

## WIVES' DOMESTIC AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES AT HOME: THE SPACE OF COFFEE DRINKING AMONG THE DAASANETCH OF SOUTHWESTERN ETHIOPIA

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**ABSTRACT** Since the 1980s, many researchers have reconsidered and criticized the representation of pastoral societies in East Africa as patriarchal. But they often failed to question the Western biased analytical framework, that is, the public-political-men/private-domestic-women dichotomy. In this paper, I focus on the space of coffee drinking in the house, one of the most daily and communal spaces among the Daasanetch of southwestern Ethiopia to examine the applicability of this dichotomy. The handling of coffee is under the wife's discretion, and only she can brew and allocate it, so that the space of coffee drinking fundamentally depends on her work. This space has a political importance such as to entertain guests, to bless the society with peace and affluence, and to conduct many *rites de passage*. This space is for the gathering and discussion by people of all social categories on private to public topics. The wife always participates in the activities of this space not only as a laborer but as an active participant in the processes of rituals and discussions. Distinctions of public/private domains and political/domestic activities are almost meaningless in the Daasanetch space of coffee drinking. While a wife brews and allocates coffee as a domestic worker in her private house, she participates in the political discussion to settle public issues. The space is both private and public, and the wife is domestic and political simultaneously.

**Key Words:** Public/Private; Political/Domestic; Gender; Decision-making; Pastoral societies in East Africa; Coffee.

### INTRODUCTION

The pastoral societies in East Africa had been represented as typically patriarchal in which men have economic, social, political, and cultural powers superior to women (Hodgson, 2000).<sup>(1)</sup> Since the 1980s, many researchers have reconsidered and criticized this representation by shedding light on the women's roles and statuses.<sup>(2)</sup> However, as Holtzman (2002) discussed, they often failed to scrutinize the public/private and political/domestic dichotomies which are the tacit premises in the male-centered analysis. This analytical framework assumes the universal subordination of women to men, and attributes its cause to the asymmetrical binary opposition between the sexes, that is, women engage in domestic labors concerning their own family and household, such as cooking, collecting firewood, and childbearing, in the private domain, whereas men take part in political activities which deal with problems transcending each family and household, such as communal meetings, judgments or rituals, in the public domain.<sup>(3)</sup>

This dichotomy has been critically examined theoretically and empirically by Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974). Many researchers have pointed out that the dichotomous analytical framework is a Western biased concept,<sup>(4)</sup> and that there is no validity to apply it to non-Western societies, because the public and private domains are often intertwined and/or did not necessarily correspond to gender difference in non-Western societies. They also pointed out that those domains changed over time under outer influences such as the incorporation into a nation-state or the articulation of a market economy (e.g. Yanagisako, 1979; Comaroff, 1987; Nakatani, 1997).

A few studies examined the applicability of this dichotomy to pastoral societies in East Africa. Hodgson (2001) revealed that patriarchy among the Maasai had been historically constructed by the intervention of the colonial government and nation-state. As these powers ascribed only men to politics and livestock ownership, women were deprived of political rights and were relegated to the domestic domain. As a result, Hodgson argued, the equal and interdependent relationship between men and women in the pre-colonial era was divided into hierarchically gendered domains of the political/domestic. In contrast, Synder (1997, 1999) argued that the women's role in rituals and Christian church increased with recent social change among the Iraqw of Tanzania. At the same time, she pointed out that people regarded women as more vulnerable to pollution than men, and that women have been excluded from the public sphere by this belief (Synder, 1999).

Both studies relativized the dichotomy by showing that political roles between genders were historically in flux. However, I think it is inadequate that they confine the present women's roles almost solely to the domestic activities without further examination. Bloch (1977) criticized social anthropologists who have often constructed the concept of social structure by observing only the social relationships expressed in ritual communications which are mostly ruled by men ignoring daily practices in which both genders interacted more equally.<sup>(5)</sup> The classification by Bloch using the ritual/daily distinction roughly corresponds to my public/private and political/domestic distinctions in this paper. Even now, researchers tend to attach importance only to apparent political activities and fail to analyze the modest domestic activities by women fully. To represent the actual gender relations, we need to examine women's daily practices in finer detail.

Holtzman (2002) recently placed the domestic food distribution by women within "the realms of female-centered social action," and analyzed the "gastropolitics" between men and women in the household among the Samburu and the Nuer. He showed that the social status of men was fundamentally defined through their relationship with women as food-providers in the space of a meal, and wives controlled the daily distribution and consumption of food to exert influence upon the political spheres of men. This work implies that everyday casual activities by the wives can affect a wider social phenomenon.

In this paper, I will focus on one of the spaces most used daily among the Daasanetch, the space of coffee drinking. Coffee falls under the wife's care,

and only she can brew and allocate it. People drink it in their small houses everyday where its elementary members are the wife and her husband. Preparing coffee seems to be typical of the domestic labor of the wife in the private space. In our capitalist society, it is often said that the wife's activities at home only function to produce and reproduce men's labor power (cf. Ueno, 1990). In contrast, I will argue that the space of coffee drinking among the Daasanetch has multi-faceted meanings such as entertaining guests, conducting various rituals, and discussing various topics. The wife always participates not only as a laborer, but also as an active participant involved in the processes of rituals and discussions. Almagor (1978b) represented the Daasanetch as a "gerontocratic" society.<sup>(6)</sup> I will show another aspect of the Daasanetch social life focusing on the wife's daily activities.

Before describing this, I provide a brief account of the division of labor and the marriage system among the Daasanetch to show the general relationships between men and women.

## OUTLINE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENDERS

### I. Division of Labor between Wife and Husband

The Daasanetch are an East-Cushitic speaking people, living in the lower Omo River basin at the northern end of Lake Turkana in southwestern Ethiopia (Fig. 1).<sup>(7)</sup> Their subsistence is mainly based on pastoralism and flood-retreat cultivation (Almagor, 1978a).

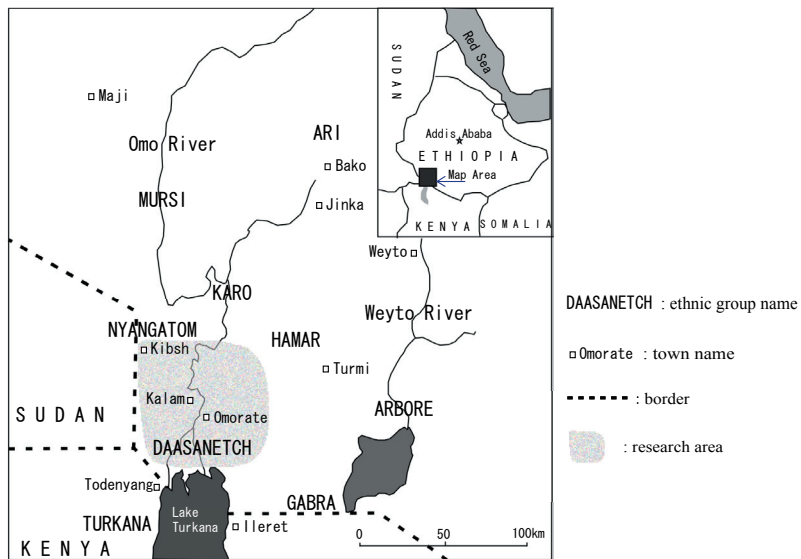


Fig. 1. Location of the Daasanetch and the neighboring ethnic groups.

