on the mother's side as well, these are called matrilineal relatives. Even though it is the patriliney that is characteristic in Mursi kin reckoning, the maternal link shows its importance in the classificatory mother's brother, who plays an important role in the distribution of bridewealth as will be shown in the next chapter concerning marriage and bridewealth distribution. Kin groups or corporate groups, vary in size, and can be big, depending on how many generations the group's genealogical system goes back. As descent, among the Mursi, is reckoned only three generations back, from that of living adults, a man needs not to trace his patrilineal descent any further, when kin relations are no longer considered valid. This means that genealogical specifications of a man's right to bridewealth and marital unions are cut (Interview with Milisha Olibui, Makki 2010; Turton 1973: 179).

As mentioned, in anthropological writing the words clan and lineage tend to overlap with each other, and the difference between the two is often ambiguous. A lineage includes people who can prove to be of a common ancestor, male or female, by stating the facts of genealogy. A clan is built on the same principle but will additionally include those who are presumed to have a common ancestor. The Mursi of the Ngeriai clan, for example, descend in an agnatic lineage, from what is now their northern neighboring group, the Me'en as they are known by to the Mursi. As they cannot clarify all the kinship relations in between, stories of how a clan is formed are essential in the making of history. This is of course historical information passed on in an oral tradition, and differs from what is searched for by literate historians (Turton and Jordomo n.d.). The story behind the Ngeriai clan is told by Milisha who is of the Ngeriai clan like his father. When the Mursi lived on the other side of the Omo, a Me'en man of the Ngeriai clan came to warn them, they would be attacked. This gave the Mursi time to move before the attack happened. As the Komorte clan was already established in Mursi, they "adopted" this Me'en man who later married a Mursi woman. The Ngeriai became Mursi and the Komorte clan's "little brother".

There are several types of clan organizations, many of them consist of totemic clans (See e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1963; Lévi-Strauss 1966). A totemic clan means that each clan is associated with an animal. The totem animal is then a symbol of the fellowship and membership of the clan. This is characteristic for the connection between descent groups and their picture of the world (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 40). Other types of clan organizations can be arranged hierarchically, with one central leader or chiefdom. Some societies become related through food, others are organized in segmented clans, like the Mursi who are organized in patrilineally segmented clans. A classical example is from Evans-Pritchard's the Nuer, which we are familiar with within anthropology. Such clan systems do not have common, approved leaders. Rather, they consist of equal lineages and clan segments. The Mursi reckon all the members of their own clan as their relatives, however as we will see they have a good idea of which lineage they are in close relations with and which ones they are not. For various reasons, such as feuds, as in the example above, lineages and/or clan segments can be united. Principles of kinship, local or ethnic belonging, and as we will see, also marriage, work together in the development of corporations.

One's descent group often settles marriage, because of the importance in creating alliances. The Mursi are divided into seventeen clans, of which five of the biggest have between two and five sub-clans, all clans are divided into different descent groups (see appendix 4). Specific rules of marrying within and marrying outside a group exist in order to create such alliances. Yet, there are examples where women and men of marriageable age get to choose their spouse, within a certain framework of rules. In Milisha's case where he fell in love and wanted to marry the girl, there were obstacles for this marriage to happen. He had to gather a lot of cows, and the relationship between Milisha's father and his wife's father had to be "tricked" into an approved one before the girl could be given as a wife to Milisha. Mursi marriage as in groups with a similar system, like for example the Nuer, may be seen as a relation between groups rather than between particular individuals, especially as the Mursi are polygamous. Obligations will then be considered more important than rights, as one puts oneself in a long-term debt by collecting and borrowing cows from family members, in order to complete a marriage payment. This may also strengthen the solidarity within the group.

Bridewealth is an important facet of Mursi marriage, like dowry has been, and probably still is important in some European and Asian countries, mostly in patrilineal, virilocal societies. Dowry is something the bride's family contributes with to the marriage, as a sort of a compensation for the economic responsibility the groom's family now have for their daughter

in law. Bridewealth then, is the groom's responsibility to give his wife's relatives in compensation for their loss of labor and her fertility. There are also certain rules for the settling of bridewealth in Mursi, as the *Tan a ngaha* (bride's mother's side) of the bridewealth need to be satisfied with the payment before the *Tan a ma* (bride's father's side). If they are not happy they can curse the bride and for example make her infertile (Turton 1973). The bridewealth payment is also a way of creating ties between people, as it creates a contract based on trust between lineages. For a Mursi man this means he puts himself in debt for the next three generations (Turton 1973), which I will get back to in the next chapter. First, some aspects of marriage and alliance.

Aspects of marriage

Thus far we have been through the various issues of kinship studies. The points and illustrations made in this chapter are solely models of realities as the actual processes of these models may be varying and changing. As we have seen in chapter 4 the Mursi are dealing with different economic and ecological contexts, their actions and responses will for that reason depend on the situations, facing the realities as they appear. Berihun Mebratie (2004) states that the anthropologist should therefore be aware that people's decisions may be contradictory to the principle. I have also, in this chapter, shown how the territory does not always fit with the map.

It can be discussed whether marriage is a right or an obligation, and of course this varies from one society to another. Seen in a historical perspective it has been quite rare to find mutual love as an aspect of marriage, as reproduction and the persistence of heritage are aspects considered a much higher value. However, love has become a more appreciated value in marriage, spreading from Western-Europe and USA to other parts of the world, during the last half of the 20th century (Eriksen and Frøshaug 1998). In an interview with Milisha, it became clear that it is more usual now than it was before, for young Mursis to be a part of choosing one's own spouse. Their fathers still need to be exchange partners, and also play important roles in organizing the marriage. I have already mentioned Milisha's story and how he fell in love with a beautiful southern Mursi girl, he said to his father that he wanted to marry her, and because his father knew of her father, they met and agreed on the bridewealth.

There was another man also fighting for this girl, but it was Milisha who could offer the higher number of cows, and the girl's father was very pleased with Milisha's offer.²³

Further Berihun Mebratie argues it should be expected that alliances might be made, contradictory to the model or the principle. Because social relations and alliance formation innately embody links allowing the system to make variations between patterns; "some of these links may be weakly linked or even be newly forged" (Berihun Mebratie 2004: 171). As already mentioned there has been two main perspectives on kinship; lineage theory and alliance theory. The latter has challenged the former by looking at kinship relations tied between groups, unlike lineage theory, which focus is on the internal structure of the descent group. It was Levi-Strauss who most fully developed this theory in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969 [1949]), where a theory of kinship and marriage was presented. There are different ways in solving the problems of kinship, as I have been trying to show. In that regard all societies have something in common: they all have rules about incest and exogamy. This involves a prohibition against sexual relations between people classified as close relatives, at least between parents and children, and between siblings. This does of course not imply that such relationships do not happen; it is a common norm forbidding them to happen. And it was this Levi-Strauss aimed to in his alliance theory, as he argued that the prohibition of incest made people organize in groups (Holý 1996: 125). These groups often have regular exchanges of spouses in order to create strong affinal ties and maintain social relationships. With the Mursi, however, we will see in the next chapter that the rules of bridewealth distribution allow them to only be in an exchanging relationship for three generations. In the fourth generation a new alliance can be created between the descent lines involved.

Levi-Strauss suggested that people marry out, but not too far out. Cross-cousin marriage was therefore considered acceptable because, as we can see from figure 2 these do not belong to the same descent group as ego. This applies whether descent is traced through a male or female line. The Mursi do have specific rules for whom it is advantageous to enter into an alliance with, and cross-cousins are no exception here either. As we can see in figure 5 ego refers to mother's brother's daughter (MBD) as "mother". However, at the same time she can be a possible spouse, because her father and ego's father are in a relationship, which makes them exchange partners (see list of exchange partners, appendix 3).

²³ Interview with Milisha Olibui, Makki June 2010.

A man's wife-givers are also the wife-givers of his daughter's grandfathers and great-grandfathers, with other words, this man is in great debt to these men who has given his wife, they have also given her mother and her grandmother. With other words, when this man is marrying off his daughters he is involved with a system of exchange-debt that will keep the alliance and solidarity between two groups strong for at least three generations. In this concern it is the bridewealth cattle, which are the binding link between two families, because, as we we will see in the next chapter, they are the source in which holds a man with a wife, and also in keeping alliances between the groups.

Chamanlu's possible son

Even though in most cases marriage alliances are determined beforehand unforeseen situations may occur. I came across an incident involving a young man living in my village Ulum Holi. This incident, I would argue, shows how young Mursis are able to influence who their future spouse may be, and also when it is the right time to enter a marital union. It was mid-day, though quite chilly. I was observing a meeting concerning the bridewealth of my host sister, Burana. The attention was suddenly brought across the compound to the other side of the village. About twenty men were sitting in a circle, some were sitting on stones and the eldest men on their *alli* (headrest), a small T-shaped stool made of wood, used both as a pillow and a stool. They were calm and spoke in turns; however, there was not one in particular who was leading the meeting.

Days before, words came to me that a young man, Chamanlu, was accused of being the father of a baby boy with a girl to whom he was not married. This girl was at this point living in our village with Chamanlu's mother and sisters. However, there was another young man involved, and it could be his child as well. An unmarried girl's family has the right to claim ten cows for a baby boy outside of marriage. The boy leaves his mother when he is old enough to be with his father to learn how to be a good herdsman. If the child had been a girl, she would have stayed with her mother and the father would not have to pay anything. The young girl claimed Chamanlu was the father. He himself alleged he was not. The girl's brother and *Dada* (FaBr) had come to discuss the situation; neither Chamanlu nor the mother of the child were present. Chamanlu clearly did not want to pay for the child, and pledged his 'innocence'. He wanted to collect enough cows to pay for a wife he wanted to marry, and did not want to marry this girl who claimed that he was the father of her child. From

conversations a few days after the meeting, I learnt that Chamanlu did not pay for the child and the girl had moved,²⁴ I never saw her in Ulum Holi again.

Also among the young women there were different views on marriage. One of the young women was Burana who was in a process of getting married. The other was Birrosuin, or Tamas as she liked to be called. Tamas looked like she could be of the same age as Burana. I was curious why she had not already married as her lip was well stretched. At first she told me that she did not want to marry. She wanted to go to school and learn how to read and write. After having given it a few thoughts, she said she wanted to marry someday, when she had finished school, in that way she wanted to be able to teach her children how to read and write.

Because it was difficult to estimate age of the Mursi, I estimated Birrosuin to be around 17-20 years of age. Her father supported her in her wish to finish school before marriage. The education program in Mursi is limited, however, an international mission station was in charge of a well-functioning school in the northern area of Mursiland. Because the Mursi are quite isolated from the rest of Ethiopia, the focus of this school was to bring the students up to the level they needed in order to attend other Ethiopian schools elsewhere.

Marriage is indeed one of the most important social happenings in the life of an East African herdsman in order to be acknowledged a socially recognized status. Also, for the women to be acknowledged a status of a wife, something which obliges her to provide her husband with various services, such as the bearing of children. The question remains as to how marriage is important in Mursi social organization and the relationships between people.

²⁴ In personal communication with Kate Fayers-Kerr, Ulum Holi May 2010.

6. Marriage Practices Among the Mursi

Throughout my fieldwork I have been concerned with different aspects of Mursi marriage. The Mursi word *gama* is translated to the English word marriage (Turton, Moges et al. 2008), and refers to the entering of a partnership. When it comes to the ceremonies that constitute a Mursi marriage, including the sets of rules, distribution of bridewealth, and as far as kinship is concerned, it also provides a breeding ground for the social structure among the Mursi. To understand the structure and social order of the Mursi, I have explored the kinship system; ties of consanguinity, affinity and co-residence, in correlation with the rules of bridewealth distribution and intermarriage. The rules of bridewealth distribution must be seen in a circular manner as the cattle function as the key symbol²⁵ on the recurrence of kinship ties.

This chapter will be concerned with the practice of bridewealth distribution, as well as with the ceremonies and specific rules connected to Mursi marriage. First, I have used Turton's work as a "manual" in following the distribution of bridewealth in one particular family, when their daughter was in the process of getting married, which means that she was ready to commit to the acknowledged status of a woman and the obligations that follow with it. Second, in addition to the bridewealth distribution, there are two other ceremonies connected to Mursi marriage. Third, the rules of intermarriage will be presented, as the rules for whom one is allowed to marry go hand in hand with the distribution of bridewealth, when kin reckoning is measured through different stages of bridewealth.

Distribution of bridewealth

Bridewealth is, especially in Africa, common in patrilineal systems while it is usually insubstantial in matrilineal or bilateral societies (Comaroff 1980: 16). By looking at the Mursi and the Nuer for instance, marriage with bridewealth usually entails the control over the bride

²⁵ For more readings on key symbols, see e.g. Ortner, S. B. (1973). "On Key Symbols." *American Anthropologist* 75(5): 1338-1346.

This paper reviews the use of the notion of "key symbol" in anthropological analysis. It analyzes phenomena which have been or might be accorded the status of key symbol in cultural analyses, categorizing them according to their primary modes of operating on thought and action.

and the affiliation of her children on the part of her husband's kin, whereas its non-payment may lead to increased control and also perhaps non-virilocal residence. As we will see below, the residence pattern of the Mursi is usually virilocal, although I came across three incidents in the same settlement where married women lived in the same settlement as their mother and father. Their husbands were also living there during the time of my stay. This may be because the Mursi kinship system is not patrilineal in the sense that it is bounded unilineal. They do indeed share a patrilineal ideology together with other East African herders (Turton 1980: 69). However, Comaroff writes:

"bridewealth *does* occur in non-unilineal contexts, and sometimes is associated with *intra*-descent group marriage. (...) I have already alluded to the Mursi, who share a patrilineal ideology, but among whom descent groups and their internal relationships are given manifest form by the mobilization and distribution of marriage payments" (1980: 16).

From Comaroff's argument I understand that the Mursi are non-unilineal as they calculate descent through the father's line depending on individual rules, such as the distribution of bridewealth. This means that through external factors, such as the bridewealth transaction, descent groups and internal relationships are given form. Because unilineal descent groups trace descent through a single parental line, either through matrilineal or patrilineal descent, they are only members of one descent line. However, in Mursi bridewealth distribution the maternal links are very important, as it is the maternal agnates of the bride who are the only ones to have rights to a share of the bridewealth as *specified* by the rules. It is also these men who are to be satisfied before the bride's patrilineal kinsmen for reasons that will be stated below. In that case they must be non-unilineal considering that kin relations take form through the rules of bridewealth distribution.

With this in mind, the set of rules in this particular bridewealth distribution is a complex and time demanding topic, which must be researched in great detail over time, something Dr. David Turton (1973) has done in his PhD dissertation. What is interesting is that I have, 40 years later, found the same patterns in bridewealth distribution among the Mursi, with only a few exceptions, such as the increase in cattle, which I have argued may be a result of the increase in cash economy. I will present my findings here, but it is necessary to analyze the process, which gives meaning to the ceremonies that constitute Mursi marriage and the organization of kinship and relations within this particular social system.

A transfer of stock, which represents the most important economic transaction that any Mursi is likely to be involved in, settles marriage among the Mursi. The distribution of bridewealth comes with a set of rules, which defines, not only the recipients of bridewealth, but also the effective limits of the genealogical reckoning of descent, and the degree of prohibited marriage (Turton 1973: 161). I have already mentioned how kinship is used as conventional rules in order to manage the bridewealth distribution. One has to take into consideration that these are ideal rules, and are not always followed by the “manual”. As we have seen the rules may to a certain extent be easily manipulated because both genealogy and memory can be adjusted in order to correspond with the rules. I have already shown how the negotiations, which come before marriage, are done and can be manipulated. Last but not least we need to get acquainted with the ceremonies by which Mursi marriage is accomplished, and how the particular rules of bridewealth distribution function as an external limit in marking off a range of prohibited marital unions in Mursi. Further, a differentiation is made between one’s mother’s side and father’s side. Relatives on the mother’s side of the family have more classificatory terms, and relatives on the father’s side have more descriptive terms. We will see that Mursi kinship terms allow a number of relatives belonging to one’s mother’s patrilineage to be grouped together, ignoring generational differences. This means that the same term is used for both one’s mother’s brothers and one’s mother’s brother’s sons. On ego’s father’s side the terms are more descriptive when generational differences are not ignored. The same term may be used to address people of the same generation, as for example father, father’s brothers and father’s sisters.