The basic unit of production and consumption among the Daasanetch is a household. Each household consists of a married man, his wife and their unmarried children. After marriage, a husband and wife form a neolocal household and allocate labor to maintain their livelihood. When the husband marries a second wife, she also builds a new house and the husband moves among each wife's house every other day. He distributes livestock and arable land to each wife. Each wife/mother milks the livestock and cultivates the land assigned to her, stores crops, and cooks and eats meals separately with her children. The Daasanetch household fits into the "house-property complex" (Gluckman, 1950), and also the "women-centered hearth-hold" (Ekejiuba, 1995). Coffee is brewed and drunk in each household.

In the Daasanetch, clan and other kin groups do not function as a co-resident group. Although the residential pattern of each village varies, there usually are influential older men and their cognates, affines, age-mates, and friends. There are five to thirty houses in a village along the eastern side of Omo River and more than fifty houses along the western side, because people fear the attacks from the western neighboring ethnic groups. The distance between the villages is more than several hundred meters.

Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 show the places and contents of the activities of three married men and five married women that I observed for 18 days. The data was collected in Jietekonnyo village in the eastern side of Omo River. This village comprised five houses (an elder's three wives' houses, his married son's house, and his friend's house) and nineteen people (three married men, five married women, one unmarried man, two boys, five girls, and three infants). The land they cultivated was located about one hundred meters to the west from the village. I visited every villager and recorded what they did and where per every hour from 6:30 to 19:30 (14 times per day) from 13 to 19 November, 27 November to 3 December, and 11 to 14 December, 2003 (a total of 18 days). When a villager was not around the village, I asked the other villagers where he/she went, and confirmed that information by asking that villager in person after he/she returned to the village. I classified their activities into domestic labor, agricultural work (weeding, bird chasing, harvesting, threshing, etc.), pastoral work (herding, milking, repairing a kraal, etc.), eating and coffee drinking, taking rests and sleeping, and visiting other villages or town. I defined domestic labor as work organized around the mother(s) and her children, such as childbirth and child-rearing in and around the household (Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974). Although the duration of my research was short and my sample size was small, my study provides a rough sketch of the division of labor between wives and husbands.

As do other pastoral societies in East Africa, the Daasanetch tend to consider livestock and pastoralism in relation to men, and crops and agriculture in relation to women. There are some restrictions on subsistence activities; castration of livestock must be done by adult men, and women during menstruation must not milk livestock because it is believed to affect and exhaust livestock milk. However, there is no strict division of labor that confines men to pasto-

ralism and women to agriculture as a whole. In fact, girls often herd livestock and older men cultivate land and harvest the crops, and both genders engage in agricultural and pastoral work (Fig. 3).<sup>(8)</sup>

On the other hand, domestic labor is exclusively done by wives. In the house, wives cooked meals, brewed coffee, made butter, and cleaned and repaired daily tools. In front of the house, they ground grains, made ropes with bark fibers, and tanned livestock hides. They walked around the village to fetch water and collect firewood. In contrast, husbands frequently went to other villages or town to visit friends or to participate in rituals or meetings with the government. Although wives also visited other villages or the town, their main

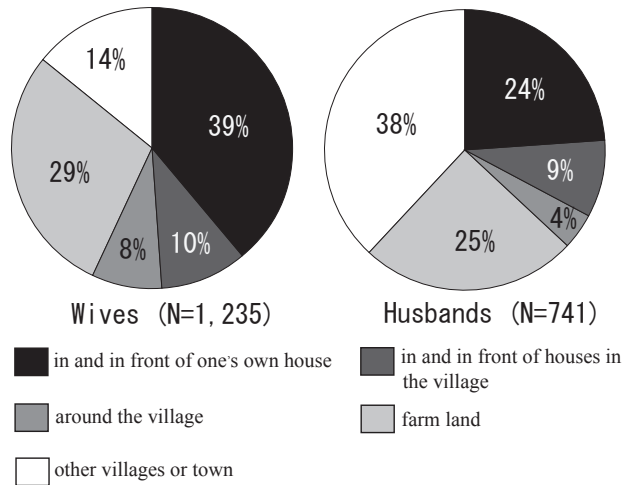


Fig. 2. The places of activities.

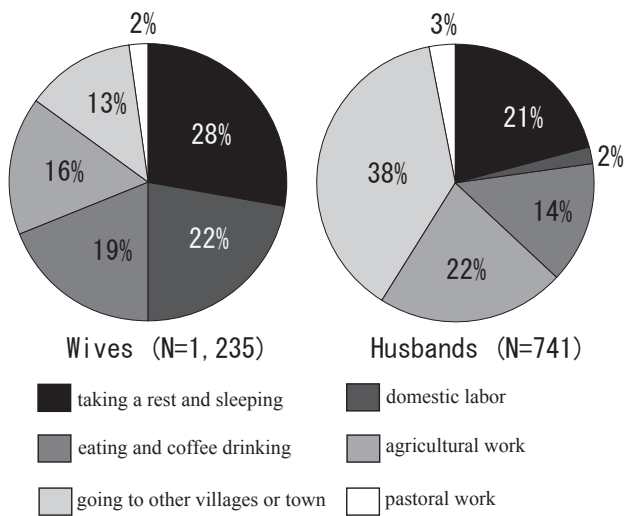


Fig. 3. The contents of activities.

purposes were to help with the agricultural work of their kin or to buy daily goods.

My data correspond to the customary dichotomy, where women performed domestic activities in and around their house while men carry out political activities in a wider space. However, I will show that such an understanding is superficial by focusing on one of the domestic activities in the house: wives spent 27% of their time for coffee brewing and drinking, and husbands spent 21% of their time for drinking coffee when they were in the village.<sup>(9)</sup>

## II. Characteristics of the Marriage System and General Status of Wife

All Daasanetch men undergo the initiation ceremony to join the generation-set (*haari*) at around 15 to 20 years of age. Soon after the initiation, men begin to marry and most of them get married in their twenties (Table 1). Girls marry at around 15 to 20 years of age.