Although I have no thorough record of how the bridewealth was actually distributed, the model, however, is quite clear as to who has his legal rights to a share of bridewealth. All the bridewealth cattle is usually handed to the bride’s close agnates before she goes to live with her husband. As we will see, this is not always the case, but at least the total bridewealth is always decided before the bride joins her husband. Once the groom has collected all the cows with good help from his close agnates the cattle are ready to be handed over to the bride’s father for further distribution.

Agnates of the bride’s mother, two grandmothers and four great-grandmothers are the bride’s father’s, her grandfathers’ and great-grandfather’s wife-givers (see figure 6); it is to these whom he is of great debt when he marries off his daughters. He is dependent on satisfying his

daughters' patrilineal kinsmen together with, and most importantly the agnates of his wife, her mother and her grandmothers. Depending on seven previous marriages; that of the bride's parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, it is decided to who the bride's father is in debt. "Thus, for example, the three cattle which are due to her MMB's agnatic descendants may be seen as deferred payment for the marriage of her maternal grandmother" (Turton 1980: 72, see figure 6 below). The men who are wife-givers to the bride's father, grandfather and great-grandfather are known as the *zuo a modain* ("people of the saliva") (Turton 1980: 71). It is these men, by virtue of their kin relationship to the bride, who are able to curse the bride if their share of the bridewealth is not satisfactorily met. It is also these men whose number of bridewealth cattle is specified by the rules. The remaining cattle are unspecified and distributed by the bride's father.

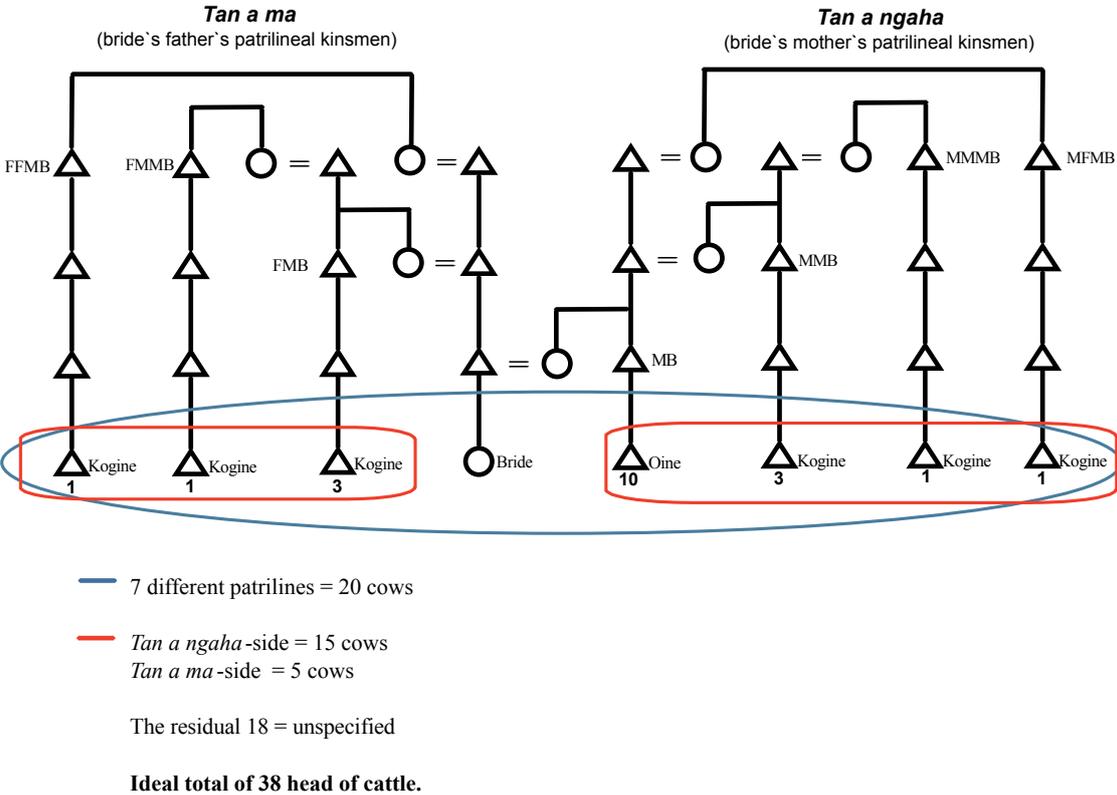


Figure 6: Ideal bridewealth distribution among the Mursi (Turton 1973: 162; 1980: 71)

If we look at the figure above, the rules of bridewealth distribution in Mursi have their base in eight patriline, the bride's four great-grandfathers and the brothers of her four great-grandmothers. The seven different patriline marked with blue illustrate the bride's agnates on her mother's side and the patrilineal kinsmen on her father's side. These men have their right to claim bridewealth, of which 5 are earmarked to the one-cow *kogine* and the three-cow *kogine* on each side. 10 are earmarked the bride's classificatory MBs. In its ideal total then 20 cows are numerically specified and earmarked these men; 15 of which go to the bride's mother's agnates and 5 of which go to the bride's patrilineal kinsmen. The residual 18 are not specified.

Turton argues that the rules of distribution, following the patrilineal division, cannot appeal as an explanation in itself, even if the people think of it as primary. He argues that it must be looked upon with circularity. The fact that three generations is as far back a man needs to trace his descent in order to prove his claim to the bridewealth of his patrilineal kinswomen is coherent with the limit of accurate kin reckoning, which is three generations above that of living adults. And for that reason, he further argues, must the patriline in the model above be considered as a function of the rules of bridewealth distribution. I have earlier mentioned descent groups, and in Turton's argument he also states that because there are "(...) shallow agnatic descent groups, consisting of the descendants of a common grandfather or great-grandfather, (...) and that the members of one of these descent groups think of themselves as having rights in each others cattle" (Turton 1980: 73). As many transactions in cattle have to do with bridewealth, what these descent groups incorporate are claims to the bridewealth cattle of patrilineal kinswomen. The explanation of the rules will also then be circular in considering that the bridewealth payment is indeed compensation to a group of agnates, for the loss of a sister or daughter (Turton 1980: 73).

Turton makes a point by stating that the rules of bridewealth need to be seen as a circle recurrent after three generations. I would also like to shed light on the aspect of the bridewealth's durability, or non-durability for that matter as the falling away of bridewealth debt is equivalent of kinship falling away. The descent lines illustrated in the model above can only be kept apart in theory if marriage is forbidden between a man and a woman who is linked together by bridewealth transactions; meaning the persons who are within the category of third cousin. The bride, as illustrated in the model, cannot marry agnatic descendants of her FFMB because these men, who had a right to ten cows from the bridewealth of her FFZ and

three cows from her FZ, still have the right to one cow from her own bridewealth. After they have received the final one cow, kin relations are cut, meaning that in the fourth generation a second and reciprocal affinal link could be created between the two descent lines, meaning that marriage of the bride's father's paternal grandparents could be repeated²⁶ (Turton 1973; 1980).

The rules of bridewealth distribution must therefore be applied with circularity, as Turton has suggested. Taken the aspect of durability into consideration as well, the rules, then, define the external limit in marking off degrees of prohibited marital unions in Mursi. However, this is only the model, and as we have already seen, genealogy may be manipulated and so the model may also change. Showing what I mean with the aspect of durability I will present the details of the rules as they appear from the model above, taking into consideration, again, that they are ideal rules. As already mentioned, the representatives of eight patrilineages corresponding with the bride's eight great grandparents are the recipients of bridewealth; on the bride's mother's side: *Tan a ngaha*, which consists of her classificatory MB (10 cows), MMB (3 cows), MMMB (1 cow), MFMB (1 cow) (Turton 1973: 161, see also list of kinship terms). The latter three patrilineages are referred to as *koige* (sing. *kogine*). Since the bride's actual MMB is most likely to be dead, these cattle are taken by MMBS or MMBSS, who are called *kogine a bio ko sizzi*, the three-cows relative. All the patrilineal kinsmen of the bride's mother's mother's own and descending generations, are the bride's *koige* (pl. of *kogine*). "Therefore, the representatives of this descent line have a right to three cattle, having taken (ideally) ten from the bridewealth of the bride's mother."²⁷ The next line of patrilineal kinsmen are those of the bride's mother's mother's mother (MMB), whose right is one cow (*kogine a bi 'done*) of the bridewealth (Turton 1973: 163).

Therefore, 15 head of cattle are ideally meant for the representatives of four different patrilineages, where the biggest share is earmarked for the representatives of the line consisting of the bride's classificatory mother's brothers (which she is linked to at the first ascending generation).

²⁶ Personal communication with Milisha Olibui, Makki June 2010.

²⁷ Personal communication with Milisha Olibui, Makki June 2010.

On the bride's father's side: *Tan a ma*, a number of cows is given to her own patrilineal kinsmen, according to the ideal pattern of distribution on this side, 18 head of cattle is the ideal total, even though such a pattern is not formally specified by the rules (Turton 1973: 163). The three remaining patrilineal lines are those of the bride's FMB (3 cows), FMFB (1 cow) and FFMB (1 cow), taking the ideal bridewealth up to its total of 38 head of cattle. The ten cattle which are due to the *Oine* (see list of Mursi kinship terms) may in this case be distributed among several men whose actual genealogical relationship with the bride could be MB, MFBS, MBS, MBSS, depending on how previous bridewealths were distributed in the patrilineal descent and which kinsmen and descendants are still alive²⁸.

Looking at the figure above, the same rules apply to the three patrilineal lines of *koige* on the bride's mother's side and on the father's side, the latter represented by the descendants of her FMB (3 cows), FMFB (1 cow) and FFMB (one cow). This leaves us with: of the ideal total of 38 head, a total of 20 cattle, which are due to seven different patrilineal lines that the bride is related to through at least one female link. Meaning that the bride's father's side is given a total of 18 head; which is not specified by the rules. 5 of these go to the three patrilineal lines, which are balanced with the three patrilineal lines on the bride's mother's side. This means that the wife-givers of the *Tan a ngaha* side is left with a total of 15 head of cattle, whereby 5 go to the *koige*, and 10 to the classificatory MB (Turton 1973: 164).

This illustrates how the bridewealth distribution leads each marriage into becoming a link of indebtedness, and how a particular bridewealth payment is distributed depending on how previous payments were done (previous payments, meaning those of the bride's mother, and/or elder sister(s)). Though, one must take into consideration that the rules of bridewealth distribution therefore specify categories of kin, rather than different individuals; this proves a consistency in Mursi kinship terminology (Turton 1973: 163).

In any case this is the model of a reality, which is incorporated in the Mursi society. I have now tried to show how the rules of bridewealth must be seen as a repetition of kinship ties, and thus make it possible to ascertain an extensive knowledge on the structure in which the Mursi are incorporated. Also, as we move further I will be concerned with the other factors

²⁸ Interview with Milisha Olibui, Makki June 2010

substantiating my argument presented in the introduction, indicating that marriage be looked upon as a total social phenomenon. However, as I have mentioned above, the reality may not always correspond with the model. Even though I have not been able to collect thorough data, I would like to present my findings in the data I have collected from a meeting I attended about my host sister, Burana's, bridewealth. In addition to attending the meeting, which was unfortunately not completed in my presence, I did interviews in order to find how the complete bridewealth was distributed and if it was brought up to its ideal total. Anyone I asked answered that Burana's bridewealth was brought up to its ideal number of 38 head, whether this was the reality or just a gesture of public courtesy I do not know. The findings from the meeting and the interviews are presented below, though they are in lack of some details, I think they present the point I have been trying to make.

Burana's bridewealth

Burana, one of my host sisters in Ulum Holi, was in the process of getting married. This represented an opportunity to find out more about the distribution of cows in her bridewealth, compared to her three older sisters' previous marriages. As mentioned above the ideal number of cows distributed to the bride's family is 38 head of cattle, however this can vary. In most cases the bridewealth does not only consist of cows, there can be calves, goats and guns²⁹ included (Turton 1973: 161). In at least one of the cases I heard of, the bridewealth had reached 44, and therefore 6 cows above the ideal number. The public number of that particular bridewealth was still 38 head of cattle.

Before going into the example below, a description of the different persons involved is necessary to get an understanding of the relations in the particular case. Numbers in brackets correspond to the persons involved:

Burana (3) - the second youngest daughter of Orieramai (1) and Ngakorokorro (2). She was in the process of getting married. The case below describes a meeting, which took place the day

²⁹ Most Mursi men own at least one Kalashnikov AK-47, as a consequence of the spreading of automatic weapons in the Lower Omo Valley during the mid 80s and 90s. The weapons were a result of the making of tribal militias under the Khartoum government, Southern Sudan (Turton 1995).

before her coming husband, Uligolony, was handing over a part of the bridewealth to her family. The remaining cattle will be given when it is time for her to leave her father's compound, which varies individually. I estimated Burana (3) to be about 16-18 years old.

Orieramai (1) – father of the coming bride, Burana (3). He was a well-respected man, which gave him an important role in meetings, marriage ceremonies and other important social events all over Mursiland. I have estimated him to be around 55-60 years old.

Ngakorokorro (2) – mother of Burana (3) and one (out of two) of Orieramai's (1) wives. Together they had six children. I estimated her to be around 40-50 years old.

Nyomanicherine (4) – Orieramai's (1) half brother, their father had five wives.

Ulichagi (6) – son of Ulibiseni (5), Ngakorokorro's (2) brother and Burana's (3) mother's brother (MB). Ulichagi (6) was thus a classificatory MB.

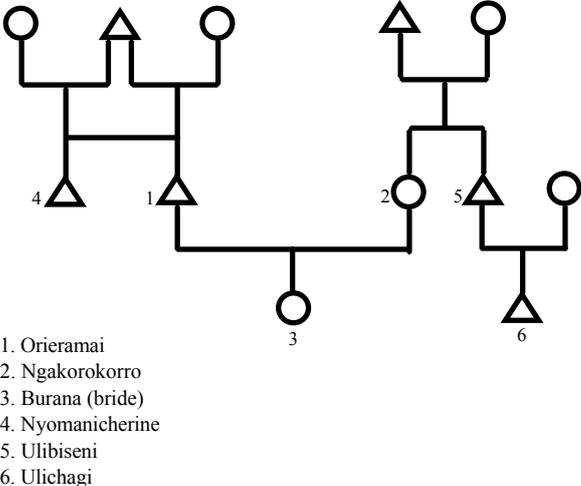


Figure 7: Illustration of the kinship relations presented in the case of Burana's bridewealth meeting.

Burana was at the time in a stage where she was a *ngoni* (engaged) – meaning her cows were collected. In this particular case her coming husband, Uligolony, was ready to hand over parts of the bridewealth. From the meeting, which was interrupted by another meeting in the settlement, it became clear that they were indeed discussing the settling of the bride's mother's side. It was mid-day, I asked the three men having a meeting if it was okay for Kate and I to sit down and listen. Kate was translating. We picked one *bena* (stone) each to sit on. At first they began small-talking and were more interested in learning foreign words such as stone and mud. When I told them I was interested in learning about Mursi marriage and the distribution of cows, they continued the meeting. The three men were Orieraimai (1), Nyomanicherine (4), and Ulichagi (6). The figure above illustrates the relations discussed at the meeting, where they are numbered from 1 to 6. Ulichagi (6) was going to receive ten cows from Burana's (3) bridewealth, whether he was to share these ten among several classificatory mother's brothers I do not know, this is also highly dependent on how the bridewealth had been distributed in the previous marriages of Burana's (3) grandmother, mother (2) and sisters. Nyomanicherine (4) was Orieraimai's (1) half brother, and there is reason to assume he was there to help his brother with the distributing of the cattle.