The age for men's marriage among the Daasanetch is quite young compared to that of the neighboring pastoral peoples.<sup>(10)</sup> One of the reasons is that there are no strict restrictions to keep young men from marrying within the age system as the Samburu (Spencer, 1965) and the Rendille (Sato, 1992). The other reason concerns the system of bridewealth (*forcho*) transfer. It is said the total bridewealth is over eighty cattle and small livestock (Almagor, 1978a: 177). When a man marries the second or third wife, he must give about five cattle<sup>(11)</sup> to the new wife's kin just before the wedding ceremony and the remainder as soon afterwards as possible. On the other hand, when a man marries the first wife, he needs to transfer no bridewealth at first, but gives two to three cattle when his wife has the first child. Almagor (1978a: 165) wrote that it took over twenty to thirty years after the first marriage of young men to transfer all bridewealth through long negotiations between the husband and his wife's kin

**Table 1.** Men's age and number of wives.

Age	Number of wives					Total number of men (unmarried)	Total number of wives	Rate of polygyny
	0	1	2	3	4			
over 70	0	1	2	0	0	3	5	1.67
60-69	1	6	6	2	1	16 (1)	28	1.87
50-59	0	8	5	1	2	16	29	1.81
40-49	0	4	11	2	0	17	32	1.88
30-39	0	8	6	0	0	14	20	1.43
20-29	3	19	3	1	0	26 (3)	28	1.22
10-19	16	5	0	0	0	21 (16)	5	1.00
Total	20	51	33	6	3	113 (20)	147	1.58

The data was collected at Dielinyimor and Kapsie villages in May 2002. All members belong to the Inkabelo territorial group.

(cf. Spencer, 1998). This social institution enables young men without much livestock to marry the first time more easily than the older men who wish to marry their second or third wives.<sup>(12)</sup>

Such an institution of the marriage system strongly influences the general status of the wife. First, as the age of a husband and his first wife is very close, they share their lot for longer years to make a living. This experience tends to make their relationship more equal than for a younger wife and her old husband. Second, the wife becomes an important mediator between her husband and her agnatic kin over bridewealth upon marriage.<sup>(13)</sup> When the wife goes to help with agricultural work of agnatic kin, they ask after her husband and tell her what they want to convey to her husband. When a wife's kin are not satisfied with the transference of bridewealth, they occasionally keep her at their house to get concessions from her husband. Third, the bridewealth transfer is very slow, and because it is not difficult to return it, a divorce is relatively easy.<sup>(14)</sup> The divorce rate is perhaps higher compared with that of the neighboring people such as the Turkana for whom "the divorce is rare" (Ohta, 2004: 375). When a wife has complaints about her husband, she voluntarily goes away to her kin's house for a while. By demonstrating the probability of divorce, she calls on her husband to reflect on his past conduct. From the above reasons, I suppose the general status of the wife among the Daasanetch to be higher than among the neighboring "gerontocratic" pastoral societies.

The status of each wife depends on her age, economic situation, and individual ability. Generally speaking, a wife becomes more influential as she ages. The wife whose husband has already married the second wife, is *de facto* the head of a household, as her husband comes to visit her house less and less. She blesses the house with coffee to "call god" (see below) to the house everyday in place of her husband. The wife's influence increases more when her first child marries and has a child, because to become a grandmother is one of the important indexes of becoming a social elder (*maa karsich*). Those wives who belong to the same generation-set of women sometimes form a clique under the leadership of elderly wives and demand the slaughter of livestock for them to an elderly man, although it is not always accepted. On the other hand, people cannot easily reject the demands of a young widow (*maa hiyesich*) whose children are not grown because she is believed to have a strong power of curse (*dor*) by crying (*buoi*). For example, she may slaughter livestock of other people without their permission (*aani sharamanto iesu*) to feed herself and her children. The owner of the livestock cannot make her return another livestock, but should wait until her children are adults.

Although there is a wide variation in the status of the individual wife, coffee brewing and its allocation is the common work of all married women.



## COFFEE DRINKING AMONG THE DAASANETCH AND WIFE AS COFFEE-BREWER

### I. Coffee Drinking

Coffee is brought to the Daasanetch town, Omorate, from the northern towns by non-Daasanetch merchants (Fig. 1). The Daasanetch buy coffee husks (*esho*, *shobolo*, *bun*), not beans (*bun rafite*, *bun dudugua*), in the Omorate market.<sup>(15)</sup> There are two types of coffee husks, one (*bun dabana*) is brown, tasty and has a good aroma, while the other (*bun dedewa*) is white, not tasty and does not have a good aroma. The price of the former is about 900 g per one birr,<sup>(16)</sup> and the latter is about 1100 g per one birr. People use about 200 g of husks for one brew and reuse the husk for multiple brews. One birr of *bun dabana* is brewed over nine times, and that of *bun dedewa* is brewed eleven times.

Married women ordinarily visit Omorate alone or with the neighboring wives to buy coffee. Those living far from the town are accompanied by men who guard them from thieves on their way. The Daasanetch women get money for coffee mainly by selling crops, milk, or butter in town, or are given money by their husbands who sold their livestock.<sup>(17)</sup>

In the house, a wife stores coffee husks in sacks of livestock skin (*shomoze*).<sup>(18)</sup> Their house is round, with a diameter of about three meters and height of about two meters. Although the space inside the house has no physical partition, it is divided into the men's sphere and the women's sphere (Fig. 4). On the left (west) side, there are a spear, a gun and a stick to castrate livestock, all used in the men's activities such as hunting, raids, and livestock work. On the opposite side, the right (east) side, a hearth (*gecham*) is made, with some pottery, a pan, firewood, milk containers, butter containers, cups of calabash, spoons, and foodstuff, used in the women's activities. As coffee brewing is the wife's work, it is stored on the right side.

People use coffee husks not only for self-consumption but wives also give them to each other in their villages. I asked seven wives for seven days about how they got their coffee husks when they brewed it (N=102). I found that 47% of coffee was bought directly in town, and the remaining 53% were given to them from other households, of which 63% were received upon request (*rogo*). The wives would sit in front of another's house with a cup of calabash or a pan and say, "I have not drunk coffee since yesterday morning," or "I know there is a lot of coffee in your house." Asking others for coffee in such a manner is done only between wives, and they are authorized to decide whether they dispense coffee husks to them or not.