Meanwhile, another group of men had gathered around by the discussion tree, a big tree located in the centre of the settlement, with six compounds formed as a half circle around. Orieraimai (1) and the other men got curious and moved over to where the other meeting was held.³⁰

There is reason to believe that Orieraimai (1) had decided upon the total of Burana's (3) bridewealth. However, from the interviews I made, I got little information on how the cows would be distributed on the bride's father's side. This may be because Orieraimai (1) had to solve and satisfy the *zuo a modain* (agnates on the bride's mother's side) first. It is also reason to believe that this particular bridewealth may not have been brought up to its ideal total, as the classificatory mother's brothers have only received 8 cows in total, where 10 is the ideal number.

³⁰ See chapter 5

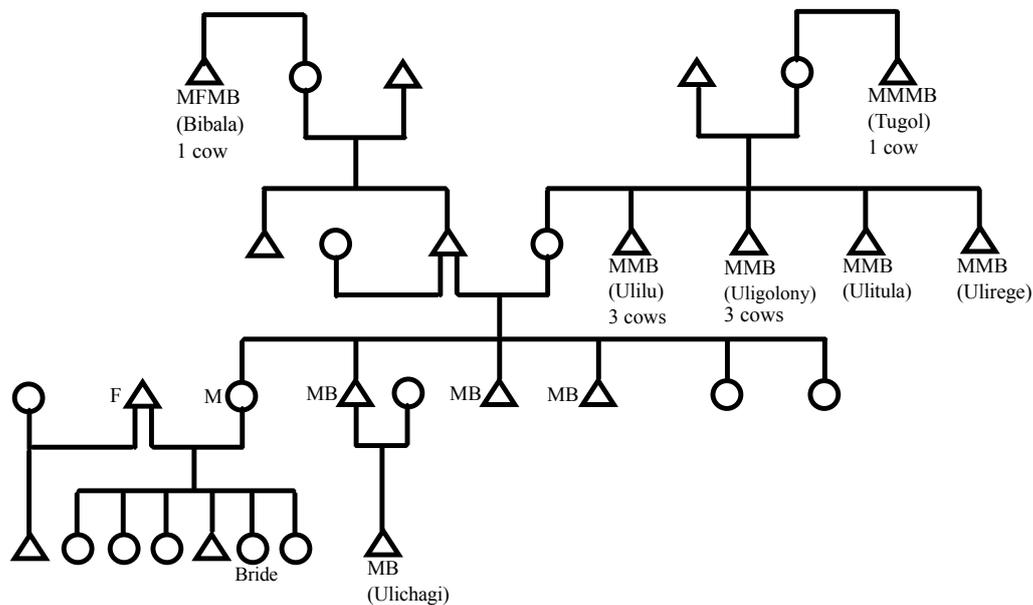


Figure 8: Bridewealth cattle distributed among Burana's MBs

The figure above is an incomplete illustration of Burana's bridewealth distribution. From the figure we can see that 8 cows are divided among the bride's MBs, however, during the meeting described above, it became clear that the young man Ulichagi was the relative to receive 10 cows as his father Ulibiseni was dead. This latter information is not in accordance with the data I have collected through interviews, illustrated in figure above. Here are the bride's MFMB, MMMB and MMBs the ones to receive the bridewealth share of 10 cows. There might have been a misunderstanding or confusion in names, because I know for a fact that Uligolony, illustrated as one of the recipients of 3 cows, was dead, and that three of his sons were to receive his share. Ulichagi may have been one of Uligolony's "sons". Another option may be that there were two remaining cows due to Ulichagi (MBS).³¹ As we can see the bride's mother's father's mother's brother (MFMB) is to receive 1 cow along with her mother's mother's mother's brother (MMMB). Two of the bride's mother's mother's brothers (MMB) are the recipients of 3 cows each. Ulitula and Ulirege had already got their share from

³¹ Ulichagi is the son of the bride's mother's brother, therefore MBS. However, according to Mursi kinship terminology, he is classified as the bride's mother's brother (MB).

Burana's sisters' bridewealth cattle. Even if the data collected is in lack of some information, it illustrates how the bride's father is still in debt to the wife-givers of himself, the bride's grandfather and great-grandfather.

I have thus far attempted to show how the rules of bridewealth distribution go hand in hand in sustaining the durability and preserving past marital alliances. Through periodic transfers of stock, or debt, for a number of generations, the marriage regulations would appear to prevent the use of new marriages to reinforce existing affinal ties (Turton 1973: 177). The rules therefore require that each marriage be followed by a series of deferred payments, of decreasing economic value, over a period of three generations, which means, when the payment transfers have reached three generations, the debt has usually been paid and one is no longer reckoned as descendants of the bride's family anymore³². In the next few pages I will be concerned with the two other ceremonial events, which constitute the ties of marriage.

The groom's *kidong ko duri* and the *tugha* of the bride

Mursi marriage is linked with a series of ceremonies happening during a span of time, which I have divided into three categories or stages. These three stages, which are the principal ceremonies held in the case of a marriage are: 1. The distribution of bridewealth presented above. 2. A ceremony for the groom called *kidong ko duri*. And 3. A blessing ceremony for the bride, called *tugha*.

The distribution of bridewealth comes to its total on the day of the bride's *tugha*. This is the last of the ceremonies held in connection with a Mursi marriage, and the bride's father holds a blessing ceremony for her. The *tugha* may be looked upon as a *rite de passage* (see e.g. Turner 1996) as it is the day the girl leaves her father's compound. Her fertility is highly valued by her husband and she is now ready to leave, considered a wife and responsible for her own family. Even though a girl leaves her father's compound she may still cultivate with her mother. It seems like young, married couples can decide for themselves where it is best for them to live. Since, in most cases, the girls share their cultivation land with their mother, they choose to stay close to their mother. I only heard of one instance where a man's wife was cultivating with his mother, which may be because her mother was dead. In most cases the

³² Personal communication with Milisha Olibui, Makki June 2010

bride goes to live with her husband, however, as mentioned above, I came across incidents where the married women were still living in their parents' compound. Burana's three married sisters, for example, were all living in the same settlement as their father and mother, though I heard Burana was going to move to her husband's compound when the bridewealth had come in complete and the *tugha* had been held.

A *kidong ko duri* (or *duriyô*, which means wedding dance (Turton, Moges et al. 2008)), is a daylong wedding ceremony held for the groom, also called *duri*. The *duri* I attended was held at the groom's father's settlement, and it was his mother's kinswomen who constituted the majority of the participants. We were singing, dancing and eating meat. One or several cows may be killed to feed the guests, though some *duri* dances can be smaller and no meat is served. The *kidong* is the characteristic drum used at the *duri*, therefore *kidong* (drum) *ko* (with) *duri* (dance).

At the occasion of the *Kidong ko duri* presented in chapter 5, I entered the settlement of Anyoye with a number of women from all over Mursi, all of whom were kinswomen of the groom, Ulilu. The women had been walking through several settlements, picking up others along the way. Ulum Holi was the last stop before Anyoye and the women who had come far, stopped to rest for the night. The next morning we started preparing for the *kidong ko duri*. The women had dressed up in second hand clothes; shirts, caps, tank tops, headbands and soccer jerseys. When I asked why they were wearing the silly hats and shirts they laughed and told me they had dressed up, they thought it was dressy – it was something different than the traditional clothing.

On our way to Anyoye, we started singing wedding songs. Two of the women from our settlement were making drumming sounds on empty 30 litres, yellow jerry cans – *kidong* (drum). We collected sticks from trees, which we used to raise towards the sky while we were dancing and singing – *dole* (girl), *jhone* (mother), *dole, jhone*. All the songs leading to these words, representing a new phase in life, as people who are capable of engendering and bearing children – ready to be self-sufficient adults, starting their own family. Games and songs were performed throughout the day and night to celebrate the new stage the couple was about to enter in their lives. Everyone had a stick in their hand, used throughout the dances. As we were getting closer to the heat of the moment the dances erupted into games, which to me seemed violent. I found myself hiding from all the women running around whipping each

other with the sticks we used while dancing. I tried to mingle with the women who were standing on the side with the children. One of the women from my settlement came closer; she raised her hand with the whip and laughed. I backed, and was clearly scared of what would happen next, I turned; ready to run, when I felt the lash on the back of my thighs. I was shocked! I understood I had suddenly become part of the game. When they saw my reaction, they understood something was not as it was supposed to be, the women still laughed, but I could see on the look on the woman's face that she was worried, and when she saw the marks it left on my skin, she realised I probably had softer skin than they, as this kind of whipping did not leave any marks on their skin. Everyone came to look, they said something I could not understand, and then they laughed. I did not know whether to laugh or cry, I recall doing both, though I knew she did not mean for it to leave any marks or hurt in any way. This was a game, traditional to a Mursi marriage ceremony where all the elder women were chasing the younger ones whipping them, and it could seem like it was a symbol on the relationship between a man's first wife and second wife. Maybe she is supposed to mark her territory, even though I think most Mursi women are happy that their husband has several wives. I spoke with one Mursi lady who could not wait until her husband got a second wife so that the new wife could fetch the water and do everything that this lady did not want to do. In the heat of the moment I believe the younger women thought it was quite fun to be chased around, laughter could be heard everywhere.



Kidong ko duri at Anyoye, May 2010. Photo: Stine Lise Jørgensen

After a while everyone sat down in a big circle, and *bunna*³³ (coffee) was served from two big kettles. When everyone had got some of the coffee, a man came and sat down in the middle of the circle, he spoke with a woman. I was later told that these were two of the groom's *oine* and *ohine* (see appendix 2). It was a play, the symbolic meaning of which is that of marriage and the concerns that come with it. The woman was wearing a garland of green leaves around her head and upper arms. She sat down with the man, they talked, it seemed like they were discussing something. She had an aggressive attitude, and was sporadically whipping the man (playing her husband) while ranting and raving at him. This particular act is called *dashi*, as it is called *dashi* when a woman hits or whips a man. Also, it was a possible scene from a marriage, when the husband came to tell his wife that he wanted a second wife, a younger wife he could have more children with. His first wife is then supposed to be in opposition to her husband, even though this is an expected situation in a marriage. A younger woman came into the circle, playing this possible younger wife, she started to pick a fight with the elder woman, who became furious and started chasing her with the wooden stick. The man exited the circle, and the singing, dancing and drumming started again. We kept on going until dawn, when meat, *tila* (porridge), *ur-a-lisa* and *arake* (booze) was served, I was so exhausted that I had to have my host father walk me home. I heard that they kept it going until the next morning, then they walked to the bride's village, where the groom, Ulilu, was going to deliver the bridewealth and bring it up to its complete total for his wife Ngamargo.

As we have seen, each marriage is to be followed by a series of deferred payments, "by preventing new marriages from repeating existing affinal ties for a period of three generations, the rules have the effect of turning affines into kinsmen" (Turton 1973: 181). During this period of three generations the original link of affinity cannot be repeated, and the regulations I have presented above proves that a man cannot marry a woman of his own clan (a general view of the Mursi clans, sub-clans and descent groups are listed in appendix 4), and according to the rules marrying into the mother's sub-clan is also prohibited. Turton states in his thesis, "a man may not marry a woman of his own clan, nor of his mother's sub-clan, nor any woman who is patrilineally related to one of his great-grandparents. (...) polygamy enables the effect of this rule to be modified in practice" (Turton 1973: 177), and during the next few pages I will be concerned with Mursi and intermarriage.

³³ *Bunna* is made of wild coffee found in different areas in Mursi. Because ingredients like chilli is added, it gives a more spicy taste to it.

Intermarriage

When it comes to marriage alliances, it is not clans that are linked through the process of creating such alliances; neither "do they function corporately in relation to political, economic or ritual activity" (Turton 1973: 178). However, the Mursi do indeed think of their society as an exogamous system as the prohibition of marrying into one's mother's clan or sub-clan is an important part of their model of social structure. I have earlier mentioned descent groups; these are the ones to be involved with rights to property in a marriage alliance. The descent groups are relatively short-lived and quite small in size, and it is their members who define their interest in marriage both genealogically and through recognized rights to bridewealth³⁴ (Turton 1973: 178). However, Milisha, one of my informants, whose story I have mentioned on several occasions in this thesis, was married to a woman of his mother's sub-clan. His mother was a Juhai from the sub-clan *Koioyi*, while his wife was from the other sub-clan of Juhai: *Ngoloin*. This is clearly a case where the genealogy has been manipulated to fit in with the circumstances, and proves the model to be different from the reality. Also, it validates how the rules may be modified, by for example from polygamy.

Nevertheless, a Mursi man refers to women of his own clan as *benen*, these women are "unmarriageable", while the "marriageable" are referred to as *miroga*. The latter is also used of human and non-human threats like hyenas, crop pests and alike. When the term *miroga* is used of enemies, like for example the Hamar, *miroga* may be translated as "enemies" (Turton 1973).³⁵ The Mursi and the Hamar do not achieve such a degree of peaceful contact that would make intermarriage possible. When used to mean "marriageable women", therefore, the term *miroga* refers to outsiders with whom it is necessary to engage in peaceful social relations. By necessary it is meant if territorial units are to be kept. The rules of bridewealth distribution, as we have seen, lay a strong emphasis on maintaining the connection between groups once linked through marriage. I would assume that the same rules apply if a Mursi is to marry a woman from a neighboring group, that is, if they are in such peaceful relations. Groups like the Chai, Suri and Karo are all groups the Mursi can exchange women with. The groups which they are not exchanging women with, remain enemies. I mentioned above that the Mursi are not exchanging women with the Hamar, likewise the Bodi, Bume and Banna.

³⁴ Personal communication with Milisha Olibui, Makki June 2010

³⁵ Also, personal communication with Milisha Olibui, Makki June 2010

They have made peace with the Banna, however they do not exchange women. Looking at the list of clans, there are certain clans that are more like "brother-clans" than others, and do not intermarry. Komorte cannot marry Juhai, Mangwi and Ngeriai, nor does intermarriage between the latter two happen. However a Bumai man can marry women from all the other clans. Myths of origin was only just brought up in chapter 5, and I have shown that the history of a clan's origin is important as far as intermarriage is concerned. When the Komorte of Mursi adopted the man from the Ngeriai clan of Me`en, they created "familiar" relations. Marriage between Komorte and Ngeriai are therefore not prohibited, but is not preferable because in people's opinion it will put you in trouble. A man of the Komorte clan married a woman of the Juhai clan, they had many problems of various kinds, and Milisha, my informant, said this was because a Komorte is not supposed to marry a Juhai. I believe the same reason applies for the Komorte and Juhai as for Komorte and Ngeriai, though I do not know their history of origin.