Their decisions would depend on the situation. If a woman has no coffee to entertain sudden guests, giving some to her becomes an obligation. The wife who has just brought coffee from town often becomes the target of such requests. The seven wives I interviewed for seven days went to town to buy coffee eleven times in total and nine times out of eleven requests were made



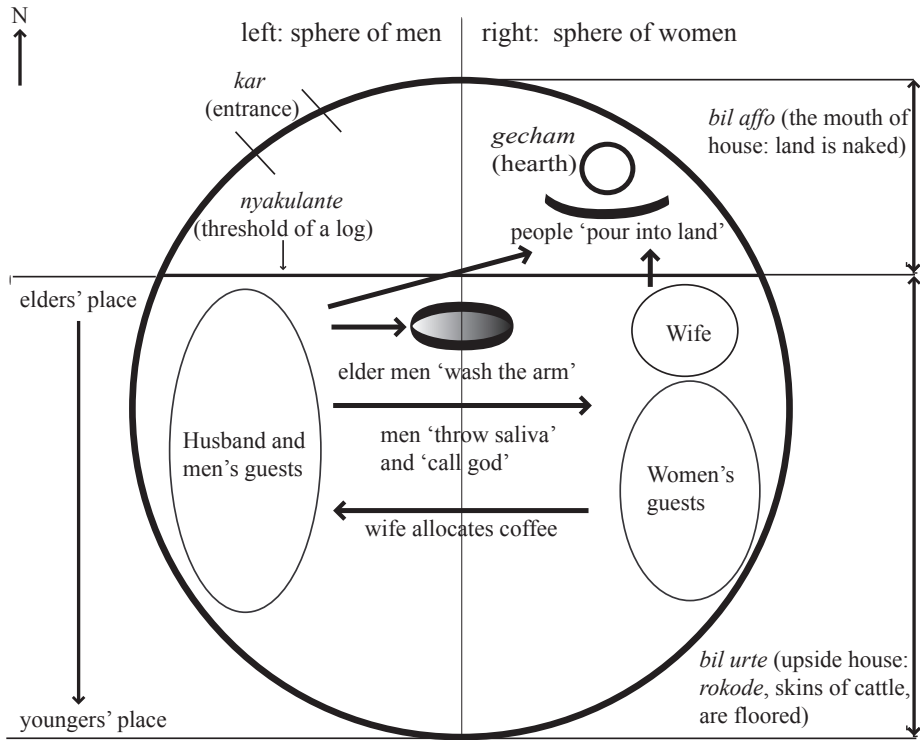


Fig. 4. The space of coffee drinking in the house.

to them. They gave some away to three wives on an average within two days. Usually, the dispenser and the dispensee (N=43) were wives living in the same village (84%). The giving and receiving between wives in other villages (16%) was mostly seen among close kin. Coffee is consumed daily, so that wives in the same village frequently give some to each other and maintain friendly social relationships.

The trade in coffee husks by the Daasanetch even in the villages far from town has slowly increased since around 1995. This is mostly done by wives, and they sell coffee at almost double the price in town. The seven wives I observed who traded coffee in the village in 2002 bought daily goods from the profit gained in trading coffee husks. Most of them were short-term traders and stopped trading after they realized their immediate needs. It is not certain if this trading leads to economic differentiation among households. However, as the Daasanetch have just started to exchange cash even with the non-Daasanetch merchants in town from around the late 1980s,<sup>(19)</sup> I emphasize that the cash economy is just now spreading into the villages by the wives' trading activities.

## II. Wife as Coffee Brewer

The Daasanetch say “thirst killed me (*bario ka ciesu*; I’m thirsty)” much more frequently than “stomach burned me (*geer ya boroi*; I’m hungry).” Although they sometimes mix coffee with onions, gingers, salt, sugar or a little milk, the basic way of drinking coffee is to put only husks in a cooking pan with water, boil it, and drink it straight. After working under the scorching sun, coffee with caffeine helps them recover from fatigue. When the Daasanetch feel sick, they first attribute it to “not having coffee” that day. In addition, if a person has a headache, others will spray coffee onto his/her head, and if a person has a chill, warm coffee is poured over him/herself to feel better. When a mother washes her baby’s body, she spouts coffee from her mouth onto the baby’s body wishing his/her health. Coffee is quite indispensable in the life of the Daasanetch.

A day of a wife starts with making a fire to brew coffee around six o’clock. People drink it three times per day, in the morning before taking livestock to graze, midday, and in the evening when livestock return from grazing. In addition, when they have visitors, they may brew coffee and drink together. The frequency of preparing coffee depends on the quantity of coffee stored in the house. When they are short of it, they tend to drink it only in the morning.<sup>(20)</sup>

The wife stores the coffee husks, and the amount is unknown to her husband, so it is the wife who decides when and how much she brews it. Quarrels often occur between a wife and her husband whether coffee husks are in the house or not. I observed some cases where a wife declined her husband’s request for coffee, although she had it. She simply told her husband that there was no coffee husk in the house. When the wives refuse to brew coffee, it was because they had complaints against their husbands, such as drinking alcohol too much, going only to the younger wife’s house, and physically abusing her. Even if her husband is annoyed by her refusal, she simply ignores him, starting to talk to her baby, or going outside silently and visiting a neighboring wife to drink coffee.

As I will show later, the space of coffee drinking is the main space for entertaining guests, so that it is very shameful for the husband if his wife failed to prepare coffee for his guests. When I asked the villagers on the qualification for a man who would hold the highest office of a generation-set, they often answered, “That is the man whose wife makes coffee every time we visit his house.” In this context, to have “his wife make coffee every time” means that not only the man is affluent and hospitable, but also a man of fine character who keeps a good relationship with his wife. As the private relationship with his wife is publicized to the society through the space of coffee drinking, providing an important factor for his social prestige, a husband always needs to take good care of his wife.<sup>(21)</sup>

## THE SPACE OF COFFEE DRINKING

### I. Norms in the Space of Coffee Drinking

The Daasanetch usually brew and drink coffee at home except for the harvest time when they do so in the farm land. There are many norms in the space of coffee drinking. First of all, only a wife can brew and allocate coffee, and she must drink it with someone. When her husband is not present in the house, she must invite friends to drink coffee together. When the wife is not present in the house, her husband perhaps goes to a friend's house to drink coffee. Another important norm is that guests should stay and drink more than two cups of coffee (*mug naama*). The villagers often said to me, "When you eat meals, you should do it quickly. The person who eats slowly has a big stomach (*ger guddo*: the person who eats too much and finish other's meal). When you drink coffee, you should do it slowly and stay long. The person who drinks only a cup and leaves the house is bad and will lose one eye."<sup>(22)</sup> This statement shows that the space of coffee drinking is not only for quenching thirst but also for staying and talking together with others for a long time in the closed house. In fact, it is not unusual for an occasion of coffee drinking to continue over an hour.

In this space of coffee drinking, men sit on the left side and women sit on the right. The elders sit near the entrance and younger people sit more toward the inner part of the house (Fig. 4), although men can also sit in the women's sphere when most of the guests are men, and vice versa. A wife brews coffee, and pours about 300 ml in each cup, and usually serves in strict order from the older to the younger and from men to women, but not necessarily. The Daasanetch have two to three coffee cups per one house.<sup>(23)</sup> When many guests come<sup>(24)</sup> and there are not enough cups, young members must wait long for their coffee until the older members finish drinking two cups each.

There are also many norms in coffee drinking related to the Daasanetch cosmology. Before drinking coffee, the oldest person present pours a little coffee from the cup onto the floor around the hearth (Fig. 4), places a few chewing tobacco flakes and calls out the ancestors' names saying, "Drink coffee (*bie ikku*), chew tobacco (*dambo komu*)." Other members follow, taking turns. This practice is called "pouring into land (*les kafin*)." People show their respect the ancestors (*garlam*), and ask them to solve the problem of the living people. This ceremony must be conducted without fail before moving the house, taking the bridewealth to wife's kin, curing sickness, or chanting the oracle.

When the first cup is served to members, they stretch backwards and up, and spray out a mouthful of coffee up into the air and towards the wife making a big noise, and shout for example, "Land peace (*les faya*), livestock peace (*aani faya*), no sickness (*baasi man*)." This blessing is referred to as "throwing saliva (*abalain lain*)" or "calling god (*waago vie*)" and takes place almost every time people drink coffee. This is ordinarily done by men, although older

wives also make the blessings and even take the initiative. Young members often respond to the elders' incantation.

The Daasanetch also "throw saliva" with milk, but the accompanying actions of the practice is different. They bend down towards their stomachs and spray out a mouthful of milk, making a small noise and simply say, "Many (*burunaika*)." People explained to me that the blessing with coffee prays for the peace (*faya*) and welfare (*misach*) of the children, wives, households, crops, livestock, grasses, and land, in short, for the whole Daasanetch society, so that they do it stretching backwards and up towards where god is. On the other hand, in wishing only for the wellness of their own livestock with milk, they spray out a mouthful of milk towards their own body.

After drinking two or three cups of coffee, a drinker bends forward to the center of the house (Fig. 4), and pours a mouthful of coffee directly to the arms to wash them. Coffee falls on the cattle hides flooring the house. This practice is called "washing the arm (*gil jian*)." This is only done by men and especially by the older men. It is said that the elders' sweat (*sumis*) is rich (*kamurut*) as their body is. By pouring their sweat with coffee onto the floor, they share their richness with the house and its members, the wife and her children. The elders should "wash the arm" especially when they visit others.

The Daasanetch say that their cosmos is composed of the upper sky (*waago*) where god (*waago*) is, the land (*les*) where people and livestock stay, and the underground (*les geere*) where the dead are. It is generally said that god brings about "cool (*abuna*)" to the living world through the rain and the flow of rivers. The word "cool" contains positive values. "Land becomes cool (*les abuna ie*)," an expression people often use after the rain, implies well-being, because crops grow well and livestock fatten by eating green grass. Peace befalls, because there will be enough food and there will be no starvation, no sickness, and no conflict. There will be cleanliness, because the annoying dust disappears and green grass will grow. The older men mediate this "cool" to the living world with god, and control the fertility of women and livestock (Almagor, 1983b: 52).

In contrast, the dead are connected with "hot (*kulla*)," implicated in being painful, sick, noisy, and angry. If people fail to "pour into land" for many days, the dead ancestors become angry, thinking that their presence has been ignored, and bring to people bad luck. When crops are severely damaged by squirrels and birds, or livestock behave unusually and fall out from the herd, people shout, "The dead [ancestors] died (*garlam kuffe*)!"

The space of coffee drinking is connected with all three spheres of god, the living, and the dead. They "call god" by spraying a mouthful of coffee into the air and praying for the welfare of the Daasanetch. The older men bring their richness through coffee to *bil urte* (upside of house) which is the space of daily life, but not to *bil affo* (mouth of house) where the dead are (Fig. 4). People offer coffee to the ancestors by pouring it directly onto the floor of *bil affo* to quench their thirst and ask them to calm down. In this space, all members must pray for the peace and the affluence of the household and for the

Daasanetch as a whole every day.<sup>(25)</sup>

I also point out here that the authority of the older men is expressed in this space. They drink coffee first and take the lead in the blessing ceremony, if not exclusively. At the same time, this space fundamentally depends on the wife's work as the brewer and allocator of coffee. All participants recognize her role and must show respect for her. For example, when there is finally little coffee left, the wife tips the pot or the pan on the stone of hearth where she brewed the coffee. Then, other members must refrain from another cup of coffee, saying, "Mine is enough (*he chu due*)." This remaining coffee is called *meles*, meaning north, and it is for the brewer. The hearth is on the northern side of the house and the brewer sits there, and only she can drink *meles* which is, they say, strong coffee because it was brewed for a longer time. People express their appreciation for her work by leaving *meles* for her.

In addition, men conduct all three blessing ceremonies toward the women's sphere as it is a reciprocal response to the wife's allocation of coffee to the men's sphere (Fig. 4). Men "throw saliva" toward the wife's direction to "call god" into her household, "pour into land" around the hearth because the angry ancestors may disturb the water container that women use to fetch water from afar and put near the hearth, and "wash the arm" just at the border between the men's sphere and the women's sphere or at the center of house to wish for the prosperity of the total household. In fact, it is said the house where many guests visit to drink coffee will become affluent, because the guests bring welfare to the wife and her children indirectly through blessing ceremonies of coffee drinking. If guests fail to conduct these blessing ceremonies, the wife can refuse coffee to such impolite persons the next time.

## II. Rituals in the Space of Coffee Drinking

In addition to the above "ceremonial" practices in daily life, many *rites de passage* are accompanied by coffee drinking. For example, the naming ceremony takes place after two to three days when a baby is born. Her/his kin and a naming-parent of whichever sex assemble at the new mother's house at night or early in the morning. As the new mother brews and serves coffee, she moves to the center of the house holding her baby. Other members "throw saliva" onto them from every direction to bless the baby with health and future, and call out the name of the baby that the naming-parent gives her/him. The newborn's name is called the "name of coffee (*meen bie*)"<sup>(26)</sup> and considered to be her/his "true name (*meen tuud le*)," although other names are given as she/he grows.

The wedding ceremony (*siene*) takes place at the house of the groom's mother. The participants are men who belong to same generation-set as the groom but of different clans. Only two women can be present, the new bride and a wife of one member of the generation-set. Men eat the meat of castrated sheep (*luuch*), called *siene* (female sheep before giving birth), and the bride wears the *siene*'s fat (*muor*) around her shoulder. Then, the wife of one mem-

ber of the generation-set comes to brew coffee and men “throw saliva” onto the bride chanting blessings.

There are also rituals conducted only by wives. After the wedding ceremony, the husband gives to the wife’s mother one castrated sheep and a big sack of coffee husks called *waany* to show his gratitude for raising his wife. Then, ten to fifteen members of the mother’s generation-set come to her house. After they eat the sheep’s meat and smear its fat on each other’s bodies, the mother brews coffee using *waany*, and the members of her generation-set “throw saliva” onto her daughter who sits at the center of the house, wishing for her fertility. Finally, her mother gives a portion of *waany* to those members before they leave.