Other myths exist, also between the different ethnic groups in the area, especially between groups where there is a history of conflict, myths about the other are very common, such as for example cannibalism. A Mursi woman told me that the Hamar said that the Mursi were cannibals, "but really, it is the Hamar who are cannibals". One day I was chatting with Karilu and Kokonge, two young girls in the settlement of Marege. Karilu was already married, only not officially (her *tugha* had not been held and all the cows had not been distributed). Of course when I say chatting, one must take into consideration that I knew very little Mursi at the time, thus, communicating with my whole body was necessary. I had taught them some Norwegian words, earlier on, which they used when they noticed I did not understand. We were talking about relationships, when I explained to them how our notion of a relationship is. I demonstrated how we are hugging the people we love, they laughed, and were more interested in all the things I could buy for them when I was to go to Jinka. I had told them I was going to Jinka to meet my "husband" who was coming from Norway. With my "husband's" money they meant I could buy them all kinds of things. I tried to explain that I would not have more money when he came, and that I could not possibly buy everything they asked for. They laughed and told me if I was intimate with him; they showed me with their hands, he would give me money. Then I could buy them bras, shoes and beads. I must admit I was a little shocked, and did not quite know how to explain to them that where I come from it does not work like that. I asked them if Mursi women got paid by their husbands. "We don't, but the Hamar do", Kokonge said. There are general myths that can be classified as myths of

origin, however myths with a negative outcome, such as the latter presented, may lead to misunderstandings between people and neighboring groups, and may therefore also generate the hostile relationship already present, however this is not something I wish to discuss any further.

From the material I have collected I have meant for the illustrations to shed light on my arguments and the actual practice of the heavy theoretical proclamations made above. I have sought to show how the model correspond with the reality, and from that illuminate the argument I make in the introduction, showing how marriage can be looked upon as a total social phenomenon. Marriage in Mursi is a social field incorporated in Mursi society. This particular field is so important that it triggers all institutions within the society. I therefore argue it is a total social phenomenon. As I have tried to show, the ritual, economic and juridical policies describe the various elements of Mursi marriage.

7. Concluding Thoughts

The intention of this thesis has been to present some reflections upon Mursi marriage, and all the various aspects of Mursi society which are incorporated in this institution. By taking the reader through the importance of cattle, and how they are distributed in order to bind the ties of consanguinity and affinity. From the outset I suggested to see marriage as a total social phenomenon, as it involves all the social institutions of Mursi society. In exploring the organized flow of cattle and women in the rules of bridewealth distribution, shedding light on and presenting ethnographic reflections upon the economic, political, social, juridical and cultural aspects of Mursi marriage, which are all institutions incorporated in Mursi marriage. In this endeavor I have analyzed and described the principles of kinship and shown how the exchanging of cattle for wives keeps the recurring of kinship ties and how it allows new affinal ties to arise within the same descent lines. These kinship ties of consanguinity and affinity are also important in maintaining corporations between groups.

Even though the Mursi are not in an intermarrying relationship with most of their neighbors, they are an ethnic group living in an area with many other surrounding ethnic groups. Some with which they are in dynamic interaction with and do intermarry. I have outlined that such external relations happen and between whom, and also the internal or "intra-ethnic" (Mekonnen 2004: 291) relations where the political, economic, juridical institutions are incorporated in the social organization, which in this case may be seen as centered around marriage and the the corporate groups in which cattle has a big significance.

I have also aimed to show how the map is not always the territory. The model of a reality within a society may be changed or manipulated by the people acting within the society. External factors, such as, in this case, government restrictions, the influence of tourism and the migration and moving of people are all part of a reality which may not always correspond with the rules which constitute the model. By presenting different cases I have shown how the reality is even more complex than the model which it interacts with. In chapters 5 and 6 I have clarified the challenges within kinship studies, and, in addition, also shown how the Mursi kinship system through marriage works as a key concept (Ortner 1973) in social organization. The important notification here is the marriage. While kinship might be a key concept of social organization in many non-industrial societies it is the marriage cattle, which is the key contribution to the organization within Mursi society. The Mursi with cattle are

thus not a cultural obsession, rather a necessary tool in the remembering of history and also the further movements and organizations the Mursi might be concerned with.

I have only briefly discussed the fact that the Mursi are indeed facing both local and global challenges, which may lead to extended effects, both positive and negative. As tourism in the South Omo region is increasing, it has together with other external impacts introduced an admonished symbolism of material exchange through money. Thus cash economy has become a new means of payment among the Mursi, which their group culture is expressed through. Long-term consequences may be that the Mursi are lead onto an irreproachable path, and this may further result in giving the Mursi an unrealistic image of the industrialized society and thus bring on other spreading consequences. Will the Mursi be able to hold on to their cultural characteristics when they are constantly in the middle of the tension between the local and the global? The Mursi might eventually lose their cattle, as a consequence of the local administration of the Government's unwillingness to work with the Mursi with questions concerning the territory in which they inhabit.³⁶ The falling away of cattle would be a tragedy for the Mursi. Marriage, bridewealth payments and ties of kinship will lose its meaning and thus the whole structure of Mursi society needs to be restructured. The question remains to whether the external impacts on Mursi society allow them to follow the development in a globalizing world on their own terms, or if they only temporarily can protect themselves against an onslaught from the globalizing consumer patterns? It may seem like there is only a matter of time until the latter scenario occurs.

Finally, the Mursi and the challenges they are facing in the notion of a globalizing onslaught is something that deserves to be brought into light, in a much wider perspective than the one I have barely presented in this thesis. Moreover, the discussion was only brought up to show give the reader an understanding of some of the underlying challenges as well as the obvious challenges that the Mursi are now standing in front of. Lastly, it was also meant to give the reader an understanding of the importance of cattle to the Mursi and to position the cattle within a context, trying to understand the various aspects of their meaning. From discussing Mursi economy and the introduction of cash economy I wanted to create a passage to the significance of marriage and marriage payments.

³⁶ I have already mentioned the Government's plans of establishing a sugar cane plantation in the area, which David Turton has discussed in "The Downstream Impact" (Mursi Online 2006 onwards: 15.06.11).

Lastly, it was absolutely a fruitful approach to pounce on the various kin relations in order to gather data about Mursi marriage. I quickly understood that there was more to it than two people joining together, however, it was not until I managed to distance myself from the field and my notes that I could really dig into the core of my data and really begin the process of analyzing. It would be very interesting to follow the Mursi as I would assume that major changes is soon to be discovered, as the Ethiopian state are developing and acting without really considering the long term effects of their actions. Unfortunately a marginalized people, such as the Mursi and many of their neighboring groups, and other ethnic groups in Ethiopia become the victims of marginalized rights to land and resources, which then again will affect their making of living, and lead to a remobilizing of the whole organization which the people are dependant on. However, my intentions have not been to give any answers or conclusions, rather to explore the systems of kinship and marriage and present my ethnographic reflections on marriage in Mursi.

8. Appendix

1. List of kinship terminology

M = Mother

F = Father

B = Brother

D = Daughter

S = Son

Z = Sister

W = Wife

H = Husband

2. Mursi kinship terminology³⁷

Shune, Dada: F, FB, FZ

Jone, Mama: M, MZ, MBD, FBW, MFBD

Gwodine: B, FBS,

Ngone: Z, FBD

Kogine (pl. koige): FF, FFB, MFB, FMBS, MMB, MMBS

Kokoye: FFBS, MF

Ohine, Kaka: FM, FMZ, FMBD, FMBW, MM, MMZ, MMBD, MBW

Kogona: FMB, MFB, MMB, MMBS, MF (also Kokye), MFBS, FB

Oine/Ona: MB, MBS, MBSS (Ona)

Ngosoni: ZS, ZD, FZS, FZD, FBDS, FBDD

Ashai: DS, DD, SS, SD, BDS, BDD, BSS, BSD, ZDS, ZDD, ZSS, ZSD, FZSS, FZSD, FZDS, FZDD

Ngangnun: MZS, MZD

Hoine: S, D, BD, BS, FBDS, FBDD, FBSS, FBSD, WZS, WZD

³⁷ These kinship terms are based on Turton's work (1973) and an interview I did with Milisha Olibui in Makki June 2010.

Maine: H, HB (also Galnen)

Galnen: HZ, HB (also Maine)

Nyangnen/Nyang: HM, WM, WMZ, SWM, DHM

Moi (Turton: Mogonen): HF, HMB

Nga: W, BW

Kwonen: SWF, ZH

Mere: SW, ZSW

Kobanen: WZH

Dangunen: ZDH

Lomonen: HBW, 2nd wife

Lang (Exchange partner): WB, WZ, WF, WBS, WBD, DHF, DH, WZH, SWF, WMB, ZH

3. List of exchange partners, Mursi³⁸

<u>Terms of reference</u>	<u>Terms of address</u>
<i>Kwonen/kowa:</i>	
SVF	name or lang
ZH	name or lang
 <i>Lang:</i>	
DH	name or lang
WB	name or lang
WZ	name or lang
WF	name or lang
WBS	name or lang

³⁸ This information is based on Turton's list of kinship terminology: reference and address systems - exchange partners (1973). My data differ somewhat from Turton's and here is presented the list of exchange partners given to me through interviews with Milisha Olibui, Makki 2010.