Although it is often argued by anthropologists that women’s exclusion from ritual spaces produces and strengthens men’s authority,<sup>(27)</sup> it should be stressed that the Daasanetch wife is not only present as the brewer and server of coffee but also conducts the blessing ceremonies in many rituals that take place in the space of coffee drinking.

### III. Gatherings in the Space of Coffee Drinking

People gather and talk together in the space of coffee drinking every day. To characterize this space, I compare its constituent members with that of the other three gathering spaces of daily life among the Daasanetch, the big shade under the tree (*gaach gor ka*) on the outskirts of the village, the small shade in front of the house (*gaach bil ka*), and the space of taking meals in the house (Table 2).

Adult men go to a big shade under a tree to take a rest and talk among each other after they drink coffee in the morning. There must be more than one shade in each village. All the men who had undergone the initiation ceremony can enter into this space and take part in discussions irrespective of their residential villages. There are two strict restrictions in this space. One is that only men who belong to the same generation-set can sit together. The neighboring (the father’s and the son’s) generation-sets should avoid each other. If a member of the younger generation-set violates this rule, the older generation-set may curse them. Another restriction is that women and children must be excluded from this space. When a woman has something to say to her husband or sons, she calls him from outside the shade.

Wives and children often sit in the small shade of their own house in the daytime. They make ropes or tan livestock hides, while talking with the neigh-

**Table 2.** The comparison of membership at the gathering spaces by sex, age and residential place.

Gathering space	Sex	Young and old	Residential place
Big shade under the tree	Only men	Separated	Not relevant
Small shade in front of the house	Mainly women	Both	Same village
Meal in the house	Both	Both	Same household
Coffee drinking in the house	Both	Both	Not relevant

bors who also sit and work in front of their own houses. In contrast with the men's big shade under the tree, the members of this space are constituted of only the women of the same village, and adult men only join them after they return from the men's big shade in the evening.<sup>(28)</sup> When guests from outside the village visit them, they are entertained in the house.

Both eating and coffee drinking are done in the house, and there is no strong constraints for the sexes and generations from sitting together. However, there are still important rules for the membership. Table 3 shows the people who sat together in the space of taking meals and coffee at one house I observed for eight days. A wife and her husband drank coffee together fourteen times out of fifteen. On the other hand, they ate meals together only five times out of sixteen. That the time of research was during the harvest season probably affected the results because it was the busiest season of the year. Also it is not unusual that a wife places the cooked meal in the house for her husband to eat and goes outside. In addition, a polygamous husband eats his meals in only one (and often the youngest) wife's house. On the other hand, as coffee is brewed and served by one wife at a time, a husband must sit together when she wants to drink it. He can also go to drink coffee in his two to three wives' houses taking turns. Old wives often complain that her husband comes to her house to drink coffee only when he is thirsty. In other words, the space of coffee drinking is an important space for face-to-face communication between a wife and her husband.

The space of taking meals was mostly attended by only the household members (Table 3). Guests were there only four times out of fifteen, of which the guest who was there three times was one bachelor, a kinsman of the wife of this house staying in the neighboring house. In contrast, many guests from inside and outside the village visited the space of coffee drinking. I also counted for ten days how many guests from outside the villages visited five houses in one village. The result was that 27 people came in total, of whom 17 drank coffee but only three ate meals.

In addition, neighboring wives often gathered and talked together, especially about complaints about their husbands in this space of coffee drinking. I asked

**Table 3.** The members of the space of taking meals and coffee drinking.

Date (2001)	The space of meal			The space of coffee drinking		
	morning	daytime	evening	morning	daytime	evening
24 December	—	B	A	A.C	—	—
25 December	B	—	B	A.D	A	—
26 December	—	—	B	A.C.D	A	—
27 December	B	B.C	A.C.D	A.C	—	A
28 December	—	A	A	A.D	—	A.D
29 December	—	—	B.C	A.D	—	—
30 December	—	B.C	B	A.D	A.D	B.C.D
31 December	B	A	B	A	—	A

A: Wife and husband together. B: Wife and husband not together.

C: Guests from same village. D: Guests from different villages.



three wives for seven days where they drank coffee. It was at their own house 38% of the time, 58% at others' houses in the same village, and 4% at others' houses in other villages. One man told me that coffee was for women whereas livestock meat was for men. It means that women request and receive coffee husks while men request and receive livestock from each other in daily life. Women share and drink coffee in the house whereas men share and eat meat in ceremonial occasions together, and both leads to stronger solidarities.

From this comparison, I characterize the space of coffee drinking as an open space to people of all social categories, women and men, elders and youths, and members of one household and guests. People can buy coffee husks at a cheap price, and a handful of husks is enough to offer hot coffee to many guests. They can also feel rejuvenated when they drink coffee due to caffeine. Coffee is suitable to entertain people in daily life, and the space of drinking coffee is suitable for gathering and talking together.

#### IV. Discussions in the Space of Coffee Drinking

As various people gather, the topics of discussion in the space of coffee drinking vary widely, from the private topics such as the daily trivial conversation between a wife and her husband, or exchange of information about the condition of grass and crop between hosts and guests, to inter-household negotiations such as requests for livestock herding, or payment of debt, and to more public discussions such as negotiation of marriage and bridewealth, or schedule and plan for a ritual. Wives are not only present as the brewer and server of coffee but also a participant in the discussions of decision-making in this space.

[Case 1: On the payment of bridewealth. 13 April 2002]

Korinyang's kinsmen visited a woman named Mielo to take her daughter, Bario, to Korinyang's house as his new wife. They brought a small sack of coffee husks called "coffee of acceptance (*bun giēna*)" to Mielo. However, Mielo refused to accept it and started to brew coffee using her own husks. She said, "Korinyang promised about one year ago to bring me one female calf (*maade*) and one male calf (*aani jab*), and also one cow (*se*) and one male calf to my mother as bridewealth when he comes to take Bario." After drinking coffee, the kinsmen reported back to Korinyang. They returned to Mielo's house after a while and said, "This coffee is only 'coffee of acceptance.' 'Coffee of livestock (*bun aanieto*)' must be much more than a sack full. We will bring four cattle with that coffee tomorrow morning." Mielo told them that an elder never told a lie, and accepted the "coffee of acceptance." Korinyang's kinsmen took Bario. Next morning, they came to her house again with four cattle.

When the groom's kinsmen visit the house of the bride's mother to take the bride one day before the wedding ceremony, they bring and give "coffee of acceptance" to her parents. When her parents accept it (*bun eeze*), it means that

they give final permission to the marriage. On the other hand, when they refuse it (*bun diize*), it shows that they are dissatisfied with the groom's behaviors. Mielo refused to take the coffee husks because Korinyang seemed to break his promise about the amount of bridewealth. Korinyang was an elder, so he should give her some cattle before the wedding ceremony. The bride's mother has a right to receive two cattle called *dongor*. Mielo's husband kept silent all the time, although Korinyang was a member of his father's generation-set whom he must show respect. The reason for this was that Bario was a daughter of Mielo's former-husband, and she had grown up in her grandmother's house. That was why the first bridewealth was for Mielo and her mother. The husband had little to say in the matter than his wife and her mother in this case.

[Case 2: On the slaughter of an ox during the male circumcision ceremony. 23 April 2002]

Ten men came to Gadda's house and his wife brewed coffee. One man said, "Our circumcision ceremony is approaching an end, so that we need to kill one ox for our fathers. It should be Gadda's, kept at Niekiiki village." Gadda only laid himself down listlessly. His wife started talking. "That ox is too small for slaughter. It is not suitable for the fathers. It is better to select some other ox." Ten men criticized her statement in turn. The discussion went nowhere at all. At last, Nameli, an elder brother of Gadda's wife, said for the first time, "If his generation-set desires that, so it should be." Ten men blessed Gadda and his wife with coffee and left the house. After three to four days, the said ox kept at Niekiiki village was brought over and slaughtered for the fathers.

After this incident, Gadda's wife told me that the ox which was requested was her *anso*, the ox given by her sister's husband as bridewealth. She did not agree of the appropriation of her ox to the circumcision ceremony, so she raised the matter of size to avoid its slaughter. Before this, Gadda had already refused the ten men about the ox, in support of his wife's insistence. Then, they cursed Gadda. He needed to be blessed with coffee by them to be cured from the pain of such curse, so that Gadda's wife invited the ten men. For this day, she called her brother, Nameli, who had already undergone circumcision and was a "man of the neck (*maa luute*)," one of the most influential men in their generation-set. She expected him to help her in the refusal of giving up the ox, but her plan went wrong and her ox was taken by "the desires of the husband's generation-set" after all.

However, as it is difficult even for adult men to refuse a request from members of their generation-set, I stress in this case that the fact remains that an insistence of one young wife (about 25 years old) delayed the circumcision ceremony, one of the most public rituals among the Daasanetch, for about ten days. Killing livestock is indispensable in the process of many rituals. All the livestock are owned by individuals, not by the public, so it is necessary for

conducting a ritual to persuade the person regardless of sex who has the right to the livestock to provide it. A wife is excluded from some parts of the male circumcision ritual, but nonetheless she is involved in the construction of such a public ritual through the decision-making process.

Passes (2004) pointed out that much researches on political speech analyzed only the men's discourse that took place in the formal public arena, but not women's speech of everyday life. Research on pastoral societies in East Africa also focused on the communal meeting in which only adult men participated (Turton, 1975; Strecker, 1990; Abbink, 1998). Lewis (1961) characterized the Somali society as a "pastoral democracy" where all adult men, but not women, participated and had a right to speak in councils of the clan. In short, pastoral democracy is men's democracy or democracy excluding women. In contrast, as both sexes participate in the public processes, and especially because the women's role is respected in the space of coffee drinking among the Daasanetch, both sexes have equal rights in blessing the society with peace and insisting on their political rights or ownership of goods using their own social relationship to strengthen their voices. I call this space of coffee drinking among the Daasanetch an indigenous democratic space in a more literal sense compared to spaces for the usual communal meetings held by men.

## CONCLUSION

I have shown that the space of coffee drinking is not only for quenching thirst. It is a space of blessing where people pray for peace and affluence of the household and the whole society, as well as where people conduct various *rites de passage*. It is also a space of gathering where people of all social categories participate, and talk together about private to public topics. I have pointed out that this space fundamentally depends on the wife's work as a preparer and an allocator of coffee, and that she actively engages herself in the processes of rituals and discussions in this space. The prestige of the husband partly depends on his wife's work in this space, and guests must show respect for her and bring welfare to the house by conducting blessing ceremonies with coffee. I have also shown that coffee is under the wife's dispensation and the neighboring wives build strong solidarity by giving it to each other and drinking it together. The space of coffee drinking is one of "the realms of female-centered social action" (Holtzman, 2002).

However, Holtzman's statements must also be examined in detail. He wrote that "gastropolitics *link* and *blur* the boundary between 'domestic' and 'political' domains" and that wives "*enter* the political through the use of their food-centered relationships to men (Holtzman, 2002: 273. Italics mine)." These expressions are not adequate in the space of coffee drinking. When the Daasanetch people drink coffee every day, they talk to god and ancestors, hoping for peace among the Daasanetch. When they conduct rituals, the daily work of wives as the preparer and allocator of coffee is indispensable. Even when

people must slaughter an ox for collective purposes, they need to persuade a wife who may insist her rights over that ox, all the while she serves coffee to entertain them. In short, to distinguish between the public/private domains, political/domestic activities, or even ritual/daily practices is almost meaningless in this space of coffee drinking among the Daasanetch. One cannot presume that there exist mutually distinct “political” and “domestic” activities which correspond to men and women, and that people then *link* and *blur* them. I can only say that the space of coffee drinking is simply both private and public, and wives take on the domestic and political roles simultaneously.

As with other pastoral societies in East Africa, Daasanetch women cannot participate in some rituals and communal meetings ruled by men. But, as I have shown above, even these male-centered activities are often constructed through a series of practices and discussions in the realms of female-centered social action.<sup>(29)</sup> By examining the processes of dynamic interactions between seemingly private and public spaces in finer detail, we can clearly apprehend the current gender relationships under scrutiny.

#### NOTES

- (1) Social anthropologists have presented two main models of social structure for the pastoral societies: the segmentary lineage system and gerontocracy. The former emphasized the equality of members in and between the patrilineal descent groups, while the latter stressed the hierarchy between older and younger men in the age-grade system. However, both models similarly represented male-dominated social structures from the male-centered point of view. Spencer (1965) described the Samburu political structure as a gerontocracy, where older men dominated younger men by controlling the circulation of women and livestock exchangeable at the time of marriage. Women are controllable “scarce resources” (Almagor, 1978b) to reproduce the hierarchy between men.
- (2) On livestock production, Dahl (1987) and Curry (1996), socio-political structure, Michael (1997) and Elmi et al. (2000), cultural practice and ideology, Broch-Due (1999, 2000) and Synder (1999), and historical changes, Synder (1997) and Hodgson (2001).
- (3) There are various terminological combinations among researchers: domain, space, realm, sphere, field, role, activity and public/private, political/domestic, public-political/domestic and public/domestic. In this paper, I will not examine their subtlety. My “political/domestic” corresponds to activity or role, and my “public/private” corresponds to domain or space.
- (4) Geuss (2001) recently analyzed the genealogy of public/private opposition in Western society.
- (5) In regard to Bloch’s discussion, Harrison (1985) showed that the activities of male cults were governed by ritual hierarchy, and everyday life by secular equality in the Sepik of Papua New Guinea.
- (6) Spencer (1965) described the Samburu political structure as a gerontocracy, where older men dominated younger men by controlling the circulation of women and livestock exchangeable at the time of marriage. Women are controllable “scarce resources” (Almagor, 1978b) to reproduce the hierarchy between men.
- (7) I conducted research for seven months between 2001 and 2003.
- (8) The time of research was during the harvest season, and the percentage of time people spent on agricultural work was very high compared with other seasons. In contrast, the