WBD	name or lang
DHF	name or lang
WMB	name or lang

Kobanen:

WZH	name
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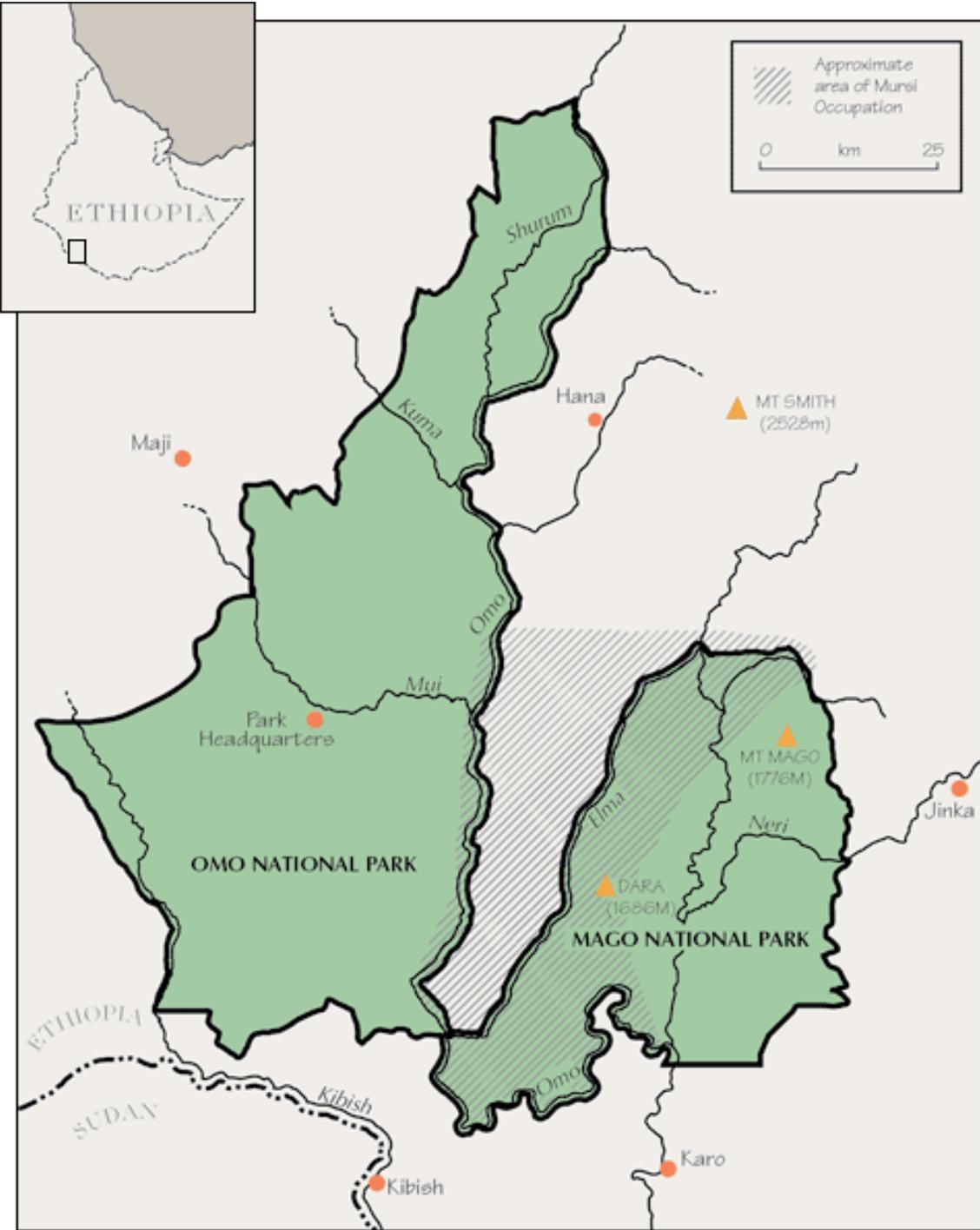
4. List of clans and descent groups

Clan	Sub-clan	Descent groups			
Komorte:	Dowi	Arikonma	Charbwotcha	Garana	Mabo
	Komorteti	Bidori	Chorebibi	Gidedang	Malgoloin
	Nyachore	Bigo	Charuse	Gunakanaga	Mirohohu
	Nyatiti	Bigurai	Demi	Jaramai	Nyew
		Biobume	Dogunolugo	Kenekare	Uligushero
		Bule	Donkoro	Konyonomora	Uliholi
		Bulugangiri	Dumalo	Korhung	Ulikibowheni
	Chakturi	Galai	Kulkoro	Ulikiwikwi	
Juhai:	Koyoi	Arichagi	Bigidangi	Ero/Buibu	Tongokuri
	Ngogoloin	Arimedere	Bilemwe	Gunatheno	Tulla
		Arthikibogidangi	Binyaninge	Mirozugo	Tumuri
		Balbong	Bulukumo	Muti	Ulichude
		Bango	Dedep	Ngokolu	Yilbagai
		Bedameri	Dorba	Tiorongodi	

Garakuli:	Bigidangi	Arikolorna	Bui	Jeredogun	Turku
	Bikibo	Badola	Charkoro	Kainkuri	Ulichakmeder
		Bichuri	Daura	Kennodorosi	Wene
		Birabi	Dorigesso	Manyorla	
		Benyinyi	Gurumedere	Moralubumi	
Bumai:	Duli	Aholi	Bilugo	Dumar	Rege
	Kennomera	Arihorogolonyi	Biochaga	Goloin	Sabakoro
	Keriang	Arigidanga	Charminiyain	Jarechakare	Sirwai
	Makul	Aritilhola	Darikio	Jordomo	Tuku
	Sabachagi	Bachuni	Dolete	Logito	Turebu
		Bichaga	Donuge	Mederiholi	Ulibalagolonyi
		Bigidangi	Duli	Mudani	Ulinyagidanga
Kagisi:	Muri	Bechakibo	Doloma	Jerongodi	Kedehu
	Tumuri	Chamea	Gowa	Kaulosir	Orgomwin
		Chola			
Mangwi:	No sub-clan	Baduren	Kirinogoloin	Nyomanihuli	Ulitheraliwheni
		Charguntul	Kwothi	Sabaramai	Weru
		Donoso	Latha	Tugul	
		Ejobe	Luduli	Tullabane	
		Gelka	Luguloinmedere	Ujesha	
Ngeriai:	No sub-clan	Arigolonyalorna	Biobetheni	Dumuloi	Ulinyalora
		Bethibe	Bisabaholi	Lemugidangi	
		Bibala	Boloi	Ulibwi	

Gongwi:	No sub-clan	Bangadi	Dede	Mederiholi	Mirobi
Berneshe:	No sub-clan	Babukwe	Elmo	Hologonoi	
Bongosi:	No sub-clan	Bone Lobok	Lubamoi Kangachu	Maldoguno	Nyambaro
Chermani:	No sub-clan	Bicharinya	Loiyakabarigolonya	Mirobiley	Ngikoro
Galnai:	No sub-clan	Bawohu Bilingo	Dari	Hurai	Mirikoro
Maiyaiyai:	No sub-clan	Baiga	Bale	Butai	
Changuli:	No sub-clan	Dologo Jonoiny	Koromeri Kwez	Mederikoro Tomai	Zilogolonyi

5. Map of Mursiland



Map 3: The Omo and Mago National Parks marked with green, and the marbled area showing the approximate Mursi territory. Mursi Online © 2006-2007

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