- percentage of time people spent on pastoral work was low because most of the livestock had already moved to livestock camps.
- (9) This includes the time spent in and in front of one's own house and in and in front of houses in the village, see Fig. 2.
  - (10) For example, the average for the age men married was around 30 among the Samburu (Spencer, 1965), around 34 among the Rendille (Sato, 1992), and over 35 among the Turkana (Ohta, 2004).
  - (11) Almagor (1983a: 95) wrote that older men must transfer at least twelve cattle before marriage.
  - (12) Almagor (1978a: 153) wrote, "Dassanetch men usually marry in their late twenties or early thirties. ...The majority of men's first marriage...take after the death of their fathers." The description is not consistent with my research. I am not sure whether the difference derives from historical change or other reasons. I only point out here that Almagor himself often emphasized that young men had an advantage over older men in marriage (Almagor, 1983a: 95).
  - (13) Almagor (1983a) did not describe the relationship between wives and husbands in detail. On the other hand, he showed that the group of unmarried girls (*kob*) mediated between youngsters in livestock camps and the elders in settlements.
  - (14) People said that wives could divorce by returning eight cattle before the *dimi* ceremony. When the first daughter begins to show signs of physical maturity, her parents conduct this ceremony. The husband needs to finish transferring eight cattle as bridewealth before conducting this ceremony. To finish *dimi* means that he would be recognized as a social elder (*maa karsich*) and divorce becomes difficult. However, even after *dimi*, a wife does not become *min laago*, "wife of fire of livestock dung" or "true wife (*min tuud le*)." This is because people collect livestock dung and make a fire in the kraal for the livestock in the evening to disperse flies and mosquitoes. The smoke signifies the affluence of the household. So, "to become *min laago*" means that a wife completely enters into the husband's kraal or becomes his true wife. To formally become *min largo*, the couple needs to undergo the *hiit galan* (to slaughter ox) ceremony generally after *dimi*, although many couples fail to do so.
  - (15) It is not known when the custom of coffee drinking was introduced into the Daasanetch. That they used coffee is on record at least in 1888 when von Hohnel came to this land. He wrote that the Daasanetch received coffee from the neighboring peoples, Korre, maybe Karo (Hohnel, 1968: 167, Stigand, 1969: 232, 240; Strecker, 1976: 19; Sobania, 1991: 125-127). After the Daasanetch were defeated by the imperial Ethiopian army in 1898, merchants from the Ethiopian highland came to visit the Daasanetch to barter coffee with livestock, and coffee consumption gradually increased. At that time, they used coffee beans. When the derg regime was formed in 1974, it rigidly restricted the domestic circulation of coffee beans which had become the most important goods for export (LMC International, 2000). In the Daasanetch land, one merchant who traded coffee beans was arrested in 1980-81, and the supply of beans stopped. As a substitute for beans, coffee husks were introduced in 1981-82 and its utilization has spread rapidly.
  - (16) One US\$ is approximating 8.5 birr (2002).
  - (17) I asked the people how much they bought coffee and how they earned the money for it in the market during 10-13 December 2001. Those whose villages were within one daytrip to town (N=19) bought 2.4 birr of coffee husks on average and acquired the money by selling milk (37%), butter (47%), livestock (5%), and others (11%). The villagers who lived far from town (N=27) bought 10.8 birr of coffee husks and acquired the money by selling crops (7%), butter (19%), livestock (44%), others (30%). The 10

- villagers out of 27 who lived far from town said they used coffee for trading in their villages. As the time of research was just before the harvest season, the percentage of money acquired by selling crops was very low.
- (18) When a husband buys coffee husks, he hands the parcel over to his wife or wives in the village. I saw a husband who bought four birr of coffee husks distribute them to his three wives using a small can in front of a wife's house. If he did not use a can or did so inside one of the wife's houses, other wives would suspect that he was partial to one wife. He needed to show that he distributed coffee equally to all his wives.
  - (19) Around 1987-88, Omorate town was established and many northerners moved there. Before that time, there was no town and only a few policemen and soldiers were stationed in Daasanetch land. At that time, barter was the main mode of exchange.
  - (20) The average number of times they brewed coffee in seven households for seven days was 2.4 times per day. They brewed the coffee 93% of the times in the morning, 65% of the time in the daytime, and 79% of the time in the evening.
  - (21) Synder (1999) pointed out that the men who had a peaceful household carried more authority in the elder's council among the Iraqw of Tanzania.
  - (22) The reason was that "the shape of the cup of calabash (*daate*) is very similar to the eye. We have two eyes. So if you drink from only one cup, you will lose the other eye."
  - (23) The cup for coffee and that for meals must be separate. In daily life, people often mix milk with sorghum in the cup for meals. During the period of menstruation (*maadiet fas guo ka*), women must not drink milk and not even use the cup for meals in which milk was poured. The reason was that this would stop livestock milk. While women eat meals in their hand during this time, they may drink coffee from the cups for coffee because milk has not been poured in this cup.
  - (24) I saw fourteen people drink together in one house.
  - (25) Coffee is bestowed many cultural values and plays important roles in rituals among other societies of southern Ethiopia as well (Getachew, 1990; Pankhurst, 1997).
  - (26) *Bie* means water, but people call brewed coffee *bie* or *bie kulla* (hot water).
  - (27) Synder has written much on pastoral societies in East Africa (1999). Aguilar (1995) showed that wives took the central role and socialized their children in a ritual called "coffee slaughter" performed in the house among the Boorana of northern Kenya.
  - (28) In Fig. 1, excluding the time spent "outside the village," wives spent 26% of their time in front of the house in the same village, and husbands did so 22% of their time. The figures are close, but wives sit in the daytime and husbands do so in the evening when wives cook in the house.
  - (29) As far as I know, there is no word that corresponds to public, private, political and domestic in the Daasanetch language. Interestingly, *en*, the plural form of *bil* meaning house, signifies not only the village as a physical gathering of houses but also the territorial group. There are eight territorial groups, constituting the biggest, autonomous, political, and ritualistic, or public, unit among the Daasanetch. The word implies that many activities at the territorial group level are the result of a series of practices and discussions that took place in each house.

